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Grow Relationships with Each Other

Guest: Pastor Bryan Carter
From the series: Seven Habits of Health Marriage and Family (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: One of the things you find in marriages and families that are doing well are husbands and wives / moms and dads / children who all appreciate one another / who don't take each other for granted. Here is Pastor Bryan Carter.

Bryan: Now, you realize that people are a gift. One of the greatest gifts that God gives to us is a husband or a wife that when God was looking at your life / when God was considering the plan for your life / when God was navigating the—He knew exactly what you needed. He sent you a gift of your husband or your wife. We have to learn to value and celebrate that gift.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine. Not taking one another for granted—that's just one of the things that promotes family health / family wellness. We'll hear more from Bryan Carter today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. You know I think a lot of times we, as parents / as husbands and wives—we can think family is a lot more complicated than it is / that healthy, successful families are a lot more complicated. Sometimes, I think there are moms and dads who think, "Boy, this is what really matters. We've got to make sure that the kids eat the organic Cheerios because—you know—they're not going to be healthy unless it's the organic Cheerios; and we've got their diet right."

Ann: I have a little of that in me, actually.

Dave: I actually found that it's important that they eat. [Laughter]

Ann: That's true.

Dave: Sometimes, I forgot about that.

Ann: You did forget feeding the children when I was gone.

Dave: Ann would leave, and there would be danger.

Bob: That would be one of the basics that we've got to get to—is that.

We've been hearing about basics this week from our friend Bryan Carter who is the pastor at Concord Church in suburban Dallas, Texas. Bryan gave a message—we were all together for this.

Dave: Yes.

Bob: It was a message that brought back the fundamentals / the basics on marriage and family. As I listened to it, I thought, "It's just good to be reminded again and again that this is what matters."

So, we've already heard him talk about how being committed to God is really foundational—and you've got to get that right before you try to get other things right—and then being committed to one another and then having fun together as a family. These are some of the basic qualities, and we're going to hear Part Two of his message today where he covers four more of what he calls The Seven Habits for Healthy Marriages and Families. Here is our friend Bryan Carter.

[Previous message]

Bryan: Healthy relationships—they accept, and they appreciate one another. If there was ever someone that modeled how to accept people and how to appreciate people, it was the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We don't have to go much further than back to the passage we read before in Mark, Chapter 3. He shows His acceptance and appreciation of people simply by the disciples that He picks.

I mean the fact that He would pick these twelve—some tax collectors, some fisherman, some publicans. The fact that He would even pick them shows His acceptance of people.

There is something about acceptance that can be transformative in our lives. There is something about acceptance that builds healthy marriages and builds healthy families because the truth of the matter is that all of us long to be accepted and valued. We long to be appreciated for who we are / for our stories / for our wiring / for our own unique makeup. We long for this. We long for this, and healthy families / healthy marriages—they model this incredibly well.

We don't admit it often, but our self-worth and our identity can be fragile. It speaks volumes when family members recognize and appreciate one another.

Like some of you here in this room, we all are very different from our siblings. I've got three children, like some of you in the room, and all of them are incredibly different. I mean you would think growing up in the same house / under the same roof, they'd have a lot more similarities; but they are night and day at times. We have to constantly watch ourselves to not make one be like the other; but understand they are unique each one to himself or herself. God wired them that way.

One of the joys of parenting is to learn how to accept them for how God has created them. As a matter of fact, it's in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul writes to the Corinthian church and tries to correct them because they are so busy comparing and competing instead of celebrating them for who they are.

One of our children is—the oldest—she is a dancer. She's been doing ballet since she was about five, and she loves it. She's a strong, typical firstborn child. We have to learn how to celebrate her and respect her because how she is wired. She is an extrovert. She loves to talk. She can talk. She can talk. She comes in from her day, and she comes right to our room and wants to talk for about 30 minutes to an hour. I mean she loves to talk. That's how she's wired. We've had to learn how to celebrate her for who she is.

