

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

By Mark Hatfield

We have a phrase that we use in Chillicothe for our congregation, our church family, that says, “We put the “fun” in dysfunctional”. While we say this in a lighthearted manner, because we realize that we are all bringing our imperfections and struggles together in the body of Christ, there is really nothing fun at all about being dysfunctional.

“Recovery from dysfunctional family patterns is not easy. It requires a transformation at the deepest levels. . . . God has promised to be actively involved in this transformation.”

—Dale and Juanita Ryan

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

1. A dysfunctional family is one where improper and immature behavior of at least one member in the home damages the growth of individuality and healthy relational skills among other family members.
2. A dysfunctional family is one where family members are impaired emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.
3. A dysfunctional family is one where everyone is negatively affected even when only one family member experiences a problem.

To summarize: “A dysfunctional family is one in which there has been a major breakdown in the basic relationships within the family so that the family itself no longer functions properly.”

When a family is dysfunctional, we end up finding chaos and unrest.

I would venture to say that most of the problems that we see in our churches today have stemmed from a greater root problem in the families that make up our local congregations. When you look at the body of Christ, it is really made up of families that have come together to assemble as one family classified as God’s household. When a problem arises, 9 times out of 10, the cause can be traced to the family and the home. Something there is not functioning properly.

Some want to talk about generational problems that have led to their dysfunctional family. While we all have wounds and learned behavior from our past, there is a greater issue that often gets overlooked; the problem of sin. When you examine your family tree and try to locate the beginning of the dysfunctional digression, where did it begin? My guess is that your research is not extensive enough unless you have followed your genealogy back to Adam and Eve.

There is no such thing as a perfect family. While some would say that Adam and Eve were perfect before the fall, dysfunction was what actually led to the fall. Indeed, family dysfunction has existed from the moment that sin entered the hearts and minds of mankind. What was the sin? Adam was entrusted with the role of being a spiritual leader and he shirked his duty, heeding the voice of his wife who encouraged him to eat of the fruit that God had commanded him would have the consequence of death. Adam and

Eve transgressed God's word and immediately, they began to hide from God in their guilt and shame, blame each other, and act foolishly toward one another and before God.

After receiving the consequences for their action, being put out of the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel were born to this couple and the first family on earth continued to be dysfunctional. Some would argue that you really don't understand family dysfunction until you try to raise children. On a day when they were making offerings to God, Cain ends up killing his brother Abel over a poor attitude of jealousy and selfishness. It doesn't take a Bible scholar to see that if you continue reading the text of Scripture, that family dysfunction has plagued every family on earth since God established the home. God ended up destroying the world in Noah's day with a flood because man became so evil in his heart that God regretted making man in the first place. All of this is taking place right after creation in the first six chapters of the very first book of the Bible. We know that God spared Noah, his wife and his sons and their wives; a total of eight people in all. Soon after the waters receded and they exited the ark, Noah gets drunk and was found naked by his son Ham. From this point onward, Noah's descendants fall into dysfunctional patterns and sinful behavior. We remember Abraham and Lot. Abraham lies about Sarah's relationship to him as his wife while Lot was being spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sexual perversion and great sins committed against one another. But then shortly thereafter, Lot gets drunk and his daughters come in to have sexual relations with him to birth offspring with their own father. That's dysfunctional!

Time will not allow us to read every example recorded in the Scriptures but these should be sufficient to establish the fact that family dysfunction has always existed. That brings us to our modern day into your family where we are gathered to discuss the subject of overcoming family dysfunction. It is not inevitable that we continue to allow our families to be dysfunctional. We are not perfect people, so we will all contribute to the challenges faced in our homes; nevertheless, God's word has some wisdom for us on how to overcome dysfunctional patterns in our families.

Prov. 11:29

"He who troubles his own house will inherit wind..."

Prov. 14:1

"The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands."

There is no reward for the one responsible for dysfunction in the home. If you come to realize that you are responsible for the dysfunction in your family, humbly repent and seek to follow the wisdom of God for the home.

Prov. 24:3-4

"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; And by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches."

Ps. 127:1

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...”

No matter what your past looks like, you can choose this day that as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord (Josh 24:15).

