

No more Dysfunctional families

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INTRODUCTION :

It seems as though no one was or is raised in a functional family these days. Most people couldn't recognize one if they actually saw it. This has become commonplace in our society. So what does it really mean and how do we avoid the sick cycle of behavior? Understand that both functional and dysfunctional people have got issues to work through. No one is exempt. The difference is this, that the functional ones choose to work out and work through those issues to resolve them. Dysfunctional people live in denial, make excuses, refuse to deal with uncomfortable things from the past or the present. They avoid opportunities to learn, grow, or change. Consider the following questions-

Do you seem constantly frustrated with everyone around you?

Do people always disrespect what's important to you?

Do you feel like "doing the right thing" never gets noticed? Am I always spinning my wheels?

Are your emotions out of control?

Does anything significant ever really happen?

So; this all sounds way to familiar. Are you ready to get off the boat that's headed

in the wrong direction? If you really want to change, it will take a commitment to do the right things for the rest of your life whether anyone else does or not. So what is the “right things”? This study includes two viewpoints

...Biblical principles and brief summaries of contemporary social behavior. In other words, I'm a preacher and my wife is a counselor. We believe these principles to be right and true. Not because we discovered them, or created them, because we didn't, but just because they work. We just packaged these principles in our own way.

One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. As Dr. Phil says, “how's that working for ya? Maybe its time to change. I've also heard it said that people stop growing when the price gets to high. After all, its comfortable or normal being dysfunctional. We somehow feel stable in our instability, and secure with our insecurities. Surely were used to it by now.

Types of dysfunctional behavior :
(check which ones apply to you)

1. Extremely passive, or aggressive
2. Habitual procrastination in making decisions
3. Prolonged or reoccurring depression
4. Anger management problems / or violence
5. Addictive behavior (drugs, alcohol, food, compulsive spending, etc)
6. Lack of communication skills (or desire to get them)
7. Authoritarian control over others (excessive regiment)
8. Work-a-holic or over achiever
9. Extreme irresponsibility (inconsistent, unpredictable)
10. Extreme value system (Religion, politics, etc.)
11. Exceptions to basic rules become the norm, instead of the exception
12. Feeling ignored, discounted, or criticized for feelings and thoughts (on a consistent basis)
13. Excessive structure or demands on time
14. Void of structure or guidelines (chaotic lifestyle)
15. No real connection to immediate family
16. Constant turmoil with closest friends
17. Inability to handle normal basic changes in life
18. Secretive, & ongoing issues with trust
19. Negative self image / self depreciating
20. Perfectionist (unrealistic expectations)
21. Extreme people pleasing behaviors

22. Ongoing cycle of failed relationships
23. Enabling others to abuse or neglect
24. Emotional instability (anxiety attacks, stress)
25. Antisocial personality
26. Preoccupation with shame or guilt
27. Unable to respect the boundaries or limits of others or yourself
28. Gravitates to other dysfunctional people
29. Constant need for acceptance, or approval
30. Discussion of touchy issues is taboo (avoid conflict)

CHAOS VS. ORDER

Living in chaos is the state of confusion, unorganized, jumbled and muddled behavior. No one seems to know what, why, where, or when to do anything. On the other hand, living with order brings security, realistic expectations, and fulfillment. So how do we get from point A to point B? First, set priorities and stick to them. You have to place a value on things that demand your time. That means you have to say no. And mean it! Anytime you say yes to one thing, it presupposes “no” to anything that would keep you from fulfilling your “yes”. But it’s not nice to say no. Have you ever heard that excuse? Which is right, changing your mind every time circumstances dictate, or keeping your word because you set priorities?

Dysfunction talks like this... “I will go to the store at three o’clock unless Joe calls, but it could rain and then I would have to take the other car and it’s in the shop. If the kids are late getting out of school, I’ll have to go later, but then I won’t have time to fix supper, so I better put off the trip to the store until some other time”. What “other time” is there when the world stops rotating so I can do what I need to? There is never going to be that time. We must learn to function in realistic parameters. Yes, we must put people ahead of accomplishments, and they must know that they are the most valuable thing to us. However, people must respect our limitations and priorities for accomplishing necessary tasks.

The earth was a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapors. Then God said, "Let there be light." And light appeared. Gen 1:2-3 (Living)

God set the world in order – days, then nights... land separate from water... days, weeks, seasons, life, death, everything in order. Nothing is random about our universe.

Establishing order means to have a customary mode of procedures.; an ordinary, regular way of doing things. It also means to have things arranged, and function by

specific rules. Things must be regulated or there will be no order. Our physical body must be regulated by proper habits of sleeping, eating and exercise. It must be able to count on us for providing these things, or it will rebel and scream for attention. So must our emotional and psychological being have some sense of order. When we have an ordinary, regular way of doing things, it brings security and a healthy functional lifestyle.