Our middle daughter is 14. She's our strong-willed child. I mean she has a strong personality; and if she makes up her mind about something, nothing will change her mind. That works out good in good situations and bad in bad situations. So, our goal is to focus that exactly where it needs to be; but she is also—she's not quite as bubbly and extroverted as our oldest one, but she still is a very balanced child. She'd rather go to her room, get herself together, then come back and talk to you; but that's her.

Then there is our baby boy who was a surprise to us. As a matter of fact, we were having a marriage retreat at the—a marriage retreat at our church in February; and he showed up in November. We had a marriage retreat in February. So, be very careful. I don't what you've got planned; but he—it was in February with the retreat, and he showed up nine months later. We said, "What happened?!" That was—that—"How did that happen?"

But he is now 11 years old, and he's a typical baby of the family. He's fun. He's joyful. He probably gets away with murder at times; but we have to value him. He is our little basketball player, and he's kind of quiet guy. He's the life of the party. He loves his family, loves his big sisters. So, we've watched them and had to learn—some of our kids are better in certain classes than others—and we've had to figure out—"How do we accept you and love you and value you for who you are?"

There are some people that, even into their adult years, struggle with being accepted by their families / struggle with being accepted—but not only accepted but also being appreciated. Appreciation is just the next step of acceptance. Acceptance is the beginning; but appreciation is when acceptance comes to full bloom.

It's there in Philippians, Chapter 1, verse 3, where Paul writes these words: "I thank my God every time I remember you." Here's Paul writing basically Philippians as a thank-you letter as he thanks the Philippian church for their support of him while he's done ministry. It's a beautiful picture of how he appreciates people.

Do you realize that people are a gift? One of the greatest gifts God gives to us is a husband or a wife. When God was looking at your life / when God was considering the plan for your life / when God was navigating the—He knew exactly what you needed, and He sent you a gift in your husband or in your wife. We have to learn to value and celebrate that gift...that gift...that gift.

One of the leading causes for infidelity with women that they often feel unappreciated and neglected and ignored; but a woman can sometimes feel like a housekeeper or a financial provider or a nanny more than a wife, sometimes. So, how do we do better? How do we appreciate one another?

One of the ways we can do this is to say, “Thank you,” often—say, “Thank you,” often: “Thank you so much for just supporting me,” “Thank you so much for your love,” “Thank you so much for how you take care of the kids,” “Thank you so much for how we share life together,” “Thank you so much for your prayers and your support.” Say, “Thank you,” as often as we can.

Also, we have to be specific with our appreciation. You can call it out. You can write it out. You can text. You can leave a note on the mirror in the morning. You could write a letter and leave it on her pillow; but find a way to daily make sure that we appreciate one another.

You see our identities are shaped at home. So, we must be intentional at affirming and appreciating one another so that our home becomes a place where we are reminded of our identity in Christ as we encourage and affirm one another.

Here is the next one: communication. Healthy families express open and frequent communication. Ephesians, Chapter 4, verse 29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up, according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” How we talk to one another matters.

How you talk to your husband / how you talk to your wife / how we talk to our children—our families are a place where we learn communication; but the text says this: The goal of communication is not simply for me to get my feelings off my chest or just to express myself alone. But the goal of communication—the text says—is to benefit the person who is listening. It’s to benefit the person who is listening.

So, the goal of my communication is to make sure that I’m always thinking, “How can I help the person that I’m talking to? How can I convey how I’m feeling? How can I convey how their actions impacted me?” We all have the ability to use our words in a healthy way. When you become a follower of Christ, He gives you power over your tongue. He gives you power over your words. So, how we communicate matters—that is what the text is saying to us. How we communicate—it matters.

He says, “We ought to build each other up.” How do we build each other up? We ought to build each other up by speaking the truth in love / that our relationships do so much better when we speak the truth in love. When we convey our real feelings, we convey the true things that happened.

