

What Does a Functional Family Look Like?

Colossians 3:17-21

Intro

We hear so much about dysfunctional families. Their struggles are the topic of TV shows, best-selling books, and popular magazines. A dysfunctional family basically experiences conflict, misbehavior, and often child who are neglected or abused on the part of the parent(s), and it occurs continually and regularly, leading family members to unhealthy behavior. Children sometimes grow up in such families with the understanding that such an arrangement is normal.

Strong, loving families do exist today. But if you want to establish healthy patterns in your own family, you'll need to learn how to recognize what they are and how to apply them in your home.

Dr. Gary Chapman some years ago wrote a book on "*Five Signs of a Loving Family.*" In that Book he talks about healthy patterns that families can learn on how to strengthen their relationships and home. I would like to share with you a few of those patterns that would help your family stay healthy and functional. Also I would like to share a few observations from my perspective.

Attitude of Service

It is said that toward the end of his life Einstein removed the portraits of two scientists – Newton and Maxwell – from his wall. He replaced them with portraits of Gandhi and Schweitzer. Einstein explained that it was time to replace the image of success with the image of service.

A healthy family has an attitude of service to each other and to the world outside. As parents we need to teach them basic chores around the home. Like tidying up, help wash the dishes, help clean the yard etc. This attitude of service helps the family be considerate of others and helps develop a sense of care. This attitude of service also helps the family think of others outside the home - to be thoughtful and considerate of other people in the neighbourhood at school or at work.

Here are some ideas: baking cookies for neighbours, raking leaves for someone, volunteering at a food bank, or volunteering to help out at the church.

"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people" (Ephesians 6:7).

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, rather than for people" (Colossians 3:23).

Intimacy Between Parents

Ephesians 5:31 says, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" This is talking about deep intimate relationship in marriage. Intimacy is much more than just physical.

1.) Intellectual intimacy: exchanging thoughts, desires, and opinions in an open and free environment taking the time to learn each other and grow with each other.

2.) Emotional intimacy: where we can share our feelings, both positive and negative; encourage a daily sharing period; tell something that has happened today; share feelings throughout the day.

- 3.) Social intimacy: doing things with each other, sharing experiences; going on dates, taking trips; truly taking the time to invest in each other's like and passions.
- 4.) Spiritual intimacy: sharing our God experiences with each other; praying together; sharing Scripture with each other.
- 5.) Physical intimacy: sharing each other's bodies; hold hands in public, showing affection.

In his book "*His Needs Her Needs*" Dr. Willard Harley writes about the five basic needs of the husband and the wife.

For the husband they are:

- Sexual Fulfillment
- Recreational Companionship
- An Attractive Spouse
- Domestic Support
- Admiration

For the wife they are:

- Affection
- Conversation
- Honesty and Openness
- Financial Support
- Family Commitment

Parents Who Teach & Train

Colossians 3:21 "*Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*" Don't embitter your children; don't push so hard they feel like they can never please you. Two action steps:

- 1.) Nurture – training by action
- 2.) Admonition – teaching by words.

Both of these must always go together; if they aren't together one leads to verbal abuse and the other leads to physical abuse. This is best done in the context of love; if the child doesn't feel loved they will rebel against you.

Parents remember your example speaks louder than your words.

Example: Two mothers lived next door to each other. Both had children the same age, and both were, at the same moment looking at the mess in their playrooms. The first mother called her children together and, getting down on her hands and knees, began demonstrating how to tidy up the room. Her children followed her lead, and they all finished cleaning up together.

The second mother scolded her children, demanding that they get right to work and "do their part" to keep the house clean. With scowling faces and lead feet, the children put a few books back on the shelf then pushed the rest of the toys under the sofa.

Teaching by example goes much farther than teaching only by words.

Children Who Honour Parents

Obedience is a healthy word and should be modeled to our children in our daily walks as Christians.

Steps that need to be taught and learned:

- Obedience builds respect for authority
- Obedience builds responsibility
- Obedience builds character

How do we teach obedience?

1.) By our model (if the sign says no left turns, don't turn left)

2.) By letting them suffer the consequences of their actions.

Parents, if you are constantly repeating yourself two or three times and the child only responds on the third warning (when you go to them and change their behavior), the goal is to take the third action to the first.

Example: So let's say little Tommy is up in his room playing and making a mess with his toys. You tell him that you are making dinner and before he comes to eat, that his room needs to be tidied up. Instead of warning him once, twice and then coming up to inspect and correct the 3rd time, take the action step 3 and make it action step 1. That is, "Johnny, I want you to get ready for dinner and have your room picked up when I call you when dinner is ready" (dinner is then made). If the room is not cleaned (guess what) Johnny missed dinner, misses story time misses the privilege of obedience.

This is a lesson that they will learn not to repeat when they know that your first action step means business. Let's say Tommy is 16 and learning to drive and getting the car on Saturday and Sunday. Chore: Tommy before you take the car, the car must be washed no later than 12pm Saturday. Saturday afternoon rolls around (and Tommy missed the 12pm deadline). He asks for the keys to the car and lo and behold, you say, "I am sorry Tommy. The rule was clear and precise. The car was supposed to be washed by noon on Saturday. You cannot have the car. Let's hope you don't miss the deadline next week. (Tommy won't miss next week – he knows you mean business).

3.) By rewarding obedience (Psalm 19:11). There should be great rewards. Honour is caught, not taught! They learn to honour you by watching you honour your parents.

Therefore the signs of a functional family are:

- 1) Attitude of Service
- 2) Intimacy Between Parents
- 3) Parents Who Teach and Train
- 4) Children Who Honour Parents

Conclusion

A few years ago, a 12-year-old boy named Michael was swimming in a small pond near his family's home in Florida. Paddling along with a snorkel and mask, head underwater, Michael didn't know that an 11-foot, 400-pound alligator was bearing down upon him.

The creature lunged for the boy's head. When its jaws snapped shut, the mask and snorkel were torn away. Miraculously, Michael's head came free from the gator's mouth; he began swimming frantically toward shore, with a hungry alligator following in his wake.

The boy's cousin, Jill standing on the shoreline, screamed. That alerted Michael's mother. She raced to the bank just as her son reached the shore. Then the gator clamped onto Michael's legs. His mother grabbed the boy's hands and pulled—a fierce tug-of-war between a tenacious mother and a ferocious alligator.

Clutching Michael's hands in a death grip, his mom pulled with superhuman strength. Suddenly, inexplicably, the alligator let go and returned to the depths. Michael's mother then dragged her son up the bank to safety.

Three months later, Michael showed a friend the scene of the near-fatal attack. By then, almost all of his scars had healed. The gouge in his scalp was covered with hair; the gashes on his legs and feet had mended. Proudly, Michael showed off three small scars on the back of his right hand. Three marks of love. Those marks had been left not by the snarling alligator, but by his mother's fingernails. She had drawn blood pulling her boy to safety.

Mothers don't give up your grip on the lives of your children. Evil forces in the world will try to pull them down, but your grip of love will pull your children to safety. Your love will encourage them to live a life of moral values according to Biblical standards. Continue praying and loving. Don't give up!