

The Way Out of Dysfunctionⁱ

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

We've been exploring the OT book of Exodus, and we've discovered that our God can and will provide us a "way out" from anything and everything that holds us captive. In His dealings with the Israelites, the Lord provided a way out of dysfunction. Since we all find ourselves stuck with some measure of "dysfunction" within our own families, we need freedom from it. The Book of Exodus has some good news for us in that regard.

Introduction

To one degree or another, every family can be considered dysfunctional (i.e., it does not function or operate properly). Recall from earlier lessons in this series that God delivered His people from Egyptian slavery; on their way toward the Promised Land of Canaan, they journeyed through the desert wherein they made a stop at the foot of Mount Sinai. While encamped there, Moses, their leader, ascended to the mountain top to meet with God and receive—what we now call—The Ten Commandments. The first four commandments deal with our "vertical" relationship with God; the following six of them address our "horizontal" relationships with others, starting with the family. Consider what family is—it is our primary human relationship and an extension of our relationship with God. Accordingly, unless we get matters right within the family, we can't expect to have relationships right with others.

1. What are some concepts or characteristics of the dysfunctional family? (e.g., what makes families dysfunctional?)
2. What (if anything) would you change about your upbringing?
3. Share some of your fondest childhood/family memories.

Preparation

Read the following text related to today's message:

Exodus 20:12 (NLT)

Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Ephesians 6:2-3 (NLT)

² "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: ³ If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

Break it Down

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, his primary focus is how to foster healthy relationships with other believers within the Body of Christ. He also broaches the subject of family life and quotes the fifth commandment (Ephesians 6:2-3). While the apostle doesn't give any specifics on how we are to honor our parents, Paul does give us principles that we can apply to our relationships with our parents. In so doing, we will see how taking these actions can benefit all our relationships and thus allow us to make significant progress in navigating a way out of dysfunction.

Honor your parents with your...

ⁱ Original sermon taught on Mother's Day 2015

1) Forgiveness

Parents make all sorts of mistakes in raising their children. Simply and realistically put, there is no perfect parent. Recognizing this, the Apostle Paul reminds us, “Forgive each other, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.” (Ephesians 4:32b NIRV) Forgiveness is God’s solution to the problems caused by living in a fallen/sinful and imperfect world. When we forgive, we are released from the bondage of unforgiveness; when we extend forgiveness to our parents (or to anyone else for that matter), we discover the way out of dysfunction, and we honor them through our choice.

1. How do you honor your father and mother? [If you are a parent, how do your children honor you or make you feel honored?]
2. Discuss forgiveness in terms of what it is and what it isn’t.
3. Consider a time you received (or extended) forgiveness. Describe what happened.

2) Speech

A lot of dysfunction in a family is rooted in what is or has been said. According to the Bible, the tongue is a powerful tool; therefore, it’s critical that we be very careful about how we use it. Consider Paul’s instruction, “Don’t let any evil talk come out of your mouths. Say only what will help to build others up and meet their needs. Then what you say will help those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29 NIRV) Speech has two sides—what we don’t say and what we do say. We can honor our parents through what we do say...both *to* them and *about* them.

1. Describe a time when words helped or healed you and/or when words hurt you.
2. How does your speech honor your parents? (e.g., what words would you use to describe your parents?) [If you’re a parent, how does your child(ren)’s speech honor you? (e.g., what have you heard them say to/about you?)]
3. Explain the proverbial saying, “Silence is golden.”

3) Prayers

The Apostle Paul believed prayer to be a critical component of right relationships: “I have not stopped thanking God for you. I always remember you in my prayers. I pray to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.... I keep asking him to give you the wisdom and understanding that come from the Holy Spirit. I want you to know God better.” (Ephesians 1:16-17 NIRV) We honor our parents with our prayers of petition and intercession...with thanksgiving.

1. What about your parents do you thank God for providing?
2. What are some of the prayer needs of your parents, siblings, or children?
3. Share about a time that you’ve prayed for someone or something wherein it changed you or your attitude about a situation or circumstance.

Conclusion

We don’t have to be held captive to dysfunction. God gives us the way out of dysfunction when we honor our father and mother...through our forgiveness, our speech to/about them, and our prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.

1. Focus your attention this week on a family member or other personal relationship that you haven’t forgiven. Then, apply the principles from the message and choose to extend forgiveness.
2. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for your family or loved one.
3. Surprise a family member with a note/expression of your love and appreciation for them.

Close in Prayer