

Restoring Your Relationships (Family)

Introduction

Most of us have colorful family histories, colorful in the sense that there are addictions, abuse, suicide, divorce. Heidi – you came from the perfect Christian home, right? They were missionaries and pastors.

My parents began their marriage at 16 years old. Why? She was pregnant and the only relational advice my dad received from his father was, “If you ever get a girl pregnant, marry her.” So he did and by age 20 they had 3 kids. In spite of becoming Christians and being in ministry, their marriage ended up dissolving after 20 years. Perfect? I don’t think so...

My family – plenty of color as well. Aunt who got hit by car...

Sexual addictions ravished the lives of many in my family and took people out of relationship with God and others. I had two uncles, one of which was once in leadership with YWAM (Youth with A Mission) and their sexual addictions resulted in both of them committing suicide.

We subconsciously learn from our families often falling into patterns that repeat generationally.

We determined we would do things differently. We’re still doing that. You would think the person you love the most would be the easiest one to do this with. But our marriages often present us with the greatest challenges. Restoring family is a long process. Every day is an opportunity to start again. (Photo of family from last year)

Can we take the dys out of our dysfunctional families?

Maybe. Maybe not. Most of the advice and modeling we receive from the world around us today is not necessarily healthy or functional. In fact, if we were simply learning from media – tv, movies, songs on the radio or from the rich and famous, we would be in and out of relationships, in and out of bed with many different people, in and out of marriage and in and out of our minds.

The Bible tells us in Romans 12:2, “*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*”

God wants us to view things from His perspective. He wants to turn us right side up rather than the upside down way of thinking that is so pervasive around us. As we allow God to change the way we think, we are transformed into a new person who will walk in the good, pleasing and perfect will God has for us. (Pray) We need to understand some basic truths God set into motion in relationships. He created us with a free will. My will overrides God’s will, therefore, the only way to be transformed is to surrender my will to His will. This also means that I also do not have control over another person’s will. The one element I CAN control in striving towards healthy relationships is my own will.

In striving towards healthy relationships:

1. I am working toward personal health

What is “personal health” in the way we’re using that term here?

We’re referring to a person who is at peace with God, themselves and with others. A person who is able to love God, themselves, and others. How do I become a more loving person? Jesus is our model and our teacher

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when it comes to being a “healthy person”.

Body

John 13:34-35

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

So in loving and following Him, we also will love one another.

In striving for healthy relationships...

2. I am learning to love

a. Why is it difficult to “love”?

- Self-centeredness /selfishness: it is our self centeredness that constantly looks toward others to meet our expectations and meet our needs. This is one of the most dangerous things to a relationship. If I believe that someone else needs to meet my needs, it puts great pressure on that person and strains the relationship. The world would tell me that there is someone out there that will “complete me”, when in reality only Jesus can do that. The world will tell me that there is a “soul mate” out there for me and if I just keep searching I will find the exact right match for me, when in reality, we are all imperfect people and there is not one person who will be perfect for me. However, God will bring people into our lives to help us become more like Him and sometimes that means there will be conflict and challenge and struggle because in Proverbs 27:17 we are told that “as iron sharpens iron so one person sharpens another”. If we want to be healthy, whole, strong, sharp, and effective people, we will be sharpened by others, particularly those closest to us. Matt, what’s another reason it is difficult to love?
- Fear: We all need the acceptance of others. That need for acceptance and relationships draw us toward other people. “Needs” make us vulnerable so relationships present a risk. Loving others present risk to our own heart particularly when we are not always accepted. For example...loving others is risking, another reason it is difficult to love...
- Insecurity/defensiveness (role play): I might say, “Do you like my new clothes?” – In saying this I may be seeking Matt’s approval and wanting him to share in my joy of the experience and “great deal” I found. I might respond out of fear and say, “How much was it?” or “Where did you find that” which then creates a defensiveness... “Now I feel I have to justify, rather than share – it moves from feelings of being in a mutual and loving relationship to feelings of being parented or perhaps even “controlled” by another person.
- These result in a breakdown of everything else
 - Communication skills
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Sex
 - Money

It isn’t that we lack communication skills, or that one of us is from Mars, Venus or some unknown planet. The problem comes when we feel rejected. This makes us feel bad, unloved, and unaccepted.

Romans 15:7 “Accept one another just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

I recently heard it said that “Truth without love is just noise” – Jesus told us truth and love must go together.

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He told us that when we do anything without love it is just a bunch of loud, obnoxious noise. Acceptance has everything to do with the side of love Jesus spoke of. Feeling fully accepted in a relationship allows people to live in an unguarded, openness that provides an environment for growth and wholeness. But...

b. How do we deal with our own fears and insecurities? How can we heal those things in us?

1. Self-Awareness: When we feel fearful and insecure, what do you do with that? The Lord can help us grow when we see this, confront it, and find healthy ways of growing.

