

LINDELL RECOVERY NETWORK

# DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

*Making Peace with Your Past*

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KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY





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*The Marriage and Family Series*

# THE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

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# A PERSONAL NOTE

*from Mike Lindell*

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network



# INTRODUCTION

Quite frankly, someone took the *fun* out of my *dysfunctional* family! My childhood was filled with severely painful secrets that—by virtue of an unspoken code called “family loyalty”—I was not to tell. And tell, I did not!

My father was a powerful man who maintained three families at the same time. Following the death of his first wife, we moved into his huge house. I’d just turned twelve. Eleven months later, my parents married and sometime after, I began to be called “June Hunt.” Prior to that, my mother, three siblings, and I convincingly wore the fictitious last name of “Wright.”

Such deceit might seem unthinkable to someone raised differently, but bear in mind: Children grow up believing that whatever they experience is normal (no matter how abnormal). However, their normal isn’t normal! And lacking a frame of reference, they assume everyone else is treated the same way, at least for a while.

The inevitable question is: What happens when children raised in dysfunctional families grow up and move into the real world? Additionally, do damaged relationship patterns vanish quickly like a porch light in a rearview mirror? The simple answer is *No*. Instead, it’s common to carry dysfunction from our family of origin right into new relationships—with classmates and roommates, employers and employees, friends and family, and a whole new generation of children.

Often this dysfunction surfaces with different faces—like having a victim mentality, always feeling powerless, becoming a people pleaser, or violating one’s own values. Gradually, an insidious lie spreads slowly into the heart like cancer: “I can’t change what I am today because of my unchangeable past.”

In absolute honesty, I felt powerless for years. I became a people pleaser, at times saying *Yes* when I should have said *No*. I sincerely assumed I had no choice. Looking back, I had no idea that these negative patterns were born and bred during my early dysfunctional days.

Clearly, when I was a child I had no choice about much that was

wrong. But when I became a young adult, I did have a choice. I could say *No*, but I did not change. I stayed stuck in those destructive dysfunctional patterns.

Eventually, as I applied God's Word to my life, the truth set me free. The apostle Paul said, "*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*" (1 Corinthians 13:11 NKJV). I needed to acknowledge: "I'm no longer a child." I *can* change—and I *did* change. And if I could change, anyone can change!

Regardless of your unchangeable past, *you can change*. The key to change is found in grasping what it means to be a part of the family of God. The heavenly Father is not a dysfunctional father—He is a perfect, nurturing Father. And when you entrust your life to Christ, not only does God adopt you into His family, He also puts Christ in you! Yes, the Bible reveals that the secret to your success is ". . . *Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27).

Christ changes us from the inside out. We no longer have to live feeling powerless, feeling desperate for approval, needing to please people, needing to fix people. Through the power of Christ, dysfunctional patterns can be broken. Although you can't change your past, you can change your attitude about your past, and you can change your future by becoming the person God created you to be.

If you have experienced the pain of family dysfunction and desire to be made whole, recognize that no matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, God has a plan for your future. The Lord speaks this truth so clearly, "*I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*" (Jeremiah 29:11). If you follow His truth and His plan, you will have a transformed life.

Don't be a prisoner of your past. Ultimately, with the power of Christ in you, your past will never control you.

June Hunt  
*Founder, Hope For The Heart*

# THE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

## *Making Peace with Your Past*

Cathey Brown knows about dysfunctional families—she’s immersed herself into thousands of them.

An adult child of two alcoholics, Cathey is keenly aware of the sizeable swath of dysfunction that can sweep through families, consuming and crippling them when chemical dependence reigns in a home. Therefore, she has devoted her life to reaching struggling children, teaching invaluable life skills and instilling a sense of significance in them despite the most dysfunctional of families.

Cathey is founder of Rainbow Days, which has provided support groups and programs for more than 220,000 children since its inception. “I consider the work I do with Rainbow Days to be my calling and one of the main reasons God put me on earth,” Cathey reflects. “I feel very blessed to do something that I enjoy, that utilizes my strengths and helps make a difference in the lives of children.”<sup>1</sup>

Cathey’s heart resembles the heart of the apostle Paul,

*“ . . . by this kind of hard work we must help the weak,  
remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said:  
‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

(ACTS 20:35)



# DEFINITIONS



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*“The heart of God is to bring healing to every child and to deliver every family from debilitating dysfunction.”*



*On the outside, they look so picture perfect.*

Cathey Brown is raised in a traditional family, each member assuming the public role that communicates normalcy, congeniality, and the classic message: “We’ve got it all together, everything is great within the walls of our house.”<sup>2</sup> But behind closed doors things are falling apart. Cathey’s father suddenly becomes verbally abusive and sometimes even physically violent, a transformation in behavior that terrifies Cathey and shatters her sense of security. Years pass before she connects her parents’ arguments and meltdown of emotions to alcohol—somehow Cathey always feels at fault for the family’s dysfunction, and a sense of inadequacy and powerlessness swells within her spirit.<sup>3</sup>

She strives to compensate by overachieving, avowing to attain perfection and gain significance through top-notch grades in school and commendable extracurricular activities. Cathey feels she can control these areas, but the truth is that her chaotic home life is controlling her.<sup>4</sup>

Scripture gives direction about who, not what, should be controlling our minds:

*“... the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”*

(ROMANS 8:6)

## What Is a Dysfunctional Family?<sup>5</sup>

There is truth to the old adage, *appearances can be deceiving*.

Some envision alcoholics as skid row bums, languishing on dirty city streets while downing liquor from a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. Yet this is rarely the case for most alcoholics.

Cathey’s father always holds down a job and responsibly meets most of the family’s financial needs. However, there is no doubt that his drinking diminishes his ability to fully function as a father and husband. It negatively affects the entire family’s emotional health.<sup>6</sup>

The number one obstacle for alcoholics and their families to receive healing from all forms and causes of dysfunction is denial. Unfortunately, a sense of shame and embarrassment in disclosing neediness prevents or delays enlisting the help and prayers of others—precisely what is necessary to no longer remain a dysfunctional family.

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other  
and pray for each other so that you may be healed.  
The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*  
(JAMES 5:16)

**A dysfunctional family** is one in which improper and immature behavior of at least one parent damages the growth of individuality and the development of healthy relational skills among family members.

**A dysfunctional family** is one in which family members are impaired emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

**A dysfunctional family** is one in which all members are so emotionally and psychologically connected to one another that everyone is negatively impacted even when only one family member experiences harm or encounters a problem.

Scripture warns about fostering dysfunction within one’s family:

*“Whoever brings ruin on their family will inherit only wind,  
and the fool will be servant to the wise.”*  
(PROVERBS 11:29)

## What Is a Functional Family?

Cathey Brown longs for a functional family, where healthy interpersonal relationships are nurtured and where problems are addressed rather than avoided.

In order to cope and adapt, children of alcoholics will either draw attention to or away from themselves. As a child, Cathey seeks attention by striving to perform perfectly in hopes that parental approval and her good behavior might distract from the preoccupation with alcohol. Children like Cathey also feel responsible for the well-being of the family and focus on being problem fixers with the goal of becoming a functional family.<sup>7</sup>

Cathey knows now that she never had the resources to meet her family's desperate need, but the Lord is eager to give strength from His unlimited resources and to transform dysfunctional families into functional families.

*"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always."*

(1 CHRONICLES 16:11)

### The Functional Family Is a Cultivating Family

**A functional family** is one in which proper and mature behavior of two parents cultivates a healthy balance between embracing *individuality* and encouraging *relational skills* among family members.

**A functional family** is one in which healthy emotional, psychological, and spiritual growth is cultivated among family members.

**A functional family** is one in which individual family members develop the ability to face problematic situations specific to them with personal confidence in God and self and with the general support of other family members.

Functional families cultivate confidence in God, which instills hope and confidence in children.

*"You have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,  
my confidence since my youth."*

(PSALM 71:5)

## What Are Dysfunctional Family Roles?<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to the various roles children play in order to cope, Cathey says the *least* likely to get help are the “heroes” like herself because they have the appearance of “having it all together.” The achievements and the ensuing accolades fool people into thinking these children are emotionally healthy and do not need special attention.

“Scapegoats,” on the other hand, are the *most* likely to get help because they purposely draw attention to themselves, frequently through negative behavior, to divert attention away from major family problems. They are obviously troubled, thus special attention is directed their way to improve emotional health and to change behavior.<sup>9</sup>

The heart of God is to bring healing to every child and to deliver every family from debilitating dysfunction.

*“He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

### Parents

#### The Dependent Parent

The *overinvolved, possessive* parent is inconsistent and uses manipulative maneuvers to *control* children, along with additional forms of immature behavior to the detriment of other family members.

#### The Dictatorial Parent

The *overcontrolling, inflexible* parent is performance-based and uses criticism to *condemn* children, along with additional forms of oppressive behavior to the detriment of other family members.

