

## HEALING ADULT CHILDREN FROM DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

Because of the sin and disorder in our society, literally millions of people have grown up in dysfunctional families, that is, in families without functioning fathers and/or mothers. This fact is of monumental significance since the family is the only context in which a person can properly and fully develop.

### FACING REALITY

To be healed of a dysfunctional background, the adult-child must face the following realities:

1. I need healing. The effects of a dysfunctional family should not be denied. We will not grow out of them. Time will not heal them. These effects will not disappear, although they may be expressed in new and subtle ways.
2. I cannot heal myself. Even individual prayers will not bring total healing, if the Lord gives us the opportunity to receive healing from others. We need other members of Christ's body (1 Cor 12:21).
3. Jesus will certainly heal me, if I let Him have His way. Jesus, and only. Jesus, can do the impossible and heal us of even the most extreme abuse.

### DYSFUNCTION BY ABSENCE AND/OR ABUSE

In healing dysfunctional families, it is helpful to distinguish between dysfunction because of absence or because of abuse. (In some cases these two causes of a dysfunctional family overlap.) The family may be a victim of circumstances, and the absence of the parent may be beyond his control. When a person has not been fully parented because of absence due to death, work, or divorce, there is not always the need to forgive the parent. This is significant because forgiveness is usually the most important aspect of healing anything, including dysfunctional families (see Sir 28:3).

### FORGIVENESS AND MERCY

**In dysfunction by abuse, it is absolutely necessary for the child to forgive the abusive parents for everything — even incest, rape, alcoholism, physical beatings, emotional manipulation, insulting language, and total neglect.** It is humanly impossible to forgive the parents, but the Lord will do the impossible. And this forgiveness will not be merely the control of hostility but authentic forgiveness. By God's miraculous grace, the abused child will be able to embrace, love, and honor dysfunctional parents (see Lk 15:20). The abused child will be able to forgive with affection and mercy.

Some therapists advise victims of abuse to vent their anger to their abusive parents. Although this is putting the blame for the dysfunctional family where it partly belongs, it doesn't bring healing. Christians can do something much better. By faith, they can cast their cares on the Lord (1 Pt 5:7). This frees them to have mercy on the parents who have hurt them. Mercy is the essential quality of forgiveness. Mercy is giving someone who has offended us better than they deserve. Did the prodigal son deserve the gifts of the ring, shoes, and the robe? Why should the fatted calf have been killed for him? (Lk 15:23) Mercy is the key to forgiveness, and forgiveness is the key to healing dysfunctional families.

## **REACH OUT TO THE DYSFUNCTIONAL PARENT**

In dysfunction due to absence or abuse, the adult-child should try to improve the relationship with his parents by visiting, writing, or calling. Often this is omitted because contact with the parents may be threatening and any improvement in the relationship may be minimal. But even a brief conversation, a birthday card, or little gift can be the occasion for great healing. If the dysfunctional parent is dead, the child should ask Jesus to heal the relationship with the parent.

## **MORE MOTHERS AND FATHERS**

After seeking to improve the relationship with his parents, the adult-child must supplement the parenting of his physical parents. The Lord in His love will send father-figures and motherly people into the adult-child's life (see Sir 4:10). He must obey the Lord in making the best of these relationships. The Lord will work through them in doing an amazing work of healing.

## **HOPE AND HEALING IN CHRIST**

By human power, it is impossible to heal adult-children from dysfunctional families. But, by Jesus' power, victims of dysfunctional families can be healed completely and even quickly. It will not take years but days for the Lord to do the impossible. He will even turn dysfunctional backgrounds to the good for those who love Him (Rm 8:28). Consequently, the millions of dysfunctional families in our society provide an evangelistic opportunity to draw millions to Jesus. His is the only name by which dysfunctional families can be saved and healed (see Acts 4:12).

***There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."***

He is the only Hope for dysfunctional families and their members, but the only hope they need.