

Make a difference by helping to restore family life

Being part of a family sounds like a brilliant romantic idea, and one often cannot understand why people coming from seemingly balanced and “normal” families have issues.

The Cambridge English Dictionary describes the family as a social group consisting of parents, children, and sometimes grandparents, uncles, aunts, and others who are related.

Families do not necessarily need to live together under one roof, but are connected through birth and marriage. They are bound by their own rules, disciplines, routines, attitudes and sometimes their own lingo.

The memory of family should bring a warm feeling of home, food, events and so on, but more and more we find that the memory of family has become a painful, or non-existent feeling.

Take 21-year-old Grant (not his real name), a student in our school. He has no recollection of a family life. He has no memory of what happened in the first 12 years of his life.

He knows he has no father and has no idea where his mother is, and although his elder sister gave him a place to stay, they have no relationship.

He also has no vision or dream for his life and has nothing in his past that he can relate to. When I asked him what his plan for his life was, he said, “all I want, is to be OK.”

When I think of my own childhood and the family that helped shape me as a person, it always makes me want to celebrate the good experiences we had: like singing together, eating unhealthy meals, long walks, picnics, Christmas, Easter and friends.

My parents tried their best with five strong-willed, naturally gifted children. They worked for small salaries, which meant that hand-me-downs were the order of the day, but we were loved and disciplined.

In hindsight, we were never encouraged to go into business, education or even politics. Our parents focused on the day we left the house to get married and have children.

But we came through and we are strong. We raised strong families and children who are impacting society. We are economic contributors to society.

Thinking back, I would love to change the wasted years. The low self-esteem, the shame I felt because I always compared my family with the builder and his family living across the road. Today I realize that I had it good, really good!

Family is such a vital foundation to a child’s life. Every family functions from its past experiences, family traditions and upbringing. Even when there are problems, they remain a family.

We can use these experiences to help heal and build our own families and the families of those around us.

I have discovered that not too many people know how to love and how to be loved.

It is easy to look at the brokenness of people and to judge the mistakes they make.

A father who was never loved or valued will find it hard and will even fail to love and care for his family. A father who comes from an abusive family will not easily become a caring father.

We also find that we have a cycle of brokenness. Children are accepting rejection, neglect, abuse as a norm. Though they hate what they see and promise themselves that they will never repeat what they went through, they end up struggling with the same issues.

Thinking back, I remember how embarrassed we were with our poor circumstances. My parents' strong religious rules and constant trouble in their marriage added to my discomfort.

During those years I promised myself that I will never be poor. I will never force religion on my children. I will never argue with my husband in front of the children – the list goes on.

I discovered that what I hated about my parents perpetuated itself in my own life when I married. It took hard learning, reading, church and a lot of good friends to help shape us in our early years of marriage.

My parents eventually got divorced and the pain and confusion of their separation left scars on my siblings.

Because I had a strong network of church friends and a very caring senior pastor couple, I was able to pull through and can now celebrate 46 years of marriage, own property, and live comfortably. We raised two beautiful daughters who are both in a professional field.

Looking back, I realise how much we need other people. People who have the same value system as us.

Society is seeing more and more broken families, which adds to the socio-economic woes of our nation

Its a shame that hurting families do not easily find balanced families to connect with, and balanced families don't easily connect with hurting families because they often feel challenged in their safe zone when they are confronted by something they believe they cannot handle.

Our society needs healing. Families need healing and restoration.

Children need love, acceptance and purpose.

Don't ignore or avoid your family, friends or neighbour in their pain, hardship and rejection as victims of brokenness.

We may not have all the answers, but we have arms to hug and ears to listen. From our own experiences we can invest in the future happiness of another family.

Let us help our society, one family at a time.

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