### The Doting Parent

The *overprotective, indulgent* parent is lacking in boundaries and uses rescuing to *cajole* children, along with additional forms of seemingly helpful behavior to the detriment of other family members.

### The Demanding Parent

The *overdirecting, imposing* parent is overbearing and uses guilt and shame to *conform* children, along with additional forms of pressure-filled behavior to the detriment of other family members.

## Children

### The Responsible Child

The *hero* tries to fix the family problems and help create a positive family image with noteworthy achievement. This child receives positive attention but often develops perfectionistic, compulsive behaviors.

### The Rebellious Child

The *scapegoat* draws focus away from the family problems and onto their own personal problems by engaging in rebellious, uncontrollable behavior. This child consumes time and energy from the family members and often develops self-destructive life patterns.

### The Reclusive Child

The *lost child* hopes that by ignoring family problems, the difficulties will disappear. This child avoids attention and would like to just “fade into the woodwork.” Reclusive children spend a lot of time alone and, therefore, are often lonely and withdrawn. They don’t want to rock the boat.

### The Reveling Child

The *mascot* uses humor and antics to direct the focus away from family problems. This child is often hyperactive and usually seeks to be the center of attention.

## Role Reversal

**Children** once did whatever they could to please their parents.

**Parents** now do whatever they can to please their children.

However, the Bible says . . .

*“Children, obey your parents in everything,  
for this pleases the Lord.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:20)

## Repeating Past Patterns

**Question:** “I grew up in a messed up family, and I am now repeating many patterns from the past. What should I do?”

**Answer:** Ask the Lord to give you discernment in identifying which patterns need to be changed and wisdom in selecting action steps that will enable you to move toward emotional health. Tell those closest to you that you want to give up these unhealthy, childhood ways of thinking, reasoning, and acting from the past. Ask them to help hold you accountable.

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child,  
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.  
When I became a man, I put the  
ways of childhood behind me.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:11)

## Define ACA

**Question:** “What is meant by ACA?”

**Answer:** Children who grow up in homes with an alcoholic parent generally take on certain predictable and identifiable roles in the family in an effort to cope with the family’s painful dysfunction. Unless efforts are extended to exchange these survival roles for functional healthy ways of dealing with family problems, children continue to play out these roles in adulthood, even after they have left their dysfunctional home environment. Although no longer children, they can still act the same way they acted as children. They are often referred to as ACA or ACOA, meaning “adult children of alcoholics.”

*“Brothers and sisters,  
stop thinking like children.  
In regard to evil be infants,  
but in your thinking be adults.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 14:20)

## What Is God’s Heart on the Dysfunctional Family?

God chose a man named Abram. God gave Abram a family, and from that family tree—42 generations later—Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world. Through faith in Jesus, we become part of God’s family.

God is relational. He designed the marriage relationship between a husband and wife to represent the relationship Christ has with His bride—the church. Similarly, our family relationships can reflect the relationship that God desires to have with His children.

No matter how dysfunctional a family may be, there is hope. A glimpse into the lineage of Christ reveals one dysfunctional family after another, making it evident that God's heart on the dysfunctional family is one of love and redemption.

*“Put your hope in the LORD,  
for with the LORD is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.”*  
(PSALM 130:7)

## God's Heart on the Significance of Family

**Derives** its name from God the Father

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”* (EPHESIANS 3:14–15).

**Represents** the relationship believers have with Christ

*“Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters”* (HEBREWS 2:11).

**Provides** a solid foundation for discipleship

*“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also”* (2 TIMOTHY 1:5).

**Confirms** that it is worthy of protection

*“Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes”* (NEHEMIAH 4:14).

**Verifies** the lineage of Jesus Christ

*“Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child”* (LUKE 2:4–5).

**Forms** the basis for recording ancestral connections

*“So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families” (NEHEMIAH 7:5).*

## God’s Heart on the Role of Family

**Rejoices** together in God’s blessings

*“There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you” (DEUTERONOMY 12:7).*

**Declares** God’s works to the next generation

*“One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts” (PSALM 145:4).*

**Supports** the local church

*“Then the leaders of families . . . gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God . . .” (1 CHRONICLES 29:6–7).*

**Provides** for individual family members

*“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 TIMOTHY 5:8).*

**Does good** to everyone, especially to God’s family

*“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (GALATIANS 6:10).*

**Loves** God’s family

*“And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:10).*

## God's Heart on the Purpose of Family

**Praises** the attributes of God

*"Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength" (PSALM 96:7).*

**Practices** Christianity

*"If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God" (1 TIMOTHY 5:4).*

**Promotes** impartiality

*"The families of the oldest brother were treated the same as those of the youngest" (1 CHRONICLES 24:31).*

**Participates** in regularly scheduled group Bible studies

*"On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law" (NEHEMIAH 8:13).*

**Portrays** humility before God

*"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (PSALM 22:27).*

**Protects** against loneliness

*"God sets the lonely in families . . ." (PSALM 68:6).*



# CHARACTERISTICS



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*“Dysfunction can  
spread like a virus  
from person  
to person.”*



The hero. The scapegoat. The lost child. The mascot.

Such a curious phenomenon that, in case after case, children of alcoholics will assume various roles in order to cope with the stress of being raised by dysfunctional, chemically dependent parents. With Cathey Brown's bent toward performance and perfectionism, she describes herself as a "hero" during her childhood because she methodically is proactive in finding "fixes" for her dysfunctional family situation. Upon realizing she cannot control an out-of-control situation, guilt looms and an increased sense of personal deficiency burdens Cathey's spirit.<sup>10</sup>

The realization that child "heroes" do not have the power or resources to rescue dysfunctional families is punctuated in Cathey's life in 1981. Cathey's mother is admitted to the hospital for internal bleeding, half of her stomach is removed, and it's all related to excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>11</sup>

Scripture warns of the dangers and consequences of being consumed by alcohol:

*“Who has woe? Who has sorrow?  
Who has strife? Who has complaints?  
Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?  
Those who linger over wine,  
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.  
Do not gaze at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
when it goes down smoothly!  
In the end it bites like a snake  
and poisons like a viper.”*  
(PROVERBS 23:29–32)

## What Is a Checklist for Unresolved Conflicts?

As a grown-up, unresolved conflicts from Cathey’s past lead her to the inconceivable. The very habits she fights so hard to avoid in childhood end up swallowing her up in adulthood. If Cathey were taking the “Checklist for Unresolved Conflicts from Your Past,” she undoubtedly would answer *Yes* to almost every question, recognizing that the pain and heartache of being raised by dysfunctional, chemically dependent parents doesn’t disappear upon turning 21.

A traumatic combination of circumstances—overachieving at work, a divorce, business challenges, and postpartum depression draws Cathey first to chemical dependence on prescription drugs and then to alcohol to further numb herself from painful realities.<sup>12</sup>

Scripture teaches there is only one true source of peace in the midst of stressful circumstances, and it’s found in the Lord of peace.

*“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you  
peace at all times and in every way.”*

(2 THESSALONIANS 3:16)

### Checklist for Unresolved Conflicts from Your Past

If you think you may have some unresolved conflicts from your past, complete the following checklist:

- Do you fear personal criticism?
- Do you give to others to the extent that it is harmful to you?
- Do you constantly seek approval?
- Do you suppress your emotions?
- Do you lie when you could easily tell the truth?
- Do you feel you must rescue others?

- Do you have difficulty having fun or relaxing?
- Do you confuse pity with love?
- Do you judge yourself too harshly?
- Do you find yourself easily manipulated?
- Do you assume too much responsibility?
- Do you have unresolved anger toward any family member(s)?
- Do you avoid taking personal responsibility for your actions?
- Do you fear abandonment?
- Do you violate your own conscience in order to please others?
- Do you feel you need to control others?

*“Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.”*

(PSALM 26:2)

## What Rigid Rules Regulate Dysfunctional Families?

Rules exist in every area of life—in every part of the universe—whether written or spoken, known or unknown, established by God or by His creations. Rules reign and that is especially evident in dysfunctional families where they are rarely spoken and never written, but are abundantly clear. These rules wield absolute authority over the lives of those they govern.

Part of the problem with rules in dysfunctional families is that they are necessarily dysfunctional. They are established and reinforced by dysfunctional parents, instilled in vulnerable children, and disseminated throughout all their relationships. Dysfunctional patterns of behavior never remain in the family but spread out to every relationship.

No one is an island. Dysfunction can spread like a virus from person to person. Paul explained the connections in the family of God, the church, as having many parts yet forming one body.

