

DISS-FUNK-SHUN: There's more than one way to spell it!

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Focus on the Family – September 2006

Today we will be exploring the complex world of one of the most fascinating societal beasts: the dysfunctional family. We will focus on everyday family dysfunction and a few of the extremes. We will not at *any juncture* be talking about my family or yours, but about “other” families that actually have dysfunction.

Unlike mine or yours - which, you know, don't.

First, the word *dysfunction* actually originates from the Greek roots *diss*, which means to brazenly insult or humiliate; *funk*, which means to spin yourself into a mood so dark that even storm clouds won't hang out with you; and *shun*, which means to treat somebody as though he doesn't exist.

All three of these characteristics are evident in the typical dysfunctional family, where rampant dissing and shunning have led to many funks, which spawn even bigger disses and shuns, which give birth to woolly mammoth-sized funks, and so on and so forth.

In one classic example, a man named Jake finds that one form of dysfunction leads to others throughout his life. At different points along the way, Jake dodges a brother who wants to kill him (diss), lies to his father about the family inheritance (more diss,), alienates a wife (shun), marries a second wife who becomes wildly jealous of the first wife (funk), tries to negotiate a blended family with children from four different mothers (dissing and shunning galore), gets cheated in business by his father-in-law (diss-honest) and sees his youngest son constantly picked on and abused by his older brothers (diss, shun and understandable funk).

In this textbook case, the textbook happens to be Genesis and the dysfunction magnet is actually Jacob – which just goes to show that, here in our country, our families may be following biblical “examples” more closely than we thought.

By our present-day way of thinking, Jacob's family needed an entire army of therapists, mediators and court orders. You wouldn't want Jake's clan as neighbors. You wouldn't want their kids playing on the same Little League team as yours. You'd ground your own daughter until she was 30 before you'd let her go to the mall with a boy from Jacob's clan. If you were the patriarch of a family like Jacob's, you might pack a bag and run hysterically from the continent.

And herein lies the puzzling dilemma. The real Father of Jacob's family never does that. Instead, God raises a mighty nation out of this bunch, creates the 12 tribes of Israel, initiates the lineage of David and . . . ahem . . . Jesus from their midst, and generally calls them *His people*.

Plus, Jacob isn't the only biblical character whose familial relationships belch exhaust smoke like a run-down 1972 Pinto:

- Abram pretends his wife is his sister and sends her to the king's bedchamber to save his own skin!
- Joseph's brothers leave him for dead then decide it'd be better to sell him as a slave.
- King David gets tossed from the throne and chased from the city by his own son.
- Martha and Mary disagree on the division of labor while the Lord sits in their living room.

We have some hall-of-fame diss-funk-shun going on here.

Yet God shows up in every one of these situations. He actually uses dysfunction for His purposes on earth. It's nutty. It's illogical. It's . . . encouraging.

Could it be that flawed families are an incredibly attractive canvas for God's restorative artwork? Could it be that flagrant brokenness in families – just like in yours and mine – is often so

devastating that it shouts the need for a Savior? Could it be that the confidently functional family – just like that of the Pharisee or the checklist churchgoer – is often more blind to their need for Jesus?

It could be indeed, and a repertoire of Bible stories is proof.

You don't have any disses, funks or shuns in your family that God hasn't seen before. For the dysfunctional family, like the sinner himself, confession, repentance and a call for help go a long way.

We can conclude this much: All families have dysfunction. The perfect family has not yet existed. But it's coming. And your dysfunctional family is actually invited to be part of it.