

How to Become a Family That Heals

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Amy and Bill had been married for fifteen years with two children, Chloe age eight and Billy, six. Amy had reached the end of her rope with Bill because he was so emotionally shut down and would not interact with her and the children. Bill was frustrated because Amy nagged him to be more involved. He felt that he could never do enough for her. They came to counseling because they noticed that the marital conflict had started to affect their children. No matter what they tried to do nothing seemed to help. Coming to us was their last hope.

As Christian counselors for the past thirty years, we have seen countless families like this one. By the time they enter our office the pain they feel is obvious to all. Basic skills like communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution are weak or nonexistent. Often this is because both parents enter the marriage with wounds from their own families-of-origin. These past wounds can be triggered by their spouse and children and they can react with very unhealthy thoughts and actions.

Without help, these parents pass their wounds onto their children, and the cycle of dysfunction continues, as the sins of the fathers are passed on to the generations to come. It does not have to be this way for this hurting family and others like them. There is hope, if they can learn how to allow God to heal their wounds and learn the skills necessary to build healthy, happy families.

It was this family and thousands more like them that motivated us to write our newest book, *Becoming a Family That Heals*, in which we take the Soul Healing Love Model that we originally developed for couples and adapted it for use with hurting families. The model integrates psychological principles with Biblical truths to help people deal with the soul wounds in their lives. Their motivation for healing is the unconditional love of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah 30:17 says, "I will restore health unto thee and heal thee of thy wounds." The problem is that many Christian couples and families know this in their heads but they can't seem to get this to their hearts. The Smith family was no exception.

Bill Smith was the middle of three boys who were raised by a demanding alcoholic father who was angry, critical, and abusive to his sons. Bill grew up feeling that nothing he ever did

was good enough for his dad. Amy Smith's was a workaholic who spent little time or energy with his children. Bill and Amy had soul wounds from childhood that were affecting their marriage and family life.

The trouble with childhood soul wounds is that they cause us to internalize the negative messages of our parents and caretakers, and we begin to believe them. They become tattooed to our souls. The message Bill's dad imprinted upon his psyche was, "You are no good and you can't do anything right." The message that Amy internalized from the neglect of her father was, "You are not important. You are not valuable." Whenever Bill would withdraw from Amy in a conflict, she would feel that she was unimportant to him. Whenever Amy would nag or criticize Bill to get him to connect to her and the children, this would trigger the message of his soul wound and he would feel like he could not do anything right. The very things they were trying to do to heal their marriage were wounding each other in the same ways they were wounded as children. They were in a terrible power struggle and could not find a way out.

The way out of this marital and family purgatory involves three basic concepts that can set a family free. They are **Mindfulness, Intentionality, and Sacrifice.**

Mindfulness is a state of being aware and attentive to your own soul wounds, as well as the soul wounds of the members of your family. When family members trigger your soul wounds—and you can be sure that those closest to you can trigger you more than anyone else—you must choose to self-soothe and ask the Lord to soothe your pain rather than becoming reactive. Mindfulness enables you to do this. It also helps you to be compassionate, empathic, and careful when relating to other family members.

Intentionality is defined as the ability to act in a healing way no matter how you feel. In other words, put your feelings aside for the sake of health. We did not say to deny your feelings. Denial is pretending that the situation is not difficult or painful. Intentionality says it is difficult and painful, but you choose to give up your right to react, retaliate, or get even for the sake of having healthy family relationships. Romans 12:1-2 instructs, "Do not be conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (KJV). Intentionality is renewing your mind with healing thoughts when your soul wounds are triggered.

Sacrifice is defined as the surrender or giving up of something valued for the sake of something having a higher or more pressing worth. In families, you give up your right to be reactive, retaliate or get even when triggered, for the higher claim of healthy, godly interaction.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, this family learned how to apply these concepts and things began to turn around for them. Before long, they began to turn hurting moments into healing moments and became a safe haven for each other in the storms of life. After all, that is what families are all about.

To read more about this precious family's journey, you can order the Rodgers book.

Becoming a Family That Heals (Focus on the Family, September, 2009)

Available on Amazon.com or at Christian bookstores or visit www.soulhealinglove.com