

## TWELVE YEARS, TEN LESSONS

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Twelve years ago through the Center for Family Healing, I was graciously offered a chair to give counsel. Through Practical Family Living I was given a Godly canvas to speak and write. Indeed, the boundary lines fell for me in pleasant places (Psalm 16:6).

Now, these twelve years are transitioning to twelve hundred miles south. My husband has been called to be Vice President of Good News, a United Methodist Renewal organization in the Houston Texas area. God has provided me a new position as well. This fall, I will join the staff at GracePoint Counseling Center in The Woodlands, Texas.

Practical Family Living combines God's Truth with sound therapeutic principles to help God's people build healthy relationships. In sincere thanksgiving for my part in CFFH and PFL, I offer ten basic lessons back to you. Some lessons are gleaned from my previous PFL articles. All of them God has used to shape me as a therapist.

1. Loving touch, practical help, validating feelings, and simply being present with a suffering loved one are appreciated first before attempting to problem solve. When God's prophet Elijah was very discouraged, God sent an angel to first touch him, and then to give him food (I Kings 19: 5-7). *Lastly*, He lovingly challenged Elijah (vs. 9).
2. A child's anger can be a signal that child/parent attachment needs strengthening. God "gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in the fold of His garment" (Isaiah 40:11). Make time to touch, verbally affirm, and enjoy your child.
3. Family devotions around the dinner table can be a symbolic way of sharing communion. Families who invite Jesus, the living bread of Bethlehem to their family table, make room for Him to touch hungry, weary places in their homes.
4. Transition, by nature, is unsettling. When families fasten themselves to Jesus, the chief cornerstone (I Peter 2:4), they are better able to navigate through uncharted waters. Keeping an old, familiar tradition in the new routine of daily life can also ease the adjustment.
5. Society emphasizes gender equality, but young women still need to feel beautiful. A father communicating this affirmation to his daughter is key in her ability to think the truth about herself.
6. A willful decision to practice healthier behaviors sometimes needs to occur before we *feel* like doing them. Examples could be cutting off an extra-marital affair, complying with medication, or being honest yet respectful about our needs and desires. God blesses obedience. In time, feelings will catch up with new behaviors.
7. When sexuality is separate from God's protective plan (marriage), we lose touch with the higher joy and purpose for sexuality. When we risk reaching for God's

higher purpose in sex, sacredness influences sexuality and husband wife become one flesh...a profound, holy mystery (Ephesians 5: 31, 32).

8. Boundaries around time, activities and tasks help to bring joy and order back to overstressed families. After Jesus fed four thousand people, He then sent them away (Mark 8:9). Boundaries can mean ending a task.
9. Addictive behaviors, such as substance abuse, overwork or overspending can be an attempt to fill empty emotional places. God can fill those empty places with life-giving purpose and release us from captivity (Isaiah 51: 13, 14).

During a recent therapy session my brand new cell phone nestled in my purse, sang loudly. I had no clue how to turn it off. As the client continued talking, I simply picked up my purse, opened my office door, set my purse with singing phone out in the hall, and closed the door. Didn't think a thing of it...until later.

*Really?? Did I really put my purse with my phone out in the hall? I felt mortified!*

But God reminded me of another story. I once heard of a therapist that kept a bag of golf clubs in the corner of his office. Inevitably clients would ask: "So, you play golf?" "Nope" the therapist would admit. "Can't hit a golf ball to save my life. But I keep trying. Someday I'll get the hang of it."

Lesson #10: God uses a therapist's inadequacies to give clients hope. Hope to keep trying. More importantly, God uses *my* sins, vulnerabilities, and weaknesses to turn me to His strength and love (II Corinthians 12: 9,10).

To those of you who were my clients, thank you so very much for trusting me with your life stories. May God hold your dreams close to His heart, and may He redeem any pain for a glorious purpose (Romans 8:28). To the readers and listeners of Practical Family Living, thank you for your attentiveness and personal feedback: you give purpose to our work. To Lynda Savage and Brenda Spina, thank you for scholarly, Godly mentoring. You have influenced me profoundly as a therapist. It was an honor to work for you.

The Center for Family Healing and Practical Family Living under the anointed leadership of Lynda and Brenda, stands ready. Ready to lead individuals and families into the next season of vibrant, purposeful ministry with a never wavering focus on Jesus Christ.

*Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.*

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