*“Just as a body, though one, has many parts,  
but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.  
For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body  
—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—  
and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.  
Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.  
. . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;  
if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”*  
(1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–14, 26)

Some of the rigid, damaging rules of dysfunctional families include:

- Don't ever** appear weak, wrong, or less than perfect.
- Don't ever** be spontaneously joyful or playful.
- Don't ever** cause problems within the family.
- Don't ever** directly address family issues, relationships, or problems.
- Don't ever** divulge family secrets.
- Don't ever** embarrass the family.
- Don't ever** fail to fully support family members, no matter the circumstances.
- Don't ever** make decisions independent of the family.
- Don't ever** put anyone or anything above the family.
- Don't ever** question or defy parental authority or family rules.
- Don't ever** share personal needs, desires, or feelings.
- Don't ever** speak badly about the family.
- Don't ever** speak to an adult family member without first being spoken to or asked to speak.
- Don't ever** talk about sex or other taboo subjects.

The Bible records both dysfunctional and functional adults following the ways of their parents and those of previous generations:

*“He did evil in the eyes of the LORD,  
because he followed the ways of his father and mother  
and of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin.  
. . . In everything he followed the ways of his father Asa  
and did not stray from them;  
he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:52, 43)

## What Damage Results from Rigid Family Rules?

Dysfunctional family rules result in dysfunctional family members.

Besides producing the four types of roles children play in their homes, rigid destructive rules strike a devastating blow to the soul and spirit of impressionable little ones. Rigid rules twist and distort their perceptions of God, self, and others. While God put rules in place for our benefit to protect and produce good in us, dysfunctional family rules are for the benefit of those who set them. They often bring harm rather than help or hope.

Jesus valued the children brought to Him. The disciples sought to hinder them from receiving the good that Christ had for them. Whether intentionally or not, dysfunctional parents today regard their children as the disciples did back then.

*“People were also bringing babies to Jesus  
for him to place his hands on them.  
When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.  
But Jesus called the children to him and said,  
‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”*

(LUKE 18:15–16)

Rigid, dysfunctional rules damage family members to the point that they . . .

**Don't engage** in open, honest communication

. . . but demonstrate poor communication skills.

**Don't develop** meaningful relationships

. . . but establish enmeshed codependent relationships.

**Don't express** personal feelings or opinions

. . . but lack self-awareness.

**Don't control** uncomfortable emotions

. . . but experience emotional instability, depression, and anxiety.

**Don't rationally** solve problems alone

. . . but are prone to develop obsessions, compulsions, and addictions.

**Don't feel** undesirable emotions without guilt and shame

. . . but engage in self-injurious activities.

**Don't tolerate** undesirable thoughts and feelings

. . . but suppress them both.

**Don't experience** sexual desires without shame and guilt

. . . but need to be in control or to be controlled.

**Don't forgive** personal mistakes

. . . but display perfectionist tendencies.

**Don't separate** bad behavior from being bad

. . . but harbor a deep fear of failure.

**Don't develop** a positive self-image

. . . but nurture a poor self-image and depend on others for a sense of self-worth.

**Don't engage** in self-disclosure

. . . but protect family secrets.

**Don't value** and care for themselves emotionally or relationally

. . . but accept an inordinate amount of mistreatment.

**Don't set** appropriate boundaries with toxic people

. . . but crave the approval of others.

**Don't form** a separate identity from the family unit

. . . but compete with and create divisions between family members.

**Don't live** and enjoy a happy childhood

. . . but feel emotionally empty and struggle with loneliness.

**Don't assume** responsibility for personal contentment

. . . but look for happiness in others.

**Don't trust** God or people to provide love and security

. . . but attempt to meet emotional needs in inappropriate ways.

Believing and accepting the truth about God's love is the greatest need of those who live with the damaging effects of rigid, dysfunctional family rules.

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life,  
neither angels nor demons,  
neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,  
neither height nor depth,  
nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God  
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

(ROMANS 8:38–39)

## What Characterizes Dysfunctional Family Systems?

Just as every individual family member is unique in a number of ways from other members, every family has some unique characteristics that set it apart from other families while at the same time continuing to share a host of similar attributes and qualities.

The Bible addresses the uniqueness of each individual.

*“You created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
I praise you because I am  
fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”*  
(PSALM 139:13–14)

### Eight Dominant Traits of Dysfunctional Family Systems

Dysfunctional family systems are characterized by:

1. **Chaos**—drama and confusion reign with emotions ruling decision making. Reasoning and self-restraint take a backseat.
2. **Control**—keeping members in compliance with family rules and ideology is critical. Maintaining and supporting the hierarchy is essential to family preservation.
3. **Denial**—obvious family problems are unacknowledged, unaddressed, and unchanged. Lies are accepted as truth, and inappropriate behavior is often ignored.
4. **Inconsistency**—what was said one day is retracted the next. Expectations constantly change, and commitments are easily broken.

5. **Indifference**—emotional support of family members is blatantly lacking unless challenged by outsiders. Children are valued for their devotion and contribution to the family system.
6. **Instability**—emotions quickly fluctuate from happy to sad, pleased to angry. Change is constant and unforeseeable; insecurity runs rampant among family members.
7. **Shame**—members serve as emotional punching bags for each other, with shame being the most effective way of hurting, manipulating, and obtaining compliance.
8. **Unpredictability**—keeping each other guessing is everyone’s specialty; therefore, what is allowed one day is forbidden the next day and what pleases someone today displeases them tomorrow.

Surely the Lord is the answer to the unmet needs that drive the maladaptive behavior of those who are members of dysfunctional families, those who are lonely of soul and spirit, those who feel isolated, disconnected, and emotionally empty.

*“Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.”*  
(PSALM 90:14)





# CAUSES



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*“Most of us do not exhibit bad behavior because we want to do bad things, but because we have deep-seated inner problems that manifest themselves in outward bad behavior.”*



Cathey Brown's journey into the throes of chemical addiction comes after her daughter, Catherine, is born.

A hormonal imbalance leads to anxiety, depression, and a loss of appetite. To remedy this condition, a doctor prescribes a powerful yet addictive drug and also recommends that Cathey drink two glasses of wine a day to relax her stomach muscles and encourage eating.<sup>13</sup> Cathey soon finds herself following in her parents' footsteps, focused on the gratification of the moment, not on the consequences of the future.

"I struggled with my addiction for a long time," Cathey recalls. "When I got into my own recovery, I learned about the problems that adult children of alcoholics have to deal with. I had grown up in that environment, and finally I had a label for it (ACA). But I suddenly realized that my daughter was at extremely high risk for repeating the same thing."<sup>14</sup>

Cathey longs to be set free and to protect her daughter from being ensnared by chemical dependence. Her experience is like that of the psalmist. . . .

*"When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;  
he brought me into a spacious place."*

(PSALM 118:5)

## What Causes Dysfunctional Families?<sup>15</sup>

Cathey is familiar with chaotic families and the fact that many times holidays only exacerbate stress-filled environments.

As a child of alcoholics, Cathey remembers tension surrounding the annual decorating of the Christmas tree. "Putting up the Christmas tree was just an unbelievable event because Daddy had to have it perfect and so he would cut off limbs and drill holes and mother would get frustrated and leave the room. We'd get tinsel on the floor and that was a mess. It was just not a joyous occasion."<sup>16</sup>

Growing up, Cathey realizes that the media images portraying the wonders of Christmas—angelic faces glowing with the joy of the holiday season—are not her reality, and her memories haunt her into adulthood and impact her marriage. Cathey recalls becoming belligerent and depressed prior to Christmas—not showing up for family events and even trying to pick fights with her husband and daughter. Fearing disappointment and failure, she becomes a self-saboteur of sorts, dismantling beforehand what she believes will bring her pain in the long run.

Years later, Cathey has gained insight concerning the motivation behind her actions. “Part of it was just being comfortable that I was worthy of people doing things for me, that I was lovable, that I deserved the center of attention.” Cathey adds that she has since learned that it isn’t about “deserving” special attention, but just letting her family love her for who she is.<sup>17</sup>

The love of Cathey’s family mirrors the depth of the love of God.

*“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate  
and gracious God, slow to anger,  
abounding in love and faithfulness,  
maintaining love to thousands,  
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.  
Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;  
he punishes the children and their children  
for the sin of the parents  
to the third and fourth generation.”*

(EXODUS 34:6–7)

The truth of Exodus chapter 34 is clearly seen in the fact that the sinful behavior of parents is more often than not passed on to children through the natural process of simulation—of replicating what they experience. Something cannot come from nothing. Problem behavior does not come from nowhere but often from a home where problem behavior is practiced by adults and picked up by children.

Most of us do not exhibit bad behavior because we want to do bad things, but because we have deep-seated inner problems that drive and manifest themselves in outward bad behavior. If you want to change how you act, first change your heart. Jesus said it this way:

*“It is from within, out of a person’s heart,  
that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality,  
theft, murder, adultery, greed,  
malice, deceit, lewdness, envy,  
slander, arrogance and folly.  
All these evils come from inside  
and defile a person.”*

(MARK 7:21–23)

With children, more is caught than taught. Without intervention brought on by a changed heart resulting in changed behavior, dysfunctional behavior will continue to produce more dysfunctional behavior.

