

# DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Making Peace with Your Past

June Hunt



 **HOPE**  
*for the Heart*

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JUNE HUNT



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# CONTENTS

<b>Definitions</b> .....	11
What Is a Dysfunctional Family? .....	12
What Is a Functional Family? .....	14
What Are Dysfunctional Family Roles? .....	16
<b>Characteristics</b> .....	21
What Is a Checklist for Unresolved Conflicts? .....	22
What Rigid Rules Regulate Dysfunctional Families?.....	24
What Damage Results from Rigid Family Rules? .....	27
What Characterizes Dysfunctional Family Systems? .....	31
<b>Causes</b> .....	33
What Causes Dysfunctional Families? .....	34
What Fosters the Functional Family Style?.....	39
What Causes Dysfunction to Develop in Some Families? .....	41
What Is the Root Cause for a Dysfunctional Family?.....	44
What Is an Authentic Relationship with Christ? .....	48
<b>Steps to Solution</b> .....	53
How to Have a Transformed Life.....	58
How to Take Care of Yourself.....	65

How to Deal with Your Own Dysfunction.....	68
How to Cultivate Your Family for the Future.....	72
How to Measure the Amount of Your Anger .....	78
How to Work through Your Sorrow.....	80
How to Identify Unhealthy Family Roles .....	82

Dear friend,

Quite frankly, someone took the *fun* out of my *dysfunctional* family! In truth, 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—double my mother’s age—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 12.) 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.” (What a play on words!)

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 looks—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, for years I felt powerless. 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 what Jesus said, 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, too, can change*. The key thought 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 He 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 on the *inside* 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 you are holding the keys to your healing—here within these pages. No matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, God has a plan for your future.

Our 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).



God promises if you follow His truths for wholeness, 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.

Yours in the Lord's hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "June". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the word.

June Hunt

# DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

## Making Peace with Your Past

Cathey Brown knows about dysfunctional families. She has immersed herself into thousands of them.

As 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 for nearly 65,000 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

*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. Statistics indicate only 3% of alcoholics fit this image.

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 and 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.

Scripture directs ...

**“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 equally negatively impacted 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 strives to gain attention by performing seemingly perfectly in hopes that parental approval and her good behavior might distract from the preoccupation with alcohol. Children like Cathey also feel responsibility 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 there is One who 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!

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- ▶ **A functional family** is one in which proper and mature behavior of two parents cultivates a healthy balance between embracing *individuality* and embellishing *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 cultivate 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.

**“For 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)**