And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

Mark 6:39-40 (KJV)

Having order means understanding your role in life. Be it in the family, workplace or where-ever, we need to know our place. The Bible clearly establishes our roles in the family and the work-place

(Eph. 5:22-6:9). If we believe in God, surely we believe he knows how we are supposed to function in life. This is the original manufacturers' blueprint. If all else fails, read the instructions! People who live without any kind of order are usually insecure, frustrated, and unfulfilled. Of course there are some who live by overt control and try to manipulate people to gain a sense of order but this kind of extreme behavior is not what we are talking about.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH:

Anytime a truth is spoken of, people will run to the exception of the rule. This is a way of escape from accountability. They will try to discredit the principle by finding some loophole. 96% of people in society believe there are no moral absolutes. They believe that no one has the right to impose what they believe to be the truth on everyone else. By this standard, everyone must come to their own conclusions about everything. There was no king in Israel in those days, and every man did whatever he thought was right in his own eyes. Judges 21:25 (Living)

To be absolute means to be perfect, not subject to qualification, and to be the final authority. So is anything absolute? Is anybody? We must understand that no person is absolutely right all the time. God alone is perfect and right. He is manifested in His word, (the Bible) and in His son, Jesus. Therefore His word is absolute truth, and you can not separate Jesus from the written word. John 1:1 says that He is the word and He dwelt among us. They are inseparable.

Jesus did not say he was a truth, but He is THE truth. Yes, there is absolute truth without exception. It is not subject to qualification, it is without error, it is perfect, reliable, and right for everyone, all the time.

You might say, what does this have to do with me living a healthy functional life? Everything! Without absolute truth, everyone does what's right in their own eyes. Dysfunctional people do what they want, when they want to do it, and however they feel like doing it. There is no sense of accountability.

There is utter truth in all your laws; your decrees are eternal. Psalms 119:160
(Living)

For if a person just listens and doesn't obey, he is like a man looking at his face in a mirror; as soon as he walks away, he can't see himself anymore or remember what he looks like. But if anyone keeps looking steadily into God's law ..., he will not only remember it but he will do what it says, and God will greatly bless him in everything he does.

James 1:23-25 (Living)

INTEGRITY :

Integrity does not mean being perfect. It means recognizing perfection and moving in that direction. Knowing right from wrong (and being accountable to it) is the key to functional behavior. If we grow up in an environment where there are no benefits for obeying the right, or no consequences for disobeying, we learn to be confused. For example; a child is caught with his hand in the cookie jar after being told not to. Mom feels mad but doesn't enforce punishment because she feels guilty for being late with lunch. After all, he's hungry so we'll make an exception to the rule. After several repeated episodes of this, the child learns to find exceptions to the rule. It's not about getting his needs met anymore. Its about manipulating the rules to get what we want.

Actions speak much louder than words. Our words mean nothing if our actions don't concur. Prisons are full of inmates who will not take responsibility for their behavior. Using some fabricated plea of insanity, the underprivileged environment they were raised in, or a general "victim mentality" seems to be the norm. If we don't learn life's "truth lessons" as a child, most likely we will act out dysfunctional behavior in society as an adult.

Say just a simple 'Yes, I will' or 'No, I won't.' Your word is enough. To strengthen your promise with a vow shows that something is wrong. Matt 5:37 (Living)

Then why, you may be asking, did I change my plan? Hadn't I really made up my mind yet? Or am I like a man of the world who says yes when he really means no? Never! As surely as God is true, I am not that sort of person. My yes means yes... I have been telling you about Jesus Christ the Son of God.

He isn't one to say yes when he means no. He always does exactly what he says. 2 Cor 1:17-19 (Living)

LEADERSHIP :

Most of us play "follow the leader" our entire life, whether we realize it or not. In other words, what was done to us, we do to others. We learn from the example

(good or bad) of our leaders along the way. Even if we get education and know truth in our head, we still tend to act out what we see others acting out. As a child we don't have much choice about our parents (or how they influence us) and as an adult we think that we must settle for the influence of those around us. We gravitate towards things that seem familiar to us. If we were abused, we settle for the familiar abuse that we have known and often repeat the cycle.

This does not have to be! We must first quit making excuses for those who treated us wrongly and quit accepting this as the norm. We must choose to surround ourselves by the leadership that we aspire to be. We must choose what we want to become and pursue it with a whole heart.