## Dysfunctional Families Produce Dysfunctional Families

### The Chaotic Family

- Both household and individuals are poorly organized.
- Family is plagued by problems.
- Parents are inconsistent and indecisive.
- Children are emotionally abandoned.

**Result:** Family members are not connected.

### Remedy:

*“... a ruler with discernment and knowledge maintains order”*  
(PROVERBS 28:2).

### The Controlling Family

- Structure is overly rigid.
- Tone is authoritative and dictatorial.

- Parents tend to be faultfinding and critical.
- Children are task-oriented; value is placed on their performance.

**Result:** Family members are fearful and insensitive.

**Remedy:**

*“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (EPHESIANS 6:4).*

### **The Coddling Family**

- Parental authority is lacking.
- Feelings are overprotected.
- Disagreements are avoided.
- Children are the center of attention.

**Result:** Family members are undisciplined.

**Remedy:**

*“... correction and instruction are the way to life” (PROVERBS 6:23).*

### **The Codependent Family**

- Conformity is strong within the family.
- Self-direction is lacking.
- Parents are overly possessive.
- Children are smothered.

**Result:** Family members are insecure.

**Remedy:**

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (DEUTERONOMY 6:5).*

## **What Fosters the Functional Family Style?**

After being raised in a dysfunctional family by alcoholics and later becoming an alcoholic herself, Cathey shares profound and encouraging insights for those struggling down her same path toward a functional family style: “Recovery is a process. It is not an event.”<sup>18</sup>

As Cathey seeks help for her addictions and takes steps toward creating a “cultivating family,” she grows increasingly concerned for her daughter, who could easily repeat generational patterns of alcoholism. “I discovered a lot of kids like my daughter—kids who needed some type of support group, some type of education, some type of outlet for talking about what was going on in their families, but there was nothing for them. They needed a different way to cope with their background than I had. Somebody needed to teach them that their feelings were okay, and rather than act out or push themselves to the limit as I had done, they could learn how to cope with it.”<sup>19</sup>

To one day be part of a functional, healthy family, the fears and needs of children of alcoholics, addicts, or other types of dysfunctional parents must be addressed in the recovery process. Ministering to children is close to the heart of God.

*“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive  
the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’  
And he took the children in his arms,  
placed his hands on them and blessed them.”*

(MARK 10:15–16)

### **The Cultivating Family**

- Structure and discipline are maintained by parents.
- Individual responsibility is required.
- Love and obedience to God are developed.
- Children are secure.

**Result:** Family relationships are balanced.

#### **Remedy:**

*“There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you” (DEUTERONOMY 12:7).*

## What Causes Dysfunction to Develop in Some Families?

Since family dysfunction is generally passed down from one generation to the next, determining the point of the dysfunction's origin may be impossible for many families. Whatever provided the impetus for the deterioration of family interaction was likely a traumatic event that so altered the fabric of the family that its members were unable to recover normalcy and succumbed to dysfunction.

The same process can be seen in an individual who experiences a trauma so impactful it changes the course of the person's life. The individual's perceptions of God, self, others, and life as a whole are dramatically altered—so much so that the person seems to have become “another person.” They might even be seen by family members and close friends as now being a “stranger” to them.

Such life-altering events need to be examined, processed, and dealt with in a healthy way from a balanced, biblical perspective. Otherwise, healthy normalcy will be lost and a new, unhealthy normalcy will lead to a dysfunctional lifestyle.

The good news is that the opposite is equally true. A traumatic experience has the potential to turn a dysfunctional person into a positive, productive individual. Such was the case with a Hebrew scholar named Saul.

*“I too was convinced that I ought to do all  
that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. . . .  
About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road,  
I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun,  
blazing around me and my companions.  
We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice  
saying to me in Aramaic,  
‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?  
It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’  
Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’*

*'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.  
 'Now get up and stand on your feet.  
 I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant  
 and as a witness of what you have seen  
 and will see of me.' . . .  
 So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient  
 to the vision from heaven."  
 (ACTS 26:9, 13–16, 19)*

Just as there can be multiple reasons people do the things they do, there can be a multitude of reasons for a family being dysfunctional. For some families, the . . .

**Presence** of chemical addiction results in maladaptive behavior

**Existence** of emotional, physical, or psychological disturbances damages family members

**Tolerance** of abusive behavior within the family prevents healthy interaction

**Adherence** to a rigid, dogmatic belief system leads to bondage

**Unexpected** death of a significant family member creates a crisis of faith that causes chaos

Whatever dynamic exists within a family that results in dysfunction, the Lord is able to intervene and bring His life-changing truths into that family. He can transform it into a healthy, functional family through which He can work to transform other families to His praise and glory.

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit,  
 and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  
 And we all, who with unveiled faces  
 contemplate the Lord's glory,  
 are being transformed into his image  
 with ever-increasing glory,  
 which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."  
 (2 CORINTHIANS 3:17–18)*

## What Is the Root Cause for a Dysfunctional Family?

Cathey is determined to bring dysfunction to a dead end with her family.

Besides amply providing love and a sense of significance to her daughter, Cathey strives to create a secure environment where Catherine feels free to express her feelings concerning her needs and her family's struggles. This is atypical for children of alcoholics, where the unspoken message is "we're not going to talk about it."

Cathey recalls a specific incident where Catherine, as a teenager, freely expresses her feelings through standing by a decision she has made. With a business trip scheduled to California the same weekend as Catherine's birthday, Cathey had hoped her daughter would join her so they could celebrate together. Catherine doesn't warm to the idea, but instead prefers to stay home and celebrate with friends. Cathey is gravely disappointed, and admittedly pines: "But I'm the one that gave birth to you and I want to spend this time with you."<sup>20</sup>

Catherine isn't swayed, and maturely responds: "Well, Mom I love you and I'm really not saying this to hurt your feelings, but you're really not going to make me feel guilty about it."<sup>21</sup>

Cathey's disappointment quickly dissipates as she recognizes her daughter's emotional strength and her healthy ability to express her needs and not buckle under to others' wishes or demands. Love, significance, security—helping to meet these needs among family members—is a sure way to drive away dysfunction.

As we allow God to minister through us, His Word encourages us.

*"Let us consider how we may spur one another  
on toward love and good deeds."*

(HEBREWS 10:24)

### 3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>22</sup>

**Love**—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (JOHN 15:12).

**Significance**—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”*  
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

**Security**—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

*“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge”* (PROVERBS 14:26).

### The Ultimate Need-Meeter

#### What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*  
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

**Love**—“*I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness*” (JEREMIAH 31:3).

**Significance**—“*For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’*” (JEREMIAH 29:11).

**Security**—“*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged*” (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, “*My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*”

**WRONG BELIEF:**

“My parents did not give me the unconditional love, significance, and security I needed as a child. Since my past is unchangeable, I can’t change who I am today.”

**RIGHT BELIEF:**

“My need for unconditional love, significance, and security can be met by Christ. Although I can’t change my past, I can change my attitude about my past. I will depend on God to empower me to learn healthy ways of relating to my family.”

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another  
if any of you has a grievance against someone.  
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

## How Do You Become a Part of God's Family?

God's love for you is unfailing and unconditional and is always focused on your highest good. He longs to walk with you through life day by day, moment by moment, all the while working to transform you into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Your deepest needs for love, significance, and security can be met only in Christ. Depending on others alone leads only to dysfunction. The Lord is inviting you today to become part of His family, but first there are four spiritual truths you need to know.

### 4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

### 1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (JOHN 10:10).

### 2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (ROMANS 6:23).

### 3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"* (ACTS 16:31).

#### 4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
 I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way  
 instead of your way.  
 Please forgive me for my sins.  
 Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross  
 to pay the penalty for my sins.  
 Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
 Change me from the inside out and make me the person  
 you created me to be.  
 In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

## What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



# STEPS TO SOLUTION



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*“God can use your  
‘mess’ to become  
your message,  
and He can use your  
‘test’ to become  
your testimony.”*



The year 1981 proves to be a pivotal one for Cathey Brown.

Not only does her mother experience the traumatic stomach surgery traced directly to excessive alcohol consumption, but her doctor looks Cathey squarely in the eye and admonishes: “If you continue to drink, in 10 years you’ll be where your mother is now.”<sup>23</sup>

A second sobering wake-up call comes while watching a television program featuring former First Lady Betty Ford’s struggles with alcohol and the anticipated opening of the Betty Ford Center. “I began to think for the first time that if a former First Lady could have this problem and be so public about it, that maybe I wasn’t so bad, maybe I could do something about my problem.”<sup>24</sup>

But Cathey soon learns that not only can she not do “something” about her problem, she can’t do “anything” about it. Rather, she must desperately rely on the help of the Lord.

*“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”*

(PSALM 121:1–2)

## Key Verses to Memorize

Cathey discovers the truth, and the truth eventually sets her free.