Ex 34:6-7

“Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin. But He will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' wrongdoing on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation. “

We have to break the cycle now and put an end to dysfunction in our home. While there will be times when we all fall back into old practices and habits causing a temporary blunder, we need to continue to grow in a knowledge of God's word and in our discernment for choosing between right and wrong.

The Functional Family

1. A functional family is one where proper and mature behavior of all members of the home cultivates a healthy balance between individuality and relational skills among family members.
2. A functional family is one where healthy emotional, psychological and spiritual growth is nurtured among family members.
3. A functional family is one where, as family members encounter problems, they have and exercise the ability to face difficulty with confidence and the support of other family members.

This requires that individually we are people of God. It also requires that spouses, parents and children learn how to take on the God-ordained roles that are given to them. As soon as you have a husband and wife fighting irresponsibly, you have a marriage that is on the verge of complete destruction. When divorce is on the table instead of looking at dysfunction, the focus is in the wrong place. When sin is not identified as the cause and humble repentance is not displayed by both parties, the end in sight is dark and gloomy in that home. When a father and mother are not on the same page with regards to raising the children because they are not reading out of the same book (the word of God) you have a home where children will begin to pull a role reversal and run the home, while the parents are labeled as a problem parent or passive parent. The children in this case will try to become responsible and save the family or rebellious and uncontrollable because they assume that they must fight the current system. In some cases the young people are reclusive and ignore the problems while imagining that they will just go away or they become restless while trying to fill voids in their life with something that brings attention to themselves and makes them feel better. Does this sound like your home? Are there some similarities that need to be restored to God's original plan for the home?

This leads to four different categories of dysfunction in a home. You might see signs of these in your home and want to address them as soon as possible.

The Chaotic Family

In this home and in the individual lives of its members, you will find a lack of organization. There will be scheduling problems (conflicting and crowded). There is a lot of clutter and a lack of concern for cleanliness. This family seems to always have problems and there is rarely any relief from the constant onslaught of issues that have to be overcome. The parents are inconsistent and indecisive. There is no clear cut leader in the home and everyone is left to fend for themselves. The children in this home are emotionally abandoned and isolated. This is true chaos.

Result:

Family members are not connected to God or to each other. This vicious cycle will spiral downwards until the home comes crashing down with it.

Remedy:

Prov 28:2

“When a land is in rebellion, it has many rulers, but with a discerning and knowledgeable person, it endures. “

The Controlling Family

There is a structure that is overly rigid. This house is only about law and very little love. When spouses communicate and the parents address the children the tone is authoritative and dictatorial. There is a great deal of faultfinding and a critical spirit that permeates the home. The children are valued for the tasks they complete and their only praise is based on their performance.

Result:

Family members are fearful and insensitive.

Remedy:

Eph 6:4

“And fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. “

The Coddling Family

The spouses in this home never confront error. Parental authority is lacking. One spouse is pinned against the other because they never see eye to eye when discussing the operations of the home. The children take control because their feelings are overprotected and disagreements are avoided. Dad and mom want to be a friend to their children and not exercise any form of discipline that would, according to modern research, warp their self-esteem. In this case, children are the center of attention and there is no authoritative structure for governing the home.

Result:

Family members are undisciplined.

Remedy:

Prov 13:24

“The one who will not use the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him disciplines him diligently.”

The Codependent Family

Conformity is strong within the family. Members of the home do not know their purpose, they simply go with the flow of those around them. Self-direction is lacking and therefore there are no goals set and met, therefore the family is left to chance for growth. A man and his wife in this home are cold toward one another because they feel like they have no individuality. Parents are overly possessive and the children never learn any sense of independence within obedience.

Result:

Family members are insecure. When you lack security, there is destruction ahead.

Remedy:

Deut 6:5

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

There are also functional family qualities that you can find in your home. These are the traits we want to nurture.

The Cultivating Family

Love and intimacy are thriving among spouses. Structure and discipline are maintained by parents. Individual responsibility is required. Love and obedience to God are developed. There is godly order in the home. There is a real peace and a divine security in the home.

Result:

Family relationships are balanced.

Remedy:

Deut 12:7

“You will eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice with your household in everything you do, because the LORD your God has blessed you.”

Conclusion

If we can help or assist you today in overcoming the chaos in your life, please obey the Lord.