Fear can drive a person to success (running scared). Fear can drive a person into isolation and addiction. A lack of acceptance can also lead to isolation. Since we were all created with the need for relationship, isolation leads us to a dark place, feelings of insecurity and loneliness occur. This dark place is a breeding ground for secrecy. Secrecy will erode relationship. These things (isolation, addiction, insecurity, loneliness, secrecy all compound fear, and the cycle continues and the prison of darkness grows.

We tell ourselves that being independent is a mark of strength. We think that we are like the Lone Ranger, fully self-sufficient.

We become strong, liberated and independent not in need of anyone, we can handle it all ourselves.

There is a problem with this way of living: loving life in solitary confinement is as close as we get to a death sentence. It makes us prone to physical illness, mental illness and emotional issues such as anxiety and depression.

There are many studies and statistics that show the connection between physical, mental and emotional health issues and the health of our relationships.

2. Love for God: God's love is agape love. It is unconditional and as we experience that we in turn strive to become servants of others. *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* Jesus wasn't insecure. He was not self-centered. He was other-centered. He was vulnerable. His relationships were not perfect. He was hurt and rejected. As we love Him He shows us how to love others in an imperfect world.

3. Love for Others Above Self – Ecclesiastes 4:12 "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves."

We need each other, we were created to be dependent, not co-dependent in unhealthy ways where fear causes us to smother people. Rather, fearlessly dependent on God, surrendered to Him and to each another. We were created by God for relationship...with Him and with others. Adam was lonely in the garden when he didn't have another person to share life with.

4. Love Yourself: The difference between loving oneself and being in love with oneself. Accept yourself. Agape confronts our self centeredness.

In striving toward healthy relationships:

3. I am pursuing JOY

Love Jesus, love others, love you!

- Jesus
- Others

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• You

Why is the order of this important?

When we love Jesus, we learn His acceptance and we can in turn accept and love others and ourselves...

A relationship/family can only be as healthy as those in the relationship or family.

C. What if you are surrounded by people who don't desire change or don't seem to have a capacity for change? What if you get hurt every time? You open up and make yourself vulnerable and you get hurt again and again. Do you just back off? Close off? Isolate? What can you do?

- Well, I can open up to Jesus: Bring my need and hurt to Him. Talk to Him about my insecurity, my fears and my secrets. He will begin to turn our way of thinking right-side-up. This will in turn help us approach our relationship with different expectations. They are not going to suddenly become loving or healthy...but I can have a different response, which then creates a different interaction? This makes it possible for outcomes and results to change?
- You can make the relationship/family healthier and stronger by becoming healthier and stronger yourself.
- Grow Yourself: As you grow, the relationship grows. Do things that you know are healthy and that you know will make you a better person. (examples: join a small group, exercise, eat healthy, pursue learning and hobbies, etc.)
- As I grow in a relationship, the relationship grows, as I bring more love, more love enters the relationship. As I bring more peace, more peace enters the relationship. As I bring more self-control, more self-control enters the relationship, etc. So as I grow in a relationship, the relationship grows! (paint pic with hands)

One thing that goes a long way is to not do anything that is obviously destructive to a relationship. I had a mentor give me some wise advice once. He said if you want to be a good pastor, just don't do anything stupid. I would say the same is true in relationships. Don't do things that will sabotage restoration and health...like becoming emotionally connected to people of the opposite sex besides your spouse. Don't start dating others while you're still married. Don't be verbally abusive. Don't let compulsive behaviors control you. We don't say this to condemn anyone. We say it as a warning. These are dangerous and painful roads to go down.

If you're single:

Address your fears, loneliness and feelings of isolation. Beware of the pursuit of pleasure. This will never bring real happiness. Even the fact that the American way is that we are guaranteed the pursuit of happiness, implies that we will always have just that...the pursuit and not the fulfillment of it. Like we have talked about, another person won't necessarily make you happier. Jesus will help you discover and find true happiness as you seek Him. Instead, address your needs by doing things that will make you a stronger and healthier person.

If you have children:

Being a healthy parent means being fear-less. Don't just be their friend because you need their approval. Don't react out of anger/fear when they act like a kid. Don't seek to have your needs met through your children...

Finally, what if you are alone? Single, widow(er), divorced, new to a community...

In striving for Healthy Relationships:

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4. I am pressing into community

(Don't stay alone). You may be there because you're too busy. Find a way out. Make sure you're addressing any emotional issues driving your busy-ness. Maybe there are just circumstances that create the busyness. This will eventually lead to burn-out and it is important to recognize that God gave us clear instructions to take one day a week to "rest". He created the Sabbath for us, because we need rest. So seek the Lord for what to do and what not to do.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" – Psalm 127:1

We never arrive....it's an ongoing restoration process.

Having healthy relationships come from a healthy relationship with Jesus.

Fearlessly pursue J.O.Y.

Fearlessly pursue loving Jesus, loving others, and loving yourself...in that order.