Sweet surrender is experienced only after acknowledging that in her own strength she can not defeat the dysfunction spawned by generational patterns of alcoholism. “I tried to study my way out of it,” Cathey muses. “I tried to rationalize my way out of it. I tried to bargain my way out of it. But finally, one day when I was in my office by myself, I just got down on my knees and cried out: ‘God, I can’t do this! You have to do it, and I don’t know what else to do except turn it over to you.’ The next morning I woke up—I’ll never forget the date, April 17, 1981—and I just had this feeling in my heart that I wasn’t going to drink anymore.”<sup>25</sup>

*“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.  
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

(JOHN 8:31–32)

## Key Passage to Read

Five chapters in the book of Genesis record the account of how God uses one son of a dysfunctional family to dramatically and forever change, not just one, but at least 11 dysfunctional family members. Joseph’s story in Genesis is a biblical portrait of what God can do in dysfunctional family relationships when one family member is fully yielded to God.

### Genesis Chapter 37 Joseph’s Dysfunctional Family

Joseph is the eleventh son of Jacob, born in his old age, born by the wife he adored. Jacob loves Joseph more than any of his other older sons. When Joseph’s older brothers see their father favoring him over them, they seethe with jealousy and anger. In their vengeance they sell Joseph into slavery. Clearly, their family exhibits many symptoms of dysfunction:

Poor communication

Anger

Partiality

Vengefulness

Jealousy

Disloyalty

Dishonesty

Bitterness

## **Genesis Chapters 39 and 41**

### **Joseph's Walk with the Lord**

In spite of the mistreatment Joseph receives at the hands of his angry brothers, he refuses to allow their betrayal to make him an angry and bitter man. Instead, he chooses by an act of his will to remain:

Yielded to God's ways

Faithful

Obedient to authority

Honest

Trustworthy

Humble

Morally pure

Consistent

## **Genesis Chapter 42**

### **Joseph's Response to His Family**

When Joseph is reunited with his brothers through the providence of God, he harbors no ill will or desire for revenge, no compulsion to get even, no attempt to do them harm. Again, by an act of his will, he chooses to be:

Giving

Forgiving

Honoring

## Genesis Chapter 50 Joseph's Response to God

At the death of their father, Joseph's older brothers again fear he will pay them back for all the wrongs they have done to him. But Joseph chooses to focus not on the harm they intended, but on the good God intends for them all. Thus Joseph's attitude toward God is:

Willing

Persevering

Faithful

### Don't Be a Prisoner of Your Past!

Like Joseph, choose to have God's mind-set toward those who have injured you.

*"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good . . ."*

(GENESIS 50:20)

## How to Have a Transformed Life

An adage in Christian ministry says—*God can use your "mess" to become your message, and He can use your "test" to become your testimony.*

That certainly has been Cathey Brown's experience! God draws from her personal pain and she devotes herself to helping transform the lives of others. Cathey has reached the target thousands of times, establishing through Rainbow Days curriculum-based support groups and programs for children in dysfunctional situations.

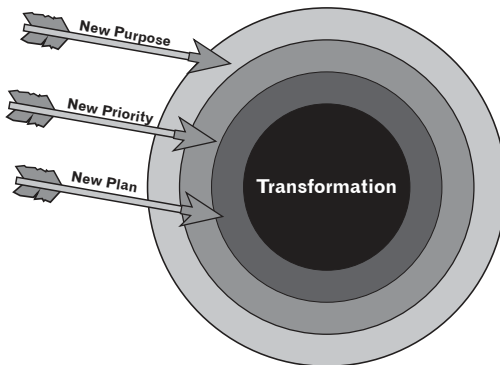
Cathey remembers a precious moment when leading a group that a 7-year-old girl comes running up to her and exclaims: “Cathey, Cathey guess what!” Cathey responds eagerly, “What?” The little girl recounts that her father is an alcoholic and her mother divorced him, then married another man who also is an alcoholic, but the little girl’s mood continues to be remarkably upbeat. “Well, guess what,” she continues most assuredly, “when I grow up I don’t have to marry an alcoholic.”<sup>26</sup>

God’s Word assures us that through the good times and the bad, God is unfolding a perfect plan.

*“And we know that in all things God works  
for the good of those who love him,  
who have been called according to his purpose.”*

(ROMANS 8:28)

### Reaching the Target: Transformation!



**THE FREEDOM FORMULA**  
**A New Purpose**  
**+ A New Priority**  
**+ A New Plan**  

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**A Transformed Life**

### Target #1—A New Purpose

**God's purpose for me** is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

*"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

### Target #2—A New Priority

**God's priority for me** is to change my thinking.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

### Target #3—A New Plan

**God's plan for me** is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

### My Personalized Plan

Life is a series of choices. I cannot embrace the functional freedom God has planned for me until I make the choice to release the hold dysfunction has on me. My heart cannot be filled with the hope of functionality until I choose to empty it of the despair of dysfunctionality. My life cannot be filled with the positive blessings of functionality until I choose to empty it of the negative practices of dysfunctionality.

## How to put away the past<sup>27</sup>

To put away the past and embrace the future, I must choose to take God by the hand and walk through the following steps with Him:

**I will . . .**

**Give myself time to grieve** the past.<sup>28</sup>

- Pray for God to reveal my grief
- Choose to be honest about my pain
- Give myself permission to grieve
- List all my painful experiences and then write the word “past” by each one

*“Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (JOHN 16:20).*

**Give up my need** to be controlling.

- Recognize that God has ultimate control
- Trust in God’s sovereign rule over my relationships
- Submit to God’s control of my personal life
- Rest in God’s love and care for me

*“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken” (PSALM 55:22).*

**Give Christ first place** in my heart.

- Ask Jesus to be Lord of my life
- Accept His forgiveness and love
- Be aware of His constant presence within me
- Allow Him to lead in all I say and do

*“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (LUKE 9:23–24).*

**Give God thanks** for my past.

- Know that God will be faithful to heal me
- Recognize that difficult relationships can strengthen me
- Look for positive ways God can use the pain in my life
- Focus on developing the character of Christ within me

*“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

**Give attention** to how I responded to my circumstances as a child. Was I . . .

- The responsible child?
- The rebellious child?
- The reclusive child?
- The reveling child?

*“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out”* (PROVERBS 18:15).

**Give thought** to my present dysfunctional characteristics.

- Pray for God to reveal my weaknesses
- Pray for wisdom to understand how to change
- Pray that I will draw on Christ, who is my strength, to make changes
- Pray for wise and discerning friends to enlighten and encourage me

*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”*  
(PSALM 139:23–24).

**Give consideration** to my God-given rights.

- The right to obey God rather than others
- The right to a clear conscience
- The right to follow the Word of God
- The right to live in my God-appointed role

*“We must obey God rather than human beings!”* (ACTS 5:29).

**Give myself boundaries.**<sup>29</sup>

- Define who I am: “I am a child of God,” and who I am not: “I am not a piece of property.”
- Refuse to be manipulated or mistreated and learn to say, *No*.
- Stop playing the victim: “As an adult, I am not powerless.”
- Stop blaming others and do not seek their approval: “I’ll take responsibility for my own behavior.”

*“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ”* (GALATIANS 1:10).

**Give up resentment.**

- Consider the consequences of unforgiveness
- Confess my own areas of unforgiveness
- Contemplate the sins for which I have received forgiveness
- Choose to forgive and keep on choosing to forgive

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”* (EPHESIANS 4:32).

**Give time to restoring** healthy family relationships.

- Be the one to begin rebuilding relationships
- Be willing to invest quality time to develop healthy relationships
- Be generous with grace toward others whose attitudes and actions are negative
- Be a channel of God’s unconditional love and acceptance to others

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift”* (MATTHEW 5:23–24).

## How to Take Care of Yourself

If you were raised in a dysfunctional family, you likely never learned how to take care of yourself but only how to take care of others and how to manipulate others to take care of you in return. In order to move from dysfunctional to functional as a healthy adult, it is imperative that you stop being dependent on others and start being *actively dependent* on God to meet your needs. That means you will enter into a partnership with God in which you will work together with Him toward attaining maturity. Ultimately, this will result in your learning contentment and experiencing fulfillment.

*"I know what it is to be in need,  
and I know what it is to have plenty.  
I have learned the secret of being  
content in any and every situation,  
whether well fed or hungry,  
whether living in plenty or in want."*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:12)

As you practice depending on God by developing a deepening relationship with Him, cooperate with Him by doing your part in assuming these responsibilities for yourself:

**Claim** your identity in Christ as a worthwhile person, one for whom He died and now lives within.

**Learn** to identify your needs and wants by asking God for insight and by understanding your basic needs for love, significance, and security.

**Make** the effort every day to do something uplifting, such as reading scriptures that emphasize your significance to God, having a meaningful conversation with a friend, or doing a good deed for someone.

