

THE COUNSELOR

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ESTRANGED FAMILIES

The world is full of pain and suffering. Families are torn apart and estranged by serious conflicts



every day. Abuse, infidelity, addictions, rebellion, fiscal irresponsibility, control issues, and religious differences are a few of the problems that divide and estrange families. The emotional pain and grief is enormous. People mourn over severed family relationships much like they would losing a loved one through death. Sometimes it is necessary to break with members of your own family because remaining connected to them would be harmful. This occurs when someone threatens the safety and harmony of other family members. Even though it is sometimes necessary to separate, loss is still experienced. Families separate from the abuser to protect themselves. Estrangement, according to the Webster's dictionary is: "the state of enmity or indifference in which there had formerly been love, affection, or friendliness. It is the condition of moving from love to hate, marital bliss to divorce, mutually satisfying relations to one wracked by stress and contempt."

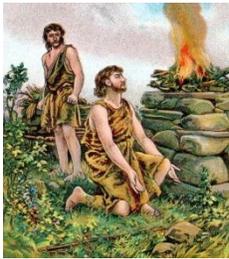
Some families become estranged when young adult children leave in anger over some major dispute. It might be that the

parents of a young adult do not agree with the direction he/she is headed and when they question them and set new guidelines, the young adult leaves home. This happens quite frequently today when young adults become involved in cults. They replace their real family with the cult group that feeds their bitterness, anger and rebellion toward their parents. Lonely young adults often seek these cults because they yearn to connect and belong. Many battle with loneliness. Other times we see parents disapproving of their children's choice of relationships, especially marriage which can lead to estrangements that endure for years. Estrangement sometimes occurs through the process of teenagers and young adults normally separating from their parents but something happens to intensify the process. The teen/young adult abuses his freedom and/or the parents become too controlling and the young adult breaks away from the family, becoming estranged. Words and actions are committed that grieve one another's hearts and family members retreat, wounded in their souls full of anger and contempt. Some families remain estranged the rest of their lives.

Biblical Examples of Estranged Families: Estranged from One Another and from God

The Bible is full of examples where families became estranged from one another and individuals separated themselves from God.

The common denominator is always sin when it comes to estrangement. Someone has grieved another and both in some way have grieved God by their behavior toward one another. Adam and Eve became separated from God by giving into the devil in the Garden of Eden. Cain killed Able and became estranged from God and his earthly family. Jacob and Esau became estranged when Jacob deceived Esau into giving up his birthright and blessing. Joseph was



estranged from his brothers and parents for many years when his brothers sold him into slavery because they were jealous and angry with him. One of the saddest estrangements of all in the Bible was

between King David and Absalom, his third son. (2 Samuel Chapter 15) The sin that set all this in motion was David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. Absalom had his brother Amnon killed for raping his sister Tamar. Absalom fled to Geshur where he lived for three years and Absalom was tricked into returning and David forgave him. The estrangement that Absalom felt had not really subsided since he conspired to take the Kingdom of Israel from his father King David. Absalom spread false rumors about his father and incited people to join him against the King. David fled for his life leaving the kingdom temporarily in Absalom's hands. Things really fell apart culminating in Absalom being killed in a battle. The themes of abandonment and estrangement are highlighted in this Biblical example. Disobedience to God and family dysfunction are core issues in family estrangement.

Issues and Dynamics

Family estrangement circumstances vary but certain patterns, issues, and dynamics are usually evident. Just by definition estrangement implies that there were relationships that once were loving and

close but became estranged later on. They wouldn't be estranged unless there was some bond initially. The core issue of estrangement is **real or perceived breaches in trust** and some form of **emotional wound** experienced



by family members. Once loving and trusting relationships are fractured and broken by one or a series of incidents that **hurt and anger** family enough to part in despair. The one leaving has no desire or hope for reconciliation. You wonder how many young adults or older married children overcome with hurt and anger never return to loving the parents they abandoned? How many families remain divided to this day because of some major argument over what now seems small compared to the destruction and pain that followed the first estrangement. Someone's feelings got hurt and their **pride** would not let them resolve the dispute, recover, forgive and heal. The solution for them was to completely disown their families.

Sometimes the pain inflicted by family members justifies permanent separation as in **physical and sexual abuse**. They have to divide as a matter of safety. The common issue here is still estrangement brought on by real emotional wounds from one member to the other. Someone's **sin** is the underlying cause for the estrangement. Both parties usually hurt one another before estrangement occurs.

Control issues oftentimes lead to family estrangement. Children rebel against parents who try to micromanage their lives. They distance themselves from their families because they were not given the freedom to develop their own strengths and talents. Breaking points usually occur when the teenager or young adult decides he or she will not submit to his parents telling him

that he must do things this or that way. Controlling parents are not always mean. There are many parents out there who have enabled their children and thought they were doing them good, when in fact they weakened and embittered them. They unwittingly fostered a sense of **entitlement and resentment** in the child they loved deeply. There are those parents who believe they must keep the pressure and environment strict for their children. They may have good motives but their strict methods prevent healthy growth and development in their children. **Rebellion** is another cause of family estrangement. Children rebel against parental authority because they are determined to do whatever they want. The fault can be the parents, the children, or both. **Money, greed and jealousy issues** divide families. Families feel cheated by their own members over money given or not given to them. Sometimes the rift generates so much resentment that estrangement occurs because someone feels like others are favored over them and they deserve more. **Unresolved stepfamily conflicts** can lead to family estrangement too. The young adult child may leave prematurely because he or she cannot or will not accept the step parent. **Conflicting values** will lead people to disassociate themselves from their own families. Certain family members may choose lifestyles that go directly against other members which leads to family break up. Similarly, **differences in religious beliefs** can cause such intense family conflict that members pull away from one another. This is very sad because the members who drifted away from Jesus Christ are cut off by their believing relatives, which oftentimes confuses and embitters them even more to keep their distance.

