Blessed Be the Tie That Binds

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BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

While the hymn that shares this title was not written about families, but as a farewell to John Fawcett’s parish in the 1700s, it struck a chord with me as it relates to the new title for this column. Ties with our families can certainly bind our hearts in Christian love. It is with our families that many of us go before our Father’s throne, pour out our ardent prayers, share our fears, our hopes, and our aims. It is within our families that we share our mutual woes, bare one another’s burdens, and share a sympathizing tear. When we are apart, we miss one another and long for when we shall be together again, knowing we are joined in heart.

Family relationships can also bind us in ways that hurt. Sometimes the hurt is like “Ouch!” and we distance ourselves for a few minutes or hours. Sometimes the ties are too binding, and we struggle to be free. Sometimes we feel as if we are being strangled and gasp for air. We let the hurts hurl us far, far away from the people and the memories. Ties that bind families together in unhealthy ways can affect us profoundly.

One coping method is to take our reality and normalize it. Another coping method is to physically separate ourselves from family members. Perhaps you have heard the saying, “Family, you can’t live with them, and you can’t live without them.”

Some of the every-day issues that strain family ties include poor communication, inability to resolve conflicts and disagreements, poor problem-solving skills, poor division of responsibilities, insufficient emotional support, intolerance of differences, and overdependency on others. Families who share these characteristics are likely to have trouble coping with life’s inevitable crises. Even relatively simple problems not resolved become major dilemmas. By their lack of successful coping skills, these families create additional problems for themselves and go from crisis to crisis with little relief and little pleasure from life or from one another.

If any of these characteristics describe your present family or the family in which you grew up, take heart. Many have hurtful memories from childhood which continue to haunt them. Trying to forget doesn’t work very well. While everyone deserves freedom from the past, and there are professionals to assist in that journey, I suggest that even difficult memories have something to teach us.

Rather than trying to completely break away from the ties that bind you, Edward Hallowell suggests there is some goodness or usefulness left back there, even if it is only in giving you a sense of continuity.1 Instead of just pulling away, remember that it’s never too late to start doing things differently.

At the 2002 Adventist Family Conference, John McVay shared that the message of the gospel story is that the change in Jesus’ family was not an isolated case. God loves your imperfect family and every imperfect family. He longs that each family might acknowledge Him as the Father of all and lay hold of the resources that He has to help them live life as a family of faith.2 Blessed be the tie!


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