Quit settling for wrong behavior in others, and quit settling for wrong behavior you think you can't change in yourself. Raise the standard of respect for yourself and for others. Create a new cycle of leadership in your life! Dysfunctional people tend to have a problem with authority in general. They have usually had bad examples in the home, at work, etc., so they disregard authority all together. Remember that you can not have order without someone in authority. Power struggles are a sure sign of chaos. We must start being the leader we always wanted to have!

They are blind guides leading the blind, and both will fall into a ditch." Matt. 15:14

MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION :

Communication is the exchange of ideas.

It is a two way street. Many have said, "knowledge is power", and if that is true, we are powerless without communicating the knowledge we have, or seeking the knowledge we need. Powerless to change our messed up relationships. We must do more than talk, yell, or fight about what we think needs to be heard. We must listen to peoples issues and validate their feelings. Discover what's important to them? If we don't know, we can't help. Most of us are so consumed about everyone helping us, listening to us, and revolving around us, that we don't stop to listen. Here's an applicable quote. "People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care".

When we don't agree, we must pre-determine fair rules for disagreements. We must feel safe talking about something that we know is going to be volatile. When we respect each other, we will never call names, curse, belittle, slam doors, use threats, hang up on someone, or communicate in passive-aggressive behavior. This is covert, cowardly, and self destructive. The opposite extreme is to avoid confrontation, shut down, suppress your feelings and not talk about how you feel. So we live in denial and make excuses. This is the only way to keep things "safe".

This also creates a lot of unresolved issues that surface in some other way, and it's hard to tell where it comes from, and when it will happen.

Most of us have collected a lifetime of bad habits when it comes to communication. It's not going to change overnight, so we must set some good rules and own up to our mistakes when we cross the line. Stick to the rules even when others do not.

“LEVELING”

This is a process by which people try to level the playing field (especially with an authority). In other words; you mess up, so it's ok if I mess up. (2 wrongs = 1 right?!) When you bring up an issue, then I'll bring up another in defense so everything gets confused. If you make a mistake, then I have the right to gossip, or intentionally mess up and somehow it seems justified. Nothing gets resolved. Nothing is clear, nothing is right or wrong. A brilliant tactic to remain dysfunctional and never move ahead.

On the other hand, a “drive through window” approach is very effective for focusing, and bringing clarity. We only deal with one issue at a time. In other words, I must clarify what you are saying to me and deal with that issue. Then close the window before I bring up anything else. For the insecure person, it is sheer genius to criticize and chop away at other peoples' values when they confront me with something. Then I never have to admit my need to improve. Jesus said get the log out of your own eye first, then you can help your brother with the splinter in his. Matt. 7:3.

One thing at a time. Separate the issues at hand and validate other peoples' viewpoint. The hardest thing to do is to separate the issue from the person. They will still be your boss, spouse or kids even though you have unresolved issues. If it can't be resolved, don't burn your bridge by attacking the person your in relationship with.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES:

Boundaries are nothing more than establishing the parameters, limits, or responsibilities of life. Some things in life we can or should do, others we can not or should not. We must take ownership to our decisions and respect others' choices when they differ with ours. The question is, what fits in which category? Are some things good at one time but not another? Of course there are legal or moral things that are non negotiable. Other things are personal preference, like how to use our time wisely, or priorities in spending money, etc. Decisions must reflect our values and be consistent, they must not change daily or hourly. Most dysfunctional people are too complicated to pin down, therefore you can't comply with their expectations. Many feed off of unhealthy attention, or shame and guilt. Once these traits are

attached to someone, it's hard to shake them off. They dictate our decisions and choices. It is self destructive and breeds confusion for the people around us. We must learn to live by principles, not by feelings. Principles tell us what we can and can not do, not emotions. One of the greatest principles of life is this; if I don't respect myself, I can not respect others, and they will not respect me either. Many people spend life trying to please everyone and do the popular thing. If I try to please everyone, all the time, I end up pleasing no one, and becoming unpopular in the process. Respect is far more valuable than popularity.

For example, I may be a good person, but I am nobody's savior. I may work overtime, but I also have to spend time with my family. Doing a good thing must always come second to doing the best thing. Knowing when to say no to the people we love can be tough. It's important to set healthy boundaries so that each person can be responsible for themselves first and protect their most important priorities.

