

A Different Perspective
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The Dysfunctional Family
Debbie Bates

We don't have to look very far to see that, in society today, families are becoming more and more dysfunctional. It doesn't matter where we live. How wealthy. How poor. In the wealthy west, you know, teenagers have less and less contact with their parents. They use the internet and cable TV and their friends to tell them who they are and how they should dress.

In poorer nations, well actually I think that people in poorer nations do much better than in the west. Families are a matter of survival for many. But even there, I mean kids get AIDS. They're sold into slavery. They're orphans. All sorts of bad things happen there too.

But here's the thing. We know that there are a lot of dysfunctional families out there but somehow we imagine that, well, there's this perfect family out there. In fact, the perfect family is the norm and the dysfunction we see in our own families, well we must be the only ones. It's our fault. We've botched it. You know, we're just stuck with this.

The teenager who doesn't respect his parents. The adults in our extended families, they've been feuding and haven't talked for ages because 8 years ago they argued over the distribution of assets from their parents will. No, no, it's just my family that's a mess. And that's the thing, it's the hand I've been dealt and there's nothing, nothing I can do about it. That's it! What's the point?

Well if that's sort of thoughts been rattling around in your head, then today, today I have some great news for you.

It's true, isn't it? Family is sometimes like living out a guerrilla war. It's so 'in your face'. Every time you come home. Every time you walk to the door the whole 'family' thing greets you. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that every family is a basket case. Hopefully yours isn't. But sometimes we're so close to it. Sometimes the pressure is so constant. It can feel like it is a basket case because we get things all out of perspective.

You know, the young mother with a baby that's teething and she's up half the night. And the parents, you know, they're so different, they feel their lives are heading in different directions. And the teenage son who's being the rebel, talks down to his parents and treats his mother like a servant. The grandparents, the

grandparents who visit and all they ever seem to do is to judge and to criticize and to tell you what you're doing wrong with your kids.

And in the middle of this, this constant family relationship tension, you get the feeling like, 'oh God, what is going on here? I mean, I love you, I honour you but why is it like this? Why can't I have a normal family like the people next door?'

And you know, for me, one of the things that makes it worse. There's this minister I knew once. He seemed to have the perfect family. His young adult children, they were so well adjusted. He'd been brought up by Godly parents and he spoke about family from a position, well it seemed to me, a position of almost having that perfect family we all desire.

And then you compare your own family to that and you think, 'boy, I've made a mess. What's the matter with me? There's no hope for my family.' Well let me tell you this. I'm not talking about the whole family thing from that place I can tell you. I haven't been a perfect husband or a perfect father. In fact, before I gave my life over to Jesus a decade and a half ago, I made some huge blunders that changed the very course of my life. And since then God's been teaching me a new way. I'm still learning.

So I'm at a certain place in my journey. You're at a certain place in your journey. And let's just get over this comparing and judging nonsense. There's only one issue - where do we take our families from here? And I, for one, what I'm about is building a Godly family. Because there is such a reward in that. Such a harvest. And not just one day in the future but along the way, now. The joy of investing and sacrificing to make a difference in the lives of those whom we love.

We're going to talk more about that whole 'sacrifice' thing over these coming weeks but today, today I just want to give us some comfort that God knows all about dysfunctional families.

Let me take you to the very first human family. Adam, Eve, their two sons Cain and Abel. Now maybe you know the story of Adam and Eve pretty well. You know, they were in the Garden of Eden, it was all wonderful. They ate that apple off the tree. They sinned. God kicked them out and they had a couple of sons.

I want to show you something about this family. The interactions between the people that might really make you sit up and take a look. We often hear people talking about the 'Adam and Eve' story

and the snake and all that stuff from a theological perspective. That's great but what about from a family perspective?

Okay. Adam and Eve, they've sinned. They ate from that one tree God told them not to. God comes looking for them. They're hiding in the garden. That's clever isn't it? And God brings Adam to account. He says,

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman who you gave me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent, the serpent tricked me and then I ate." And the Lord said to the serpent, "Because you have done this cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures. Upon your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will strike your head and you will strike his heel."

Genesis chapter 3, verses 11 to 15.

There it is. See Adam rebels against God and Eve rebels against God. Okay, they can blame the serpent and maybe the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on but they were the ones that rebelled against God. And the very first thing that Adam does is he blames Eve. And the very first thing she does is to blame the serpent. See, they've gone from perfect harmony to dysfunction. God tells them that that is going to be the norm from now on and amongst their children to. Have a listen to the rest of it. The 2 sons, Cain and Abel.

"Abel kept sheep and Cain tilled the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel, for his part, brought the first ??? of his flock. They were fat portions and the Lord had regard for Abel and his offspring but for Cain and his offspring, he had no regard. And so Cain was very angry and his countenance fell. But the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well sin is lurking at the door, its desire is for you but you must master it."

"Cain said to his brother, "Let's go out into the field." And when they were out there in the field Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him."

Genesis chapter 4.

Here we have it. The very first family. They rebel against God. Husband turns on wife. Brother kills brother. Its the absolute natural state of a family that turns against God. But listen to the good news because God is one who forgives. Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 8. He said,

"You won't put anything ahead of me. No idols don't make any idols, don't worship them because I am a jealous God and I will punish children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

In other words, when we put God at the head of our families, He will show us His steadfast, unwavering love. Not just to us but to a thousand generations. You know what that means? It doesn't matter how bad things have become in our families, when we honour God, He in turn will honour us.