The dynamics usually involve pain, wounds, severe falling out, distancing, a few attempts by some family to reconcile met by failure and estrangement. Family members feel betrayed, unloved, and abandoned and hopeless. They reach a point in their anger and pain that they feel better off leaving

their blood relatives forever! Unfortunately, many times these decisions are made impulsively and actions are so drastic that the one leaving believes there is no way back to the way things were when they felt loved and accepted by their own family. We see these core issues everyday as family members disown one another, perpetuating a legacy of pain that never fades away.

Prolonged Hardship

Suspended in the aftermath of grief, estranged families are reminded daily that some of their own are out there living in resentment and deadness toward them. Family estrangement endures, affecting everyone. The casualties of estrangement are usually the parents, siblings, grandchildren, cousins, extended family and friends. Future generations are impacted by those who disown their families. Relationships that should have been never occur. Those that were longed for are gone. Dreams are snuffed out when families become estranged. Weddings, births, birthdays, and the celebration of life's passages and transitions are missed by those left behind and by the newly developed families of the estrangers. Hardship is prolonged.



And this grieves the heart of God. He designed families to stay together, to love and forgive one another, and to work things out. God grieves family brokenness too.

Estrangement is much like divorce: it is a death that never dies. There are no final funerals, only a lingering longing for family connectedness. Think about the pain the Biblical characters felt when they lost their sons, like Jacob and David. And Rebekah when Jacob fled Esau. In that case, Rebekah never saw her son Jacob again. She missed out on so much. Family estrangement causes great pain, oftentimes

pain that could have been avoided. The estrangement process is grueling and impacts so many. People make adjustments through the years but they still yearn for the fullness of enjoying and encouraging the families God gave them.

Healing

Healing is possible even when the estranged don't return home. God can and will heal you from the pain of family estrangement. There is purpose in the your pain. God will use your suffering for His purposes and for His glory no matter what. I know it is very difficult to see purpose in the devastation family estrangement brings, but you must trust God and let Him heal you. This is very hard to do



when you initially experience the grief that comes with losing your loved one through estrangement. The brokenness is overwhelming. The thought of never seeing your son or daughter again is too much to bare but you must take this loss and pain to the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows all about family estrangement. He was estranged from his own siblings on earth during his ministry. He lived with the brokenness of humanity while he walked this earth.

There are many levels and phases to healing from family estrangement. The emotional turmoil over family estrangement resembles the grief process. Family estrangement is a form of death. A loved one cuts himself off from those that love him. The family lives with the pain and uncertainty of his return, they imagine the worst. After the initial shock of the estranged leaving, the pain settles and time wears on. Those left behind usually feel very sad, and discouraged. They go through denial, anger, depression and eventually accept the loss. The phases of grief do not always progress in a predictable pattern. They are not so clear cut. You may think

you are done with anger and reached acceptance only to find yourself feeling sad and depressed the moment a memory is triggered. This is all part of the healing process. Time does not heal all wounds it helps deepen our perspective and lets God work on us. Remain proactive in letting Him help you through the process and take steps to focus on being productive in your life. You will live with the loss but it does not have to disable you. Trust God and do your part. Purpose in your heart to let God heal you and reveal the meaning in your suffering. Let this estrangement and brokenness make you better not bitter. Allow this tribulation to build perseverance, character, and hope in you (Rom. 5:3-5). The whole process of pouring out your life to God over your estranged loved one will draw you closer to Him.

All family estrangements are painful. There are different levels and types of hardships brought on by those forsaking their families. Some families have deeper levels of pain depending on their situation. Some take comfort in at least knowing their estranged is alive and well while other families don't know anything about those that left. They long for a breakthrough in the condition or whereabouts of their estranged one. Bad news can drive a parent or relative into depression when they previously believed things were better even though they were separated. The pain is relative to those left behind. We should never underestimate or assume that an estranged family member is further along just because their situation is less traumatic than someone else or considerable time has elapsed. Loss is loss and it still hurts. That powerless feeling accompanies all levels of family estrangement for those left behind.

Hope

Your son or daughter may have left hating you and everything he once believed true. He or she left on a horrible note and you wish you could have done something to prevent them from leaving that way. Parents

often fall into the guilt trap of wondering what they did wrong to bring about the estrangement. Consider your part and learn from your past but don't linger there too long. It is not good for you to live in regret. You must move forward trusting God.

Cling to the Blessed Hope of Eternity - Jesus Christ! He is our hope, in this life and beyond. God is not done yet with your estranged love one. He works in all situations to accomplish His purposes. Cling to the Sovereignty of God. He is not shocked or baffled by your child's behavior. He knows your heart's cry and longing for reconciliation with your estranged loved one. He hears and answers all your prayers in His time and according to His will. He is working on your estranged family member, and molding you too. Our Hope of Glory Jesus Christ will bring this matter to

conclusion, you must believe and trust Him to heal your brokenness and bring your loved one back to Himself. He loves your children more than you and He watches over their lives even when they make terrible decisions and do things that grieve His heart. Don't stop praying for your estranged. Believe God is able to redeem them back to Him and reconcile them to you. He can deliver them. They may find themselves in a terrible situation like the Biblical prodigal son who come to his senses. God will deal with them. Trust God for that and cling to Him in hope that your prodigal returns. Don't become so dispirited that you waste your sorrows, living a defeated unproductive life as a believer. Let your family estrangement eventually propel you to new heights for God's Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven. Let God transform you through this whole experience.

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