At one point, when my mother was in rehab for a broken leg, she asked me to help her think of a spiritual thought she could present at their Family Home Evening (FHE) group. She said, 'What do you say to people who consider themselves to have been abandoned by their families and by society, who feel useless, with no options or freedoms left in life?' That was a tough one. These people were old, frail, many of feeble mind, as well as body, and none of them felt relevant any more. What would you tell them? One of the words that rang in my head in answer to this question was the word "relevant."

Exploring Relevance

I scoured the dictionary to learn more about the word "relevant." The word I came away with as a good equivalent is "helpful." When someone is relevant in our lives, they are useful (helpful) to us. Likewise, to be relevant in someone else's life we need to feel like there is a reason or purpose for our being in their life. We want to feel like the lives of those around us might be, in some way, diminished if we weren't there. Some might think that feeling this way is egotistical, but I believe that most people want to feel needed or in some way useful to those with whom they live and come into contact.

What makes someone relevant in the lives of others? In the case of those in the rehab/care center my mother was in for a while, is there something they can do to still be relevant, to still feel relevant? How can someone who has lost so many abilities and

freedoms that they need to be professionally cared for feel or be relevant to others? What is the universal ingredient that makes someone valued in the lives of others? I guess I should be asking the question, "Is there a universal something-or-other that can make someone be perceived by others as still being relevant in their lives?"

Does relevance in someone's life, usefulness if you will, require money? Can someone be useful to you without giving you money? My guess is that most of us can think of at least one person in our life that doesn't support us financially, yet is important to our happiness to have around. What about caring for us physically? Is that required for being relevant or useful in one's life? Again, most of us have someone in our life who doesn't physically take care of us, but who we still feel is vital to our happiness. What about those who are important to our social or intellectual advancement? Do we know of anyone who doesn't do either of those things who is still a key part of our life?

Turn to the scriptures

As my mother and I discussed this subject, this scripture popped into my head. It is 1 John 4:19. "We love him, because he first loved us." For a long while I couldn't see much of a connection between this verse and the topic at hand, but over time it began to become more clear. What does love have to do with whether or not someone is useful/helpful in our life. The answers to my questions didn't begin to reveal themselves until I asked the right question - "What makes God relevant in my life?" The answer will be slightly different for each individual, but I can guarantee that somewhere in everyone's answer love will be included as a necessary part.

How can love be a universal part of what makes a person relevant? Now I am not talking about shallow forms of importance, but lasting and important forms of relevance in our lives. If I am living off of Daddy's money then of course he is important, useful, or helpful in my life. That, by default, makes him relevant in my life. But most of us don't have the capacity to be everyone else's sugar daddy. There just aren't enough funds to go around.

I'm looking for a kind of relevance that even someone in a nursing home can claim for themselves. I would like to insert a disclaimer at this point. I recognize that the time will come when many of us will only be able to serve others as the object of their service. There are those who are being cared for by others who don't know right from

wrong, reality from fiction, and have no physical capacity to make choices any longer. They must be cared for in all respects. The people I am referring to are those who still have their mental faculties, but may be forgetful, sometimes confused, and may not be able to be trusted to write a check correctly. Socially and physically they may have many limitations, but they are still aware enough that they feel the losses caused by their situation. These people are the ones who feel the despair of abandonment, and the loneliness of being put away from their loved ones. They keenly recognize their loss of autonomy and independence.

A truth about age

From birth to our mid thirties we continue to gain in strength, intelligence, capacity and prowess. Some of these attributes continue to grow with us into old age for many years after our thirties. But physical capacity peaks and begins to reverse the process during this decade of our lives. For some it becomes noticeable a few years earlier, and for some a few years later, but it comes just the same. It starts with little things. For me it was when I realized that I no longer had the ability to eat at any hour of the day, whatever I wanted, in whatever quantity I chose, without negative consequences. At some point I realized that I had to stop eating pepperoni at 3:00 a.m. or I would pay dearly for it. I learned that I had to wait a while before going to bed if I had just eaten spicy food or the heartburn became a killer.

Little by little my body changed. When I put on five pounds I noticed that one small act that used to be done without thinking now became something that either took decided effort or I could no longer do it. Putting on weight became more than just easier. I now had to guard against it. Kneeling, and holding my ankles while walking across the floor on my knees, which I did for fun at the age of 12, was now something you did to me to cause me excruciating pain. Every year I notice a little bit more of me is slipping away.

