

Extending Our Family Means Extending Our Hearts

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Hyun Jin Moon's Family Peace Association



There is often a significant event that becomes the "defining moment" for an individual or group. As a defining moment, it's some special occurrence or decision that makes a statement on who you are and what matters most to you. It may be overcoming adversity together like soldiers in a battle or achieving something great like a scientific breakthrough. For our family, it was when we became an extended family, and we welcomed a widowed mom and two baby girls into our lives.

We had hoped for a large family, but after several miscarriages, we still had just one son approaching five years old in 1993. That year Miki went to Japan with our son to assist her sister whose husband was in the hospital with cancer. Her sister had already experienced a mental breakdown from the stress. Then, when her husband passed away much more quickly than expected, she could not manage her life and family.



My wife and I agreed that the right thing to do was to bring her sister and the two baby girls to America to live with us. It did not feel like an obligation; rather, we felt it was an honor to support and protect this family in need. We had no idea how we would afford to support them or deal with the legal, immigration, and practical challenges of raising an extended family. We just knew that if we followed our hearts and our calling from God, things would work out. It would take multiple miracles for all these things to succeed over the following years, but we believed that God would provide the way.

One of the most beautiful and most challenging things about family is that we don't get to choose who's "on our team." Sometimes they are difficult for us to relate with, and often they see the world differently

from us, but we still have an undeniable connection as a family. If we remember that the purpose of our family is to grow our hearts and learn to face every situation in life with love and gratitude, then we

welcome those challenging relationships rather than shying away from them.

One important thing for us was defining what our family rules and boundaries would be from the beginning. Rules should be clear in every family, but it is even more important in an extended family. The children all knew who to turn to if there was a conflict in the house and who made decisions about each aspect of our home life. These rules and boundaries might not need to be clearly stated in a "regular" family. Yet, in a blended, extended family, they have to be clearly stated and followed. That allowed for trust and clarity in any situation.

I believe that in any extended family situation, for example, if we were to live together with our own adult children and grandchildren, we would need a similar sort of system. Young children need to know clearly and specifically that they should always listen to their parents first if there is any confusion or conflict. Grandparents can provide unlimited love, guidance, and support, but the central relationship for young kids has to be their parents unless there is some reason why the parents can't be in that position.

One of the most surprising things for us was how active and involved the girls' dad would be from the spiritual realm. We always tried to keep his presence alive on our altar and in our prayers, but we didn't realize how much support and guidance he would provide. Both my wife and I could see how the spirit world supported these beautiful young girls and our whole family. From immigration to schoolwork to financial blessings, events beyond explanation continued to occur. I learned that an extended family concentrates spiritual support from our ancestors and relatives to provide more protection and encouragement than we ever could have asked for.

There were many practical benefits of having an extended family, too. Our "only son" was thrilled to instantly have two younger sisters. Three years later, when we had another son, the girls were in heaven to have a baby, and they provided so much love and care for him. This became the "new normal" for us. Even after our girls had grown up and moved away, we continued to invite others into our home and family; we learned that it's always a blessing to have others around, "extending" our family as we extend our hearts.



The "defining moment" I mentioned earlier was not, in fact, in the many challenges and activities of living life together over twenty-plus years as a large, extended family. The defining moment was when we opened our hearts and decided to care for this other family as our own, no matter what the future held, with no guarantees and no safety net, for better or for worse. It wasn't until years later that we realized that the decision we made that day would define who we were and how we lived as a family.

Looking back, we feel that we were lucky to be essentially forced into having an extended family. We may not have taken that path if we had a choice, but we are so glad that we found ourselves in a connected, caring, extended family. We couldn't have known how enriching and moving it would be to share all our life experiences together and how many blessings we would receive from Heavenly Father. We didn't know at the start that this extended family would just become "our family."