**Realize** that emotions are honest feelings. It is how you express them that is right or wrong.

**Allow** yourself to have painful feelings. Remind yourself that feelings are not fatal no matter how much you may hurt inside from wrongs done to you or expectations that are not met.

**Welcome** pleasant feelings, hold on to them, and relish them.

**Look** for things to do that bring you joy and people to be with who make you laugh.

**Improve** your self-image by learning a new skill, taking a class, or improving your personal appearance.

**Spend** time and money on yourself by reading a favorite book, buying something you like, or doing something you enjoy.

**Feel** good about your accomplishments at work, home, church, and in relationships.

**Begin** prioritizing significant people and meaningful activities and learn to say *No* to all that would keep you from saying *Yes* to God.

**Practice** telling others that you care about them but that you are responsible to God to care for yourself as well: “I really do care about you and would like to be with you, but I have some responsibilities I must take care of. Let’s plan something else another time.”

**Stop** seeking to control others or allowing them to control you. Instead seek freedom in your relationships.

**Guard** against engaging in obsessive or compulsive behaviors by being aware of your thoughts and actions. Illicit the help of others to remind you and hold you accountable.

**Take** time to focus on God’s love for you and learn to see yourself as He sees you by completing a Christ-centered devotional such as the 31-day devotional *Seeing Yourself Through God’s Eyes*. Memorize scriptures that speak of His love for you.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!  
And that is what we are!”*

(1 JOHN 3:1)

## How to Deal with Your Own Dysfunction

If the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time, the way to change a family is by changing one member at a time, and that member is you—the only one you *can* change. Given the enmeshed system of a dysfunctional family, just one member can rock the boat enough to create a tidal wave. The key is knowing whether to rock the boat or to get out of it.

It takes enormous courage and determination to try to become functional while maintaining close ties with a dysfunctional family of origin. The ties that bind the members together can choke the life out of one who seeks to struggle against them in an attempt to become free of them. For many, freedom can come only when distance creates a loosening of the cords so that there is room for movement.

If you desire to truly walk in the freedom Christ purchased for you, you will have no choice but to cut the cords that hold you and every member of your family in bondage to one another. It is impossible to find your true identity in Christ while remaining bound to a family system that is based on owning you and providing your identity for you. God's Word is clear . . .

*"You shall have no other gods before me."*

(EXODUS 20:3)

As you follow Christ as your Lord and Master . . .

**Acknowledge** the dysfunction within your family and particularly your own personal dysfunction.

**Admit** to God, yourself, and at least one other trustworthy, functional person that you have a problem.

**Don't** attempt to change anyone but yourself, the only person you *can* change.

**Believe** that you can change with the power of God working in and through you.

**Memorize** and repeat Psalm 25:15, “*My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.*”

**Refuse** to take on the responsibilities for other family members.

**Focus** on your own feelings, coping mechanisms, and the role(s) you play within your family.

**Construct** positive, biblical roles of your own choosing for your life now.

**Look** at your own character defects.

**Determine** what you can do to improve your life.

**Identify** and list behaviors that enable the dysfunction to continue.

**Join** a 12-step program or other support group if appropriate.

As you seek to change, use these questions for personal reflection and to gain insight:

**What** took place in your family as you were growing up?

**What** roles did you take on? How did they effect you then, and how are they effecting you now?

**What** messages about yourself did you get from your family?

**What** beliefs did you form about yourself then? About God? About life? About your family?

**What** beliefs do you have about yourself today? About God? About life? About your family?

**What** is the basis for the beliefs you have today?

**Does** it feel good or bad to be a member of your family today?

**How** do you feel when you are around your family? Happy? Sad? Angry? Depressed? Shameful? Guilty?

**Do** you feel like a little child or a victim again, or do you feel like an adult?

**Do** you assume any childhood role when you are around your family now?

**Did** you have anger issues as a child? Do you have them now?

**When** and why did you start to feel as you do?

**As an adult**, did you switch your role from being a victim to being an abuser or an addict?

**Do** these questions stir up feelings in you that reflect current problems in your life or past problems from your family of origin?

It is important that you share both your past and current feelings of anger and pain with a safe and mature person who can help you process them and release them and your family to God. In releasing them to God, you will find that He will release you and set you free.

*“I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison and to release  
from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”*

(ISAIAH 42:6–7)

## How to Put Away Past Anger

Often, children who grow up in dysfunctional families enter adulthood with unresolved anger buried under a history of mistreatment and unmet emotional needs. For many, the connection between their present outbursts of anger and their past dysfunctional childhood is never seen. For others, the cause and effect is not only seen and understood but becomes the springboard for change.

As you think about your own anger, consider what the Bible says:

*“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,  
brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.  
Be kind and compassionate to one another,  
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

(EPHESIANS 4:31–32)

## Putting Away Past Anger

**Realize** your unresolved anger.

- Admit you have harbored anger in your heart and confess it as sin.
- Ask God to reveal all your unresolved anger.
- Admit to a wise, nonjudgmental friend or counselor that you have buried anger.
- Ask God to help you see your sin as He sees it.

Say to the Lord, *“I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin”*  
(PSALM 38:18).

**Revisit** your root feelings.

- Did you feel hurt—rejected, betrayed, unloved, ignored?
- Did you experience injustice—were you cheated, wronged, maligned, attacked?
- Did you feel fearful—threatened, insecure, out of control, powerless?
- Did you feel frustrated—inadequate, inferior, hindered, controlled?

Pray to the Lord, *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (PSALM 139:23–24).

**Receive** God’s love for you personally.

- Personalize Bible verses that reveal God’s love for you:

Lord, thank You for saying to me, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

God, *“Because of [Your] great love [I am] not consumed, for [Your] compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”* (LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23).

- Read this passage daily:

*“I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 8:38–39 NLT).

- Rely on the Lord to meet your inner needs for love, significance, and security:<sup>50</sup>

Lord, *“I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation”* (PSALM 13:5).

- Thank God each day for His unconditional love.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”* (1 JOHN 3:1).

Pray, “. . . that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (EPHESIANS 3:17–19).

**Recognize** your need to forgive.

- Make a list of each of your hurts—release each one to God.
- Pray for those who hurt you—for whatever is broken in them.
- Give any desire for revenge to God—do not strike back or retaliate.
- Release those who have hurt you into the hands of God—forgive as God forgave you.

Be faithful to . . . *“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you”* (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

**Release** your rights regarding the offense.

- Release your right to hear “I’m sorry,” for the offense.
- Release your right to dwell on the offense.
- Release your right to “get even” regarding the offense.
- Release your right to keep bringing up the offense.

Remember . . . *“Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends”* (PROVERBS 17:9).

**Rejoice** in God’s purpose for allowing your pain.

- Thank God for the ways He will use this trial in your life for your good.

- Thank God for how He will use your resolved anger for the good of others.
- Thank God for His promise to restore you after a time of suffering.
- Thank God for His promise to use all the pain to make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

Give thanks that . . . *“The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast”* (1 PETER 5:10).

### Reflect Christ’s love.

- Reflect the love of Jesus by praying for every person who hurts or angers you.
  - ♦ “Lord, may my heart be a reflection of your heart.”
  - ♦ “Lord, may my mind be an expression of your mind.”
  - ♦ “Lord, may my will be a demonstration of your will.”
  - ♦ “Lord, may my love be an illustration of your love.”

Jesus said, *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (JOHN 13:34–35).

### Restore the relationship when appropriate.

- Remember that sometimes reconciliation may not be appropriate, such as in cases of abuse or between people involved in an adulterous affair or other destructive relationships.

An important first step is to understand the differences between reconciliation and forgiveness.<sup>31</sup>

- ♦ Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense; reconciliation focuses on the relationship.
- ♦ Forgiveness does not require a relationship. For reconciliation to occur, two people must walk together in agreement toward the same goal.

The Bible says, *“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* (AMOS 3:3).

## Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

**Forgiveness** can be given by one person.

**Reconciliation** requires at least two people.

**Forgiveness** is extended in one direction.

**Reconciliation** is reciprocal . . . involving a two-way direction.

**Forgiveness** is a decision to release the offender.

**Reconciliation** is the effort to rejoin the offender.

**Forgiveness** involves a change in thinking about the offender.

**Reconciliation** involves a change in behavior by the offender.

**Forgiveness** is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

**Reconciliation** is a restored relationship based on restored trust.

**Forgiveness** is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

**Reconciliation** is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

**Forgiveness** is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

**Reconciliation** is conditional and is based on repentance.

After understanding these differences, talk with a trusted pastor or counselor to help you determine whether reconciliation is advisable in your situation. Realize, you can forgive your offender, but you should not reconcile with someone who refuses to change.

The Bible says . . .

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,  
do not associate with one easily angered.”*

(PROVERBS 22:24)

## Steps to Reconciliation

If reconciliation is appropriate, do so safely while maintaining appropriate boundaries, following these steps:

1. **Confess your anger** both to God and to the person with whom you have resisted, or have not wanted, reconciliation.