Just as we were added upon during our youth and the first half of our maturity, so now do we have to face the subtracting of everything we held so dear. We used to feel like we were immortal, but now we fear a fall, a tear, or a reaction to something we take or eat. We start to protect ourselves from the ravages of the advancing years. But why? What is it we are supposed to be learning from having everything about us stripped away one piece at a time?

I have decided that the lesson the Lord is helping us learn through this process of addition and subtraction is that what is left over in the end is who we have become. In our youth we become fiercely independent and sometimes careless or reckless with our mortality. But when we start to lose all our abilities, all that is left is our character. And until senility takes that away from us, who we have become is all we are left to live with. This is the person we will take to stand before the tribunal of God at the last day.

How does love affect our character?

This is where 1 John 4:19 comes into play. Have you ever wondered why God first loved us? Think about that? You know, as well as I do, that we are fickle children. We promise one thing then do something else. We often betray our promises and His trust in us. We have broken His laws and even flaunted our misdeeds in His face. Yet knowing beforehand that we would do just these things, He still loves us with total perfection. His love for us never wavers, is never put on the bargaining table, and is never used as a bribe. He never threatens to take it away or withhold it for any reason. In the scriptures, especially in Isaiah, He tells Israel what their punishments will be because of their disobedience as a covenant-breaking people. But each of these punishments is followed by the prophet reminding the people that "his hand is stretched out still." (Isaiah 9:12,17,21; 10:4; 5:25)

He is always beckoning us to come to Him. At no time does Christ or the Father ever tell us to go away, but always to come and be loved.

This is what makes God relevant to us. We can count on His love. It doesn't matter if He is paying our bills, making us popular, solving our problems for us, or anything else. What makes Him relevant is that His love never wavers and never ceases. His support and concern for us are eternal. It is this universal constant that all of us can count on. What is it that we are striving for when we keep the commandments and make covenants? Isn't it to become like Christ and like God, our Father? And isn't love their defining attribute?

Satan has shown us that you can be clever and smart, but not be able to comprehend love. Because he has no comprehension of love and its power in the lives of others, he cannot comprehend the mind and personality of God. He would have us hate and cast off love in any form, because love is something he just can't grasp. Lucifer is the

antithesis or opposite of the Christ. The one offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins to provide us with the opportunity to grow into perfection through repentance, while the other abandons his followers and offers us as sacrifices after getting us to commit every kind of heinous crime. Satan knows no loyalty, and knows no compassion. He is devoid of all godly attributes. His intellect is all he has. Small wonder the world worships intellect over godly love.

Back to the question at hand

So what could my mother say to these people in the rehab/care center who had lost so much? What is it that any of us can offer to one another that is of ultimate use to each and every one of us at any time of our lives? It is the nature of God's love that the welfare of others is always more important than personal wants. He says it Himself when He tells us His reason for all He does in Moses 1:39.

> 39 For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass
> the immortality and eternal life of man.

His work, his glory rests in Him enabling us to achieve the same exalted status He has achieved, eternal life. Is there anything in the universe that could make Him more relevant, more helpful or useful to us than this love He bears for us? And if God has become so important to our happiness because of the love He bears for us then what could be more important for us to learn than this same kind of love?

We learn to love Him as He has loved us only by experiencing His love. That love is learned through the service we provide each other. Have you ever seen anyone who dreads retirement because they don't know what could possibly give their life meaning outside of their current job? They have missed the point of mortality. The point of mortality is to learn to love as Christ loves, to serve as Christ serves, and to develop the character traits that Christ has shown to us.

When we learn how to love as God loves, to be kind as He is kind, to forgive as He forgives, to be tender toward other's feelings as He is tender toward our feelings, that is when we achieve our greatest relevance toward the family of Man. It is then that, no matter what our physical limitations, financial constraints, or our political leanings, we are able to do the most good. I know a man who has lost so much of his memory that he is socially good for very little. But his love for others shines brightly still. When you

walk into a room his smile lights up the day. You feel warm and comfortable in his unadulterated acceptance of you at that moment. Gratitude for your very existence is evidence in everything he does. Love has made him relevant/helpful/useful in my life. No amount of money, power, prestige, or influence could hold greater sway with me than his pure acceptance of me for who I am at this very minute.

This was my Mom's message to her FHE group: love is what makes each of us relevant. In any age, at any age, the love of God made manifest through our behavior towards one another is what makes each of us relevant in each other's lives.

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Can Love Make You Relevant?