

# Dandelions and the Family

There is a story of a man who prided himself on his immaculate yard. He cared for it like a mother gently cares for her newborn child. One year, dandelions started growing in his yard. He tried everything to get rid of them. Perplexed and deeply concerned, he contacted the Department of Agriculture and asked, "What do I do to get rid of dandelions?" Their response was, "Get used to dandelions."

Problems in families are much like dandelions. While few newlyweds and new parents are alerted or convinced of this, we all learn that "we better get used to problems." Jesus says it this way, "*In this world you will have trouble.*" Thankfully he adds, "*But take heart! I have overcome the world*" (John. 16:33). More than almost anything, how families face problems in Christ's strength will determine the character and spiritual legacy of the family. Therefore, how do we grow families that persevere and even grow through the problems and pain of family life?

**First, we have to honestly acknowledge what is real in us and in our families.** Paul, writing to his beloved church of Philippi, testified to his commitment to know Christ in great depth, yet quickly acknowledged "*not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect*" (Phil. 3:12). A Christian cannot spiritually grow in his relationship with God and others unless he is honest. It is true in our personal imperfections and family problems. Scott Peck, a noted writer, says, "Problems are the cutting edge that distinguishes between success and failure. So often we do everything we can to ignore them, yet this tendency is the primary basis for emotional and relational pain."

Are you keeping the peace in your marriage or lovingly seeking and speaking the truth? Denial and avoidance are not emotional and spiritual virtues. Be honest! What is the joy quotient in our marriage? If the truth hurts, own the truth, and by God's grace, work at it. Joy in marriage is work. Do we communicate positively with your children? Are we emotionally available to them? Ask them. They will act as if you are strange, but it will matter in their hearts. Have an honest discussion about it. Are we struggling with anxiety or depression? Being ashamed of it and keeping quiet about it is not the solution. Are you dealing with lust or bitterness? As long as pain and problems are kept in the dark, the darkness still has some power of it. Bring it out in the light with a few you trust.

The commonality we have with all humanity is personal pain and family problems. The danger for good church-going folk is the tendency to dress up the pain and refuse to talk about our problems. Pretense is not a virtue before God. The Bible calls it pride. Pride, whether it is dressed in religious lingo or in machismo quickly become the source of the greatest hurt in the family.

**Secondly, we must practice "putting the past behind us."** Paul openly admitted that he did not have it all together "*But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead*" (Phil. 3:13). The Greek word translated, "forgetting" is an athletic term. A runner in a race, when she gets ahead, does not look back. She forgets who is behind and focuses on the victory ahead. Often it is not the problem, failure, or crisis in the family that brings the greatest pain. The greatest pain is the emotional and spiritual residue. Anger, resentment, disappointment, bitterness, and unforgiveness — these are enemies of the souls that infect attitudes, poison relationships, and give the devil a foothold in families.

As Christians, we are called to be people of grace. "*God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repays us according to our iniquities*" (Ps. 103:10). We are called to give to others what God has given to us. And, you did not earn it with God. Certainly, there is a time to confront and "speak the truth in love." Relationships are doomed by superficiality if we are not honest. The sweeping of pain and problems under the rug is to guarantee they will resurface, often with a greater degree of emotional intensity. People of grace, move to an emotional forgetting. This is not a mental forgetfulness. Healing in the family is a grace commitment to no longer allow the past to infect and affect the present and future.

**Thirdly, we must press on in hope.** Paul says, "*... straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All who are mature should take such a view of things*" (Phil. 3:13b-15a). Ongoing conflict, especially in marriage, can go from anger toward emotional detachment. The end of the marriage is in sight. Sometimes, Christians experience crisis and tragedy and never regain healthy equilibrium. Christians can become angry, bitter, and cynical, and cease to know joy and peace this side of heaven. Other times Christians and their families suffer unspeakably, yet they choose to live well. What is the difference?

I suggest a promise on which to meditate. "*Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who he has given us.*" (Romans 5:4-5). **Hope is the difference!** So what is hope? Paul defines it well. "*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*" (Phil. 3:12b). We press on, keep on keeping on, sometimes walking not by sight nor feeling, trusting that Christ has not only taken hold of us. But, He is sufficient and will sustain us.

Great Peace in the Lord

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