There are two words that all of us need to embrace: transparency and openness. When we are transparent in our communication, we are open in our communication. It allows the other person to see who we really are. When we hide behind in security / when we hide behind untruths or half-truths, we put up a barrier in our relationships. They want to love you for who you are. They want to know you for who you are. It only happens when we build each other up by speaking the truth.

Two more and we’re finished. Here it is. Healthy families resolve conflict or conflict resolution. In conflict resolution, healthy families resolve conflict quickly and constructively. Healthy marriages / healthy families—they resolve conflict. It’s Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 9, where He says, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” Have you ever had conflict in your marriage or family? I’m sure that all of us can attest that conflict happens.

When you put two people or a group of people under the same roof with different personalities and different backgrounds / different families of origin, no doubt that there is going to be some type of conflict. It’s part of our own reality as we have our—if we are sinners, well, we’re saved by grace; but we still struggle. We still struggle with sin. We still struggle with selfish desires. Sometimes, there is conflict over poor communication or just differences or—James 4:1 says, “...it comes from our own desires.”

There are three ways you can deal with conflict. Most of the time, our families of origin had some preference to dealing with conflict. You can run away from it. You can just be incredibly passive and say, “You know what? I don’t want to deal with it.” This is how I best deal with conflict. I just ignore it and keep going. Or you can run toward it. You can be incredibly aggressive and always want to, not only deal with the situation, but want to deal with every single conflict assertively. Finally, you can work through it.

That’s what healthy families do. Healthy families—they don’t just run away from it. They don’t run toward it, but they work through it. They try to embrace this model of being a peacemaker—that when you consider the life of Jesus Christ, He modeled for us what peacemaking ought to look like. He modeled for us that being a peacemaker meant taking the initiative. It was Jesus Christ who came to us despite the brokenness that we caused. That’s what peacemakers do.

Peacemakers mean that they are going to be the first to say, “Hey, I’m sorry.” The first to say, “That was my fault. I apologize”—the first to be able to offer forgiveness, the first one to bring up the issue. They are not going to wait and say, “You know what? They shouldn’t have said it to me; and because they said it, I will wait until they”—no, they are going to take the initiative whether it was their fault or not to help be a peacemaker.

Peacemaker means you've got to be mature in Christ because some stuff that we argue and fuss over really is not even worth it; but you have to grow in Christ enough to say, "You know what? I'm mature enough to be able to deal with that in a healthy way."

To be a peacemaker means you have got to love the person that's in your family: "The reason we are talking / the reason we are trying to work through it / the reason that we're trying find a better solution is because I love you, and I love God. I don't want our conflict to damage my witness or to damage our relationship with God."

To resolve conflict, there is some stuff you've got to overlook. There is some stuff you've got to confess. There are sometimes you've got to confront, and there are always times where you've got to forgive. It is forgiveness that helps bring healing to relationships because that's the same thing that Jesus Christ did for us.

Here's the final one. Healthy families face suffering / face times of suffering together. It's called resilience. Healthy marriages / healthy families—they have this inner-strength because they are able to go through times of suffering together.

James 1:2-4 says, "When you meet"—"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, not lacking anything."

As followers of Christ, all of us must have a theology of suffering. Friends, suffering will show up in all of our marriages / in all of our families. Sometimes, it shows up financially. Sometimes, it shows up as a health issue. Sometimes, it shows up as a parenting challenge. Sometimes, it shows up as a diagnosis. In those case, healthy families—they don't let the suffering draw them apart. They let the suffering drive them together.

They begin to recognize and realize that when you follow Jesus Christ, suffering can be redemptive; but God doesn't waste any of our tears / any of our pain / any of our difficulty / any of our suffering; but He uses all of it to make us and to shape us into the image of His Son / into the image of Jesus Christ.

