

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth episode of "The Gospel According to TV." Next week I'll conclude the series with a message entitled "Sunday Morning Live!" Today's message is "Desperate Households." The title is based on the show "Desperate Housewives." I've never actually watched an episode of this show, but it is one of the most talked-about television shows of our time. Since I don't know anything about the characters or plot, I asked for some help from my Facebook friends. Only a few admitted to actually watching it, and based upon their descriptions, I've put together a synopsis of the show: "Desperate Housewives follows the lives of a group of women, seen through the eyes of their dead neighbor, who committed suicide in the first season. The women live on Wisteria Lane (which is appropriate because wisteria is a fast growing vine that can choke and kill other plants). And while wisteria is killing the host plant, it will be blossoming as beautifully as ever. On Wisteria Lane, the twists of deception, murder, lust, suicide, gossip, adultery, blackmail, and addictions all exist carefully hidden behind the flowery masks of picture-perfect people. Just like wisteria, these women are pretty to look at, but they can be deadly and destructive."

I did get one poignant comment about the show from Latham Craft, one of our teenagers. He wrote: "If you want the scary truth...Desperate Housewives is a foreshadowing of what the world will be like if our generation doesn't step up."

Actually the Bible is full of stories of desperate housewives. Sarah was so desperate for a child that she gave her handmaiden, Hagar, to her husband Abraham and that started a whole lot of trouble we're still suffering from today! Leah was so desperate for a husband that her dad, Laban, slipped her into the honeymoon tent with Jacob instead of Rachel, the one Jacob thought he was getting. That was more like a desperate dad! Hannah was so desperate for a child she wept and fasted for years until the Lord gave her a son named Samuel. The list goes on and on, but rather than talk about the television show, or even those women in the Bible, I just want to camp out on the word "Desperate" from the show's title.

Those housewives in the Bible or the ones on Wisteria Lane aren't the only desperate people around. They aren't the only ones who are working hard to maintain a public appearance of a perfect family and a perfect life when things below the surface are falling apart. There are thousands of desperate households here in East Texas. In this message I want to make four observations about Desperate Households. And I'll offer some dynamic solutions for hurting families from God's Word.

(1) AMERICAN HOMES DESPERATELY NEED HELP

Three thousand years ago, Solomon made this observation about how families can experience troubles. Proverbs contains some of the most basic, practical advice for marriage and families ever written. "Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred." (Proverbs 15:16-17) Compared to the rest of the world, most American families are wealthy and have plenty to eat, but there is also plenty of turmoil, because the most important ingredient for family happiness is not how much money is in the bank, but how much love and laughter is in the home.

I don't have to tell you that the so-called "traditional family" of two parents living together with 2.3 children is no longer the norm. Television shows reflect our culture more than they influence them, and by observing some of the famous television families over the past six decades you can trace the gradual disintegration of the traditional family in America.

One of the earliest family shows was "Ozzie and Harriett," with their two sons, David and Ricky. Ricky Nelson used the show to launch his music career. But they were a typical All-American family. They were a lot like the Andersons on "Father Knows Best" with Robert Young. He was a dad who'd ride the paper route tossing papers when his son, Bud, was sick. He'd always choose to see Kathy in a school play even if it meant missing an important business meeting. And who can forget, "Leave it to Beaver"? Where Beaver Cleaver and his brother, Wally, had to get out of all kinds of problems they created—but the problems weren't crime or drugs, they were more like breaking a window or riding their bikes across the neighbors grass. And all these families faithfully attended church on Sunday.

Probably the most dysfunctional TV family of the 60s and early 70s was the Douglas family on "My Three Sons." They were unusual, because there was no mom around, so Uncle Charley stepped in to help. The other single parent family during this time was on "The Andy Griffith Show." But again, there was Aunt Bee to help out. We've got a lot of single parent households in our church, and I'll bet some of you have wished for an Aunt Bee or an Uncle Charley! By the way, I always wondered why Uncle Charley and Aunt Bee didn't marry and create a whole new show!

The first show to really explore the blended family concept was "The Brady Bunch." You remember the plot? "Here's a story of a lovely lady; who was bringing up three very lovely girls; all of them had hair of gold; like their mother, the youngest one in curls..." You get the picture. Even though it was a big family, it was still one big HAPPY family.

But the idea of a happy family changed with Norman Lear's "All in the Family," which was first seen in 1971. Suddenly, a family wasn't portrayed as a happy, carefree group. Instead, a loud bigot named Archie Bunker who called his wife a dingbat and often yelled, "Oh, stifle it Edith!" He argues with his son-in-law and calls him a meathead and a Pollock.

But in spite of this show, there were still some wonderful television families in the 70s and 80s including "The Waltons." For years when I went to youth camp, it never failed: We'd be in the bunk house after lights out, and after it got quiet someone would always say, "Goodnight, John Boy" and everyone would start giggling.

And another outstanding family show was "Little House on the Prairie." The Ingalls were a close-knit family of pioneers who faced life's challenges with love and faith. Moms and Dads, get the DVDs of this show and let your kids watch it.

