

April 21-22, 2007  
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## It Begins With You

I have a guest that I want to introduce you to today. This one is very, very important in my life. Are you ready to meet him?

*(Call Micah, my Siberian Husky - Have him do tricks - Have him lay down.)*

Micah is a great dog. Micah is a part of our family. Even though he is pretty well trained, there is one thing I have discovered. Micah has a mind of his own. He doesn't always do what I want him to do. What does that say of me? I can't even always get my dog to listen to me?

Today we are beginning a sermon series called *How to Get a Family to Function*. Each of us is a part of a family. We have either grown up in a family. Or we are a part of our own family. Or both.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. They can be made up of single persons. They can be made up of several people living together. They can be made up of single parents with children. They can be made up of grandparents with children. They can be two parent, husband and wife households. They can be two parent husband and husband or wife and wife households. They can have children or no children.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Some families are intact. Some families are broken. Some families are patched together. Some families may never be patched together. When I speak about families, I will most likely speak of them from my perspective which is of a two parent, blended family. Which means I am living successfully in a relationship. I have also experienced the pain, hurt and brokenness of divorce. I have children. I have step children. I have adopted children. I am a grandparent. I am a part of a family, broken and pieced together. Families come in all shapes and sizes.

There are people in our society who will tell us that the family is under attack and deteriorating. I agree. But not for many of the reasons of those who say that.

For me, our families are under attack and deteriorating because we have lost a sense of perspective on how to get along. We have lost a sense of perspective on healthy behaviors that allow a family to learn how to function well. A family, no matter how it is constructed, is a community of people learning how to live together.

As we begin talking about *How to Get a Family to Function*, I want us to begin by looking at ourselves individually as a part of a larger family or community. That is why these couple of verses are important for me from Romans. They offer a vision of how to be a part of community.

**The first offering really comes from the whole passage *cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others. You're fortunate if your behavior and your belief are coherent. . . If the way you live isn't consistent with what you believe then it is wrong.*** The assumption behind this whole passage is that we are a part of a larger community. We don't live alone. We are not islands. We can't even always do just what we want. We are a part of a larger whole.

This isn't always easy to hear. Because we so easily buy into the notion that our culture tries to sell us that it is all about you. You should get what you want.

You know, when I was growing up, my parents made me do chores around the house. Each day it was my job to clean up after our dog. Each week I needed to clean the basement even the bathroom, so that it could pass my mom's inspection. And if I didn't get it right, I was given the opportunity to do it again.

I grew up in a family that didn't have cable TV. We had three channels, ABC, NBC, and CBS. I washed dishes by hand until I was a junior in High School. I grew up with the notion that I am a part of a family and I had a role to play to help the family function. And my personal feelings about whether I wanted to play that role really didn't matter, to my parents anyway.

Today, our children are growing up being fed a steady diet that life is all about them. They don't have to do anything if they don't want to.

Anyone want to guess what that creates when people in a community begin to believe that life is all about me and getting my needs met? It creates a society of pretty selfish people.

If we are going to learn to get our families to function, it will be important for those of us in families to see that we are a part of a larger whole. We are connected to each other. We belong to each other. Yet we are also responsible for our own behavior as a part of that larger whole.

**A second offering of this passage** is an understanding that how we live is just as important as what we say. Sometimes as parents, we forget that. If we aren't careful we can live in such a way that our actions aren't consistent with the words we tell our children.

Let me just say, our children are watching us. They are watching and learning. And if our actions for life and faith aren't consistent with what we say we believe, they will smell that out in a heartbeat. In time, they will follow our actions more than our words.

But guess what, our spouses/partners are also watching us. They are also observing our words that come into action. And our actions can bring comfort and closeness or it can drive a wedge between us.

There was once a man who was driving quietly along a country road and suddenly realized that he was lost.

He stopped at a small farmhouse to ask for directions, and he saw an elderly woman sitting on the porch. An elderly man was working around the front yard, whistling nonstop. The whistling was loud and clear, but it seemed to be aimless and purposeless. There was no recognizable tune, just whistling.

When the traveler walked up to the man, after he received directions he said, "I see you are fond of whistling."

"Oh," he said, "its second nature for me now."

Then pointing to his wife on the porch, he explained that she was his wife, and that they had been happily married for thirty-eight years when she became blind. Coming as it did so late in life, the blindness had been a very frightening experience for her and she was still feeling a deep-seated insecurity.

Then the husband said, "I figured if I just keep whistling while I'm outside the house, she'll have the security of knowing I'm still with her."

Our actions matter. They tell us and others who we are and what we love. Our spouses see it. Our partners see it. Our children see it.

Once, some people came to Calcutta to see Mother Teresa. Before leaving they begged her, 'Tell us something that will help us to live our lives better.' She looked at them and said, "Smile at each other. Smile at your wife. Smile at your husband. Smile at your children. Smile at each other, it doesn't matter who it is, and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other."

One of them smiled and said, "You're not married are you?" as if to say its not always easy to smile at those we are married to.

She corrected them and said, "Oh, yes. I am married. And I find it difficult sometimes to smile at Jesus, because he can be so demanding."

Smile at each other, to make a positive difference for your family.

What Paul wants is for all of us to be shaped by our faith. He wants our faith to then shape the most important relationships of our life. While we won't get everyone in the family to do what we want them to, we can invite God to be a part of what we do. We can see ourselves connected and part of a larger whole. We can see that how we live and act really does matter.

May God help us to live a life of faith.

Amen