Write out the confession ahead of time to get the wording just right.

—“I realize I’ve been wrong in holding on to my anger and refusing to allow God to restore our relationship. I’m deeply sorry. Will you forgive me?”

2. **Keep the encounter free of anger** and accusatory statements.

Instead of “You did \_\_\_\_\_” statements, use “I felt (sad, hurt, devastated, etc.) when (event) happened.”

3. **State your desire for reconciliation** within a renewed, right relationship.

“I sincerely want us to have the best relationship possible—a healthy, supportive, positive relationship that is right in God’s sight. Is that what you want, too?”

*Jesus said, “I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. . . . Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (MATTHEW 5:22–24).*

Reconciliation can help you resolve past anger and lead to healing. That is God’s desire. However, reconciliation is not always possible or advisable if the other person is unwilling to change.

The Bible says . . .

*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,  
live at peace with everyone.”*

(ROMANS 12:18)

## How to Learn Acceptance— Your Hope for Healing

You may have experienced many losses growing up in a dysfunctional family—the loss of freedom, friends, hobbies, plans, dreams, or even losing a loved one. You might also grieve the loss of “what could have been”—happy memories, learning valuable lessons, or simply a sense of normalcy. Overcoming pain from a dysfunctional family may involve going through a grieving process.

Grief affects your past, present, and future. Working through your grief will therefore involve connecting to the past, accepting the present, and adjusting to the future.<sup>32</sup> The work of *accepting the reality* of your unwanted loss may be difficult, but your efforts will succeed when you have the right focus.

Rather than trying to feel what others want you to feel, focus on God. Pray, “Lord, whatever you want me to feel and whatever you want me to do is my desire. My commitment is to be the person you want me to be through this season of sorrow.”

*“Trust in him at all times, you people;  
pour out your hearts to him,  
for God is our refuge.”*  
(PSALM 62:8)

### Accept Your Past

#### Accept that the past remains in the past.

- **Pray:** Seek God’s help in embracing your grief.

*“The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles”* (PSALM 34:17).

- **Recall:** Think back on your loss, then write and finish these sentences.
  - ♦ “I remember these significant events and memories . . .”  
( List both good and bad )

- ♦ “I look at these photographs and recall . . .”  
( List memories, good and bad )
- ♦ “I am grieving over . . .”  
( List all )

*“These things I remember as I pour out my soul”* (PSALM 42:4).

- **Weep:** Allow yourself to shed tears.

*“My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God”* (JOB 16:20).

- **Complete:** As you review, beside each event on your list, write the word *past*, which confirms, “I am content to leave the past in the past.”

*“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 TIMOTHY 6:6).

- **Memorize:** Write down these verses to memorize from Psalm 119:
  - ♦ v. 28—*“My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.”*
  - ♦ v. 50—*“My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.”*
  - ♦ v. 107—*“I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word.”*
  - ♦ v. 156—*“Your compassion, LORD, is great; preserve my life according to your laws.”*
- **Give thanks:** Thank God for all He has taught you from the past and trust how He will use your past in the future.

*“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

## Accept Your Present

### Accept that the present offers stability and significance.

- **Choose:** Live one day at a time.

*“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (MATTHEW 6:34).

- **Prioritize:** Put the Lord at the center of your life.

*“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”* (MATTHEW 6:33).

- **Ask:** Go to God with your specific questions. (Make a list.)  
*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (PHILIPPIANS 4:6).
- **Thank:** Give thanks to God for providing everything you need.  
*“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”* (2 PETER 1:3).
- **Praise:** Give God praise for His promise to never leave you.  
*“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”* (HEBREWS 13:5).
- **Focus:** Concentrate on the joy and satisfaction of helping others. (Make a list.)  
*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”* (GALATIANS 6:2).

## Accept Your Future

### Accept that the future offers new opportunities.

- **Believe:** Rest in the plans that God has for your future.  
*“‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).
- **Know:** Your sorrow and grief will not be wasted.  
*“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees”* (PSALM 119:71).
- **Commit:** Have the courage to surrender.  
*“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans”* (PROVERBS 16:3).
- **Depend:** Have faith in God, whom you cannot see.  
*“We live by faith, not by sight”* (2 CORINTHIANS 5:7).
- **Expect:** God will fill the void in your life.  
*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope”* (PSALM 130:5).
- **Trust:** Remember the Lord’s everlasting love for you.  
*“I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation”* (PSALM 13:5).

## How to Cultivate Your Family for the Future<sup>33</sup>

Cultivating your family for the future involves sowing seeds of unity, but Cathey Brown knows authentic healing must begin with one collective, “tilling the dirt” act—*forgiveness*.

Cathey finds true freedom from her past through forgiveness—forgiving her parents for withholding a nurturing childhood, forgiving her dad for his abuse, and forgiving herself for her own sins and shortcomings. And what has blossomed for Cathey as a result of deliberately choosing to forgive is a fresh, new way to love her parents and to receive their love.<sup>34</sup>

Forgiveness is more often than not the starting point for restoring relationships, and it is critical for cultivating emotionally and spiritually healthy families. The Bible reiterates our need to forgive time and time again, even endlessly according to the following passage:

*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,  
‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother  
or sister who sins against me?  
Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered,  
‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”*

(MATTHEW 18:21–22)

### How to Be a Healthy Family

As you endeavor to cultivate the hearts of family members . . .

**Emphasize** the uniqueness of each individual family member.

- Observe family members and identify two or three positive actions, attitudes, or other attributes that distinguish each one from the others.
- Find an opportunity to compliment each relative in private, express your pride in them for exhibiting Christlike qualities and your appreciation of their individual uniqueness and positive example.

*“Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?” (1 CORINTHIANS 12:14–17).*

**Seek** togetherness, but also encourage individuality.<sup>55</sup>

- Plan some family projects that utilize the strengths and skills of each individual family member.
- Have regularly scheduled family gatherings, and at least one time a month celebrate individual accomplishments of family members.

*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–7).*

**Maintain** consistency in the messages you communicate.

- Practice what you preach by making sure you don’t have one standard for family members and another one for yourself, or commend a certain behavior one day and condemn it the next.
- Do what you say you will do regarding discipline and unbiased administering of rewards and repercussions toward family members.

*“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (JAMES 3:10–13).*

**Practice** immediate but appropriate discipline.

- Establish and administer rewards and repercussions that fit the particular behavior so family members consider you fair and just.

- Don't make idle threats. State what will happen when certain actions are taken by family members, then follow through when you are alone with an offender. Explain that choosing a behavior includes choosing the reward or repercussion associated with the behavior; therefore, you are honoring the person's choice.

*"Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them"* (PROVERBS 13:24).

**Allow** a generous margin for mistakes.

- For the most part disobedience is intentional, whereas mistakes are unintentional and are based on miscommunication, misinformation, or poor judgment. Give people the benefit of the doubt and then clarify instructions and agreements.
- Do not expect perfection from family members but request they aim for excellence by doing the best they can to comply with family agreements and expectations.

*"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"* (EPHESIANS 4:32).

**Encourage** the appropriate expression of feelings.

- Affirm the feelings of family members by acknowledging them and allowing the appropriate expression of them.
- Encourage the healthy expression of feelings that are natural and warranted as a result of sad, difficult, unfair, or hurtful circumstances.

*"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out"* (PROVERBS 20:5).

**Promote** and develop natural talents and abilities.

- Take note of the individual talents and abilities of family members. Provide opportunities for them to be developed inside and outside the family.
- Engage the family in various athletic, cultural, and social activities that will expose and enhance individual talents and abilities.

*"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it"* (PROVERBS 22:6).

**Require** family members to take responsibility for their own attitudes and actions.

- Don't blame others for your choices, and don't allow members of the family to shirk responsibility for their individual attitudes and actions by trying to blame someone else for their choices.
- Empower family members by impressing on them their individual freedom to think, make decisions, and act for themselves, which makes them personally responsible for the choices they make.

*"Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load"* (GALATIANS 6:4–5).

**Treat** everyone with love and respect.

- Apply Jesus words: *"Do to others as you would have them do to you"* (Luke 6:31).
- Read 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and make a list of the characteristics of love described there. Memorize them and commit to incorporating them in your thoughts and actions toward others.

*"Love never fails"* (1 CORINTHIANS 13:8).

**Nurture** a dependence on the Lord.

- When facing difficult circumstances (or people), make a decision to trust God even when the end may not be easy or pleasant.
- Daily remind yourself that God has a plan for your life that cannot be derailed by anything or anyone.

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight"* (PROVERBS 3:5–6).