Show respect for everyone. 1 Peter 2:17 (Living)
and give honor and respect to all those to whom it is due. Rom. 13:7

Bear one another's burdens..[but]every man shall bear his own load
(or personal responsibility)Gal 6:2, 5

Above all else, guard your heart, for out of it is the wellspring of life. Prov. 4:23
Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. Matt. 7:6

AVOIDING EXTREMES:

When we talk about chaos and order, many people become obsessive or compulsive about having control or being a perfectionist. This is obviously extreme and counter productive. When we talk about truth, many people are crusaders for a principle and forget the reason the principle exists. They have zeal for the letter of the law but don't exercise the spirit behind the law. Most of us react according to our perception of the area needing correction. When someone is extremely "left" we go to the extreme "right" to correct the situation. Somehow the onlookers find a balance in watching the pendulum swing. If we adopt extreme behavior, we help create and perpetuate dysfunctional relationships. A functional person is a balanced person. The emotional frenzy of living in a dysfunctional family or workplace can be draining. It leaves us with depression, anxiety attacks, and fits of rage. We must find the root of these unresolved issues and learn to establish realistic expectations. Unresolved issues must be dealt with on a regular basis in a calm, respectful way. Don't suppress your needs. Denial only leads to more dysfunction and a lack of fulfillment in relationships.

The man who fears God will avoid all extremes
Ecc. 7:18 (NIV)

Common roles played in dysfunction:

Dependant - creates issues free of personal
consequence
Enabler -makes excuses, perpetuates denial
Hero -tries to make everything alright
Scapegoat -takes blame
Mascot - distracts with comic relief or entertainment
Lost soul - withdraws, daydreams, lives in a
fantasy world

Does this describe your Mother, brother, sister, Dad, co-workers, etc?
Many families have each one of these roles played out and never get
help or try to change because “that just the way we are”!

A picture of a healthy , functional family:

- 1.Maintains basic provisions—food, clothes, shelter, health care, etc.
- 2.Nurtures an atmosphere of safety, security, and a sense of belonging
- 3.Fulfills the need for love and acceptance
- 4.Respects the privacy of each members autonomy or individuality
- 5.Creates self esteem, a sense of worth, and personal value
- 6.Has an agreed upon right to make mistakes and learn from them
- 7.Enjoys recreation and has fun together
- 8.Allows permission and freedom to develop spiritually at your own pace
- 9.Communicates family values and healthy boundaries
- 10.Creates meaning and purpose in life both individually and as a group

How to help create dysfunction in 10 easy steps :

1. Don't talk about problems
2. Don't express feelings openly or honestly
3. Communicate indirectly, by sulking or acting out
4. Have unrealistic expectations about what others will do for you

5. Don't bother with getting your own needs met, or admit you have any
6. Don't have fun or enjoy anyone around you
7. Disregard your lifestyle as an example
8. Make sure your no means "maybe"
9. Don't ever talk about intimate or private things
10. Don't rock the boat, keep the "status quo"

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES-

You don't have to read the Bible very long to see that it is full of dysfunctional relationships.

It's not full of perfect people with no issues. Thank God. We're not alone in life's struggles and there is hope. We must be able to learn from those who have gone before us. Take Adam and Eve for example. They disobeyed, blamed others and tried to cover up their mistakes. Then their kids had unresolved conflicts leading to anger management, and murder, then Cain lived as a non productive recluse as a result. Sound dysfunctional? Sound familiar? Not much has changed, has it?

The entire book of Genesis is filled with problem relationships. Adultery, manipulation favoritism in parents, sibling rivalry, the list is lengthy. Even Jesus had misunderstandings with his mother. When he was twelve, she lost him at the temple (but he himself was right where he chose to be). If this happened today, his picture would have been put on a milk carton, or posted at Wal mart and she might have even been turned into DHS! When she asked him to turn water into wine (John 2:1-11), his comments expressed frustration. "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come". As a Bible student we always look for deep spiritual meanings to these passages, but as a student of relationships, we see that God is very much connected to our daily struggles.

One more example comes from King David and his family. Yes, he was a man after Gods own heart, but yes he was a very dysfunctional family man. According to Chuck Swindoll, he had over a dozen wives and not all were moral or legally right. Part of the story we often overlook includes the rape of his daughter Tamar. He turned the other way when Absalom wanted justice and this caused mutiny, insurrection, and the temporary loss of the kingdom. His son turned against him and David's army had to hunt him down, but the stories not over. David's General named Joab had to intervene when David mourned for Absalom (2 Sam. 19:1-8). These were his words, "you love those who hate you, and hate those who love you". He went on to say that if he didn't correct this dysfunction immediately, his life's worse disasters were eminent. David was just like most of us. Sometimes his emotions, his grief, his lust, or his bad judgment clouded his thinking. If King David was subject to it, we can be to. Thankfully, God can redeem anyone, even

the worse cases of dysfunction. We must learn from past mistakes and identify the guidelines to prevent repeating them in the future.

Follow the principles to:

1. establish order,
2. embrace truth,
3. maintain your integrity,
4. take leadership seriously,
5. learn to communicate effectively
6. stop leveling,
7. respect boundaries, and
8. avoid extremes.