Many in this room know what it is like to go through a season of suffering in a marriage and family; and I want to remind you that God can use that season of suffering to bring you closer together / that God can use that season of suffering to bond your family like it's never been bonded before. God has not forgotten about you; but God is sanctifying each of us through this life.

Friends, those are the seven habits that I wanted to lift up for you today to encourage us all to build strong and healthy families that reflect Christ in our relationships. We all have work to do. Our goal is to create a legacy in our families that will live on long after we

are gone. We are tending to plant seeds today that will forever flourish forever. We're not trying to create perfect families, but we are trying to create families that please God.

Thank you. God bless. [Applause]

[Studio]

Bob: Well, again, that's Pastor Bryan Carter with a message on the Seven Habits of Healthy Marriages and Families.

As we sat and listened to that message, I remember thinking, "It is good for all of us to have a mentor come along and just remind us of what's true and point us, again, in the right direction and for us to just say, 'You know this really matters.'"

It's so easy to get distracted by all kinds of things and to come back to the basics and say, "At the end of the day, if we miss the soccer game or if something goes wrong and we have to cancel piano for this fall, at the end of the day, these are the things that matter. Are we committed to God, committed to each other? Do we prioritize time together? Do you we accept and appreciate one another in our family? Do we express open and frequent and communication? Do we know how to resolve conflict, and can we face suffering together?" If you can do that—

Ann: You've got a good family.

Bob: You do.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: The other stuff is going to work its way out; but these are the relationship skills that will mean, not only a good family, but as he said, Dave, a good legacy.

Dave: Yes; and I think as we've already said, it would be a really good homework assignment / a project to grade yourself. Here is what I would say to parents: "Ask your kids." Go through each one of the seven and say, "You know, how are we doing?" You know when he is talking about number six with resolving conflict quickly and constructively, I remember a vacation that we took as a family—and again, this was now two of our sons were married. The third had his girlfriend with him. We got into a family—what would we call it, Ann?

Ann: It was a fight. It was an all-out fight.

Bob: Really?

Ann: Yes.

Dave: It was a big conflict that took four to five hours to really drill down and get at the root of. It was hard, but it was really good for our family. I mean we practiced one of those habits that day.

Ann: It was really interesting because we started out doing a devotional together as a family. Somehow—

Dave: I forgot. That's how it started.

Ann: It turned into speaking truth, and then the truth kind of brought out a lot of different things and pain and hurt. We did end up praying together at the end, but it was a long, hard journey.

Dave: It was worth it.

Bob: You know as we think about habits that we build into our family, you've got to be intentional to develop a habit. You don't just happen on habits—well, if you do, they are bad habits. We've got the President of FamilyLife® David Robbins who is here with us. You were President when Bryan Carter shared this message, and I think it struck you the same way. We have to be purposeful if we want to cultivate good habits.

David: Yes; the thing is—and what's fascinating about our modern moment—is that we will be formed some way.

Bob: Yes.

David: We are already semi-consciously adopting habits and being formed. Our world is such a good disciple her people. These habits being formed like—checking our phone 80 times a day. I certainly contribute to that average.

Bob: I was just checking my phone while you were talking. [Laughter]

David: It's a true fact. They aren't designed by companies and people that are helping push us toward a personal transformation and formation to the image of Christ—I mean to say the least; right?

Bob: Right.

David: There are studied algorithms and there is gamification prompts to keep you coming back and engrain habits within you. So, to do nothing is to submit to the cultural current that eventually tries to take you out of the beauty of the gospel. So, I love this. I remember hearing this in person with Bryan just going—"Man, these habits are counter-formation, needed in my life / in my marriage in this season. It's a busy season with young kids.

You know I think sometimes we wrestle with habits and being legalistic, and I just love Dallas Willard's quote: "Grace is not opposed to effort, but it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort, though, is an action." Let's us put these habits into practice.

Bob: We are to strive. We are to be diligent. We are to cultivate these things, and God's spirit is there to enable it to happen.

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