# FAMILY ROLES



# 1

## Hero Hal

The Responsible Child, “Golden Child” (often the first child)



How They Appear	How They Feel	How They Function	Without Emotional Healing	With Emotional Healing
Incapable of making a mistake—“Can do no wrong!”	Afraid of failing	Take on a parental role at a young age	Driven workaholics and compulsive perfectionists	Aim for excellence while balancing work and play
Perfect—“Do everything flawlessly”	Like failures because they can’t fix the family	Provide parents with proof that they are good parents	Riddled with stress-related illnesses	Stress the value of enjoyment—far more relaxed
Performance-oriented	Never satisfied with themselves or others	Instill in family members a sense of family pride	Without shame—believe the end justifies the means	Become good, ethical executives

<p>Able to “do it all” —earn awards</p>	<p>Responsible to keep the family together and functioning</p>	<p>Impart family worth</p>	<p>Seeking significance based on what they do, not on who they are</p>	<p>Take responsibility for self—not everyone else</p>
<p>Desirous of positive attention</p>	<p>Detached from and unaware of their own emotions</p>	<p>Enable the family to feel it has value through their successes</p>	<p>Self-professed failures because they can’t change their families</p>	<p>Accept individuality in each family member</p>
<p>Superior in achievements (grades, sports, extracurricular activities)</p>	<p>Inadequate in every way</p>	<p>Furnish a change of focus for the family away from its dysfunction</p>	<p>Self-sufficient and proudful—success makes it almost impossible to admit wrong</p>	<p>Stress cooperative sharing, admit wrongs, and recognize their need for emotional healing</p>
<p>Mature and responsible— develop good relations with authority figures</p>	<p>Extreme shame over family dysfunction</p>	<p>Prove to the world that their family is functional and successful</p>	<p>Judgmental of others and themselves</p>	<p>Learn to accept failure as a part of life</p>

# 2 Scapegoat Sammy

The Rebellious Child, “Black Sheep”



How They Appear	How They Feel	How They Function	Without Emotional Healing	With Emotional Healing
Unable to do anything correctly—“Can do no right!”	Angry over the injustice they receive	Take the focus off the dysfunctional parents	Irresponsible and don’t care	Accept responsibility gladly and willingly
Inadequate—“Do nothing good enough,” even if they excel	Hostile over the hurt they endure from family members	Provide distractions from real family issues	Addicts and prone to be prolific liars and troublemakers	Possess the courage and discipline to change
Angry—“act out” family problems	Enraged over the rejection they experience	Receive the blame for everything bad that happens even if they are not at fault	Distrusting and cynical, but with a care-free attitude	Become accepting, fun-loving friend “makers”

<p>Determined to cause trouble to get family time and attention</p>	<p>Even “negative attention” is better than “no attention”</p>	<p>Give the family cause to say “if this child wasn’t being a problem, we wouldn’t have any problems!”</p>	<p>Self-destructive and have self-hatred</p>	<p>Become the first of the family to get the help of a recovery program</p>
<p>Defiant, strong-willed, and responsible for family troubles</p>	<p>Compelled to confront family pattern of denial and resist conformity to family dysfunction</p>	<p>Allow the hero to be “good” since the scapegoat is “bad.”</p>	<p>Bitter and unforgiving with a “chip” on their shoulders</p>	<p>Develop humility and extend forgiveness and grace freely</p>
<p>Unable to achieve but able to lead others . . . in the wrong direction</p>	<p>The family is ashamed of them</p>	<p>Provide a dumping ground for every family problem</p>	<p>Critical and judgmental faultfinders</p>	<p>Generally become excellent counselors because of their empathy</p>
<p>Irresponsible and self-destructive (truancy, addictions, teen pregnancy)</p>	<p>Dejected and like losers</p>	<p>Carry all the family shame</p>	<p>Hopeless romantics with little discernment</p>	<p>Honest and have a high regard for truth</p>



# 3 Lost Child Linda

The Reclusive Child, “Wall Flower”

How They Appear	How They Feel	How They Function	Without Emotional Healing	With Emotional Healing
Quiet, unsociable, and lacking in initiative	Ignored, lonely—wish they could fade into the “woodwork”	Provide relief for family—“At least we don’t have problems with this kid!”	Unwilling to formulate or share opinions	Become skilled, compassionate listeners
Shy, weak-willed and of no consequence	Powerless, like a continuous victim	Make no emotional or time demands on family	In denial about their feelings—unable to acknowledge them	Develop relationships in which feelings are shared and valued
Unmotivated and apt to procrastinate	Unneeded, like an unimportant nobody	Allow family time to attend functions for the hero and solve problems of the scapegoat	Out of touch with reality and apt to one day find they have missed out on life	Can be creative and talented—powerful actors/writers who express their ideas through characters

<p>Disinterested in family activities and desirous of being alone in their rooms</p> <p>Fearful of taking risks, of engaging in competitive games, or seeking closeness</p>	<p>Unable to express feelings—they don't know what they feel!</p> <p>Convinced they “have to” avoid conflict and intimacy for self-preservation</p> <p>Insecure and invisible, like they don't fit in . . . don't have a place . . . don't play a role . . . don't belong</p> <p>Small and worthless yet see others as big and valuable</p>	<p>Don't “rock the boat” and don't demand attention</p> <p>Make it possible for family to focus on other people and things</p> <p>Free family from feeling “put upon” by making no requests</p> <p>Enable family to feel good about having a “no needs” child</p>	<p>Not connected with others—not emotionally free to have meaningful relationships</p> <p>Likely to feel overlooked—like opportunity has passed them by</p> <p>Occupied with their private world and focus on something unrelated to interaction with others</p> <p>Afraid to get involved with activities that require intimate, social interaction</p>	<p>Might be musicians who communicate their emotions through music</p> <p>Could be artists who reveal their hopes and dreams in their art</p> <p>May become authors who present their thoughts and opinions through writings</p> <p>Find ways to connect with people and form mutually, intimate relationships</p>
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# 4

## Mascot Molly

The Reveling Child, “Clown” (often a younger child)



How They Appear	How They Feel	How They Function	Without Emotional Healing	With Emotional Healing
Friendly—to have an abundance of friends and spend little time at home	Little self-worth	Become the “social director” for the family	Involved in abusive relationships and “save” others	Experience the full range of emotions
Accommodating—go with the flow and unable to own responsibility	False guilt—blame themselves when they have done no wrong	Take responsibility for the emotional well-being of the family	Influenced too much by others and easily manipulated	Learn how to take the lead—stand on principal—no longer easily manipulated
Funny, cute and attract attention	Scared of disapproval	Provide comic relief for the family	Emotionally stuck—unable to grow up and unaware of how to get their own needs met	Become kind-hearted, generous, able to listen to others

Hyperactive with short attention span	Inadequate and unequipped for life	Distract the family from real problems	Unable to handle stress and are likely to marry a “hero” to take care of them	Take responsibility for their personal well-being
To be people pleasers—attention seekers	Compelled to hide pain with humor	Give the family a reason to lighten up a bit	Skilled at joking their way out of serious situations	No longer play the clown but remain fun to be with
To have difficulty expressing difficult feelings	Unable to receive love, only give it	Divert the family focus from problems to fun	Prone to make light of tragedy and suffering	Use humor in healthy ways, possibly as a professional entertainer
Fragile, immature and in need of protection	Innate fear—especially when it comes to anger	Diffuse anger with laughter	Expected to make others feel better even if it means ignoring their own pain	Can become effective in the helping profession—social worker or therapist



# SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



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*“First seek the counsel  
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

In what ways can I show **love** when I don't feel loving toward my family?

*"**Love** is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. . . . it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."  
(1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–5)*

Can I ever feel **secure** even though I came from such an insecure background?

*"Whoever fears the LORD has a **secure** fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge."  
(PROVERBS 14:26)*

How can I overcome the loss of not having a loving **father**?

*"A **father** to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling."  
(PSALM 68:5)*

How can I **be reconciled** to my family members who are difficult to get along with?

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and **be reconciled to** them; then come and offer your gift.”*

(MATTHEW 5:23–24)

How can I get past responding out of my **childhood** pain?

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of **childhood** behind me.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:11)

How can I **forgive** family members who have hurt me?

*“Bear with each other and **forgive** one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Can God **heal** the deep **wounds** from my childhood?

*“He **heals** the brokenhearted and binds up their **wounds**.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

How can I break the bondage of living  
for the **approval of other people?**

*“Am I now trying to win the **approval of** human beings,  
or of God? Or am I trying to please **people?**  
If I were still trying to please people,  
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*  
(GALATIANS 1:10)

My parents were not good role models for me.  
Whose **example** can I **follow** to be a more loving parent?

*“**Follow** God’s **example**, therefore,  
as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love,  
just as Christ loved us and gave himself up  
for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*  
(EPHESIANS 5:1–2)

How can I overcome bitterness toward  
those who **intended to harm me?**

*“You **intended to harm me**,  
but God intended it for good to accomplish  
what is now being done . . .”*  
(GENESIS 50:20)





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(Jeremiah 29:11)*

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