One of the best TV families ever was seen each week on "The Cosby Show." During the 80s and early 90s this show about the Huxtables was one of the highest rated shows on television. Bill Cosby is passionate about family values and the show taught valuable life lessons.

And we move from the 90s into this century. What are some of the most watched television families today? Well, you have "The Family Guy," an animated series about a dysfunctional family with a bumbling father named Peter who ridicules his daughter for being ugly. The baby is the smartest one in the family, except for the dog who walks on two legs, talks and drinks martinis. That show will give you a great father-image huh? No.

Then of course, there is the *most* popular television family of the 21st century, "The Simpsons." The creators of this show designed all the characters to be dysfunctional. Because they're cartoon characters, they don't have to grow up. So for 20 years Americans have been laughing at Bart, who claimed to be "an underachiever and proud of it." Wow, what a great role model for kids to study. But perhaps the greatest reflection of the demise of the American family is that "The Simpsons" is the longest running sitcom in American Television history. D'oh! Last spring it surpassed "Gunsmoke" as the longest running prime time entertainment series in television history.

Then there's "The Osbournes," starring aging rocker, Ozzy, former lead singer with the group Black Sabbath. One of his songs was "The Suicide Solution." I've never seen the show, but it is the most watched series in MTV history, and has so many "bleeps" it's sometimes hard to follow the conversation.

Today, there's even a "reality TV family." "Jon and Kate plus Eight" followed the lives of this "normal family." But when you put people in front of cameras it's impossible to act normal, and today, they have split and it's Kate plus eight minus Jon!

So, in the span of my lifetime, we've Ozzie and Harriett to Ozzy Osbourne. That should explode any social theory that humanity is evolving to a higher and better state! A household that doesn't seek God's help will always slide into chaos. The Bible says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, [let's say "household"], its builders labor in vain." (Psalm 127:1) We don't have the strength to build and maintain a happy household, we can only do that when we call upon God for help.

Families in America are suffering and one of the biggest causes is the breakdown of marriage that leads to divorce. That leads to my next observation:

(2) COUPLES DESPERATELY NEED KINDNESS

There are a lot of factors I could talk about that are important for a happy marriage, but the one I want to talk about today is good, old fashioned kindness. The Bible says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. A hot tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." (Proverbs 15:1, 18)

America leads the world with the highest divorce rate of any developed nation in the world. You've probably heard the scary statistic that 1/2 of all marriages in America now end in divorce. That *isn't* true. That statistic has been widely quoted but it was based on the faulty use of data that even a freshman statistics student would catch. In 1981 there were 2.4 million new marriages, and there were 1.2 million divorces. 50%? No. Think of it this way: In 1981 there

were 2.4 million weddings, and 1.2 million divorces, but those numbers didn't reflect all the millions of marriages already in effect. But the actual percentage of divorces in America isn't very encouraging. George Barna's research organization interviewed 4,000 adults and from this small sample they determined that of adults who have ever been married, one in three has had at least one divorce. The most shocking finding in their research was the percentage of divorced Americans who claim to be born again is equal to those who don't claim to have been born again.

There is so much anger in marriages today. A little bit of kindness would go a long way in lowering the stress level among couples. I like the story about Frank, a good old boy who was having trouble in his marriage. Frank asked his pastor for some advice and his pastor told him to be nicer to his wife and he gave him some suggestions. So that afternoon Frank showed up at the front door dressed in a suit, wearing cologne, with a bouquet of flowers in his hand. He said, "Honey, let's go out on a date!" His wife burst into tears and he said, "What's wrong?" She said, "It's been an awful day. Johnny's sick and throwing up, the washing machine broke, and your parents called to say they're coming this weekend...and to top it all off, you have to come home drunk!"

Guys, try helping your wife around the house a little more. No husband has ever been shot while doing the dishes!

Kindness means to be willing to admit you're wrong and to forgive your partner when they have blown it. Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of Billy Graham said, "A happy marriage is the union of two great forgivers." The poet Ogden Nash wrote, "To keep your marriage cup brimming; With love in your loving cup; whenever you're wrong admit it; and whenever you're right, shut up."

Have you ever noticed we often treat strangers nicer than we treat our mates? Couples should demonstrate common courtesy to each other. It's actually uncommon courtesy, because it's pretty rare. If you're in a relationship and there is a measure of desperation, why don't you start by showing kindness to your mate?

(3) KIDS DESPERATELY NEED DIRECTION

Proverbs is full of great advice for parents. "A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke." (Proverbs 13:1) "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding." (Proverbs 15:32)

The best thing parents can give their kids is discipline. Discipline is a coin with two sides. Discipline should punish a child when they willfully disobey their parents. Sometimes, that's the only definition of discipline parents accept. But discipline also involves the positive action of guiding your child in the proper direction. It takes both punishment and pointing.

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about punishing a rebellious child. The phrase "Spare the rod, spoil the child" *doesn't* appear in the Bible." (That's a chapter in my new book coming out this fall, "No, that's NOT in the Bible.") But the Bible does say, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him." (Proverbs 22:15)

You may think your child is too old to use the rod of correction, but there's an old episode of "Beverly Hillbillies" where Granny uses a frying pan to teach Jethro a lesson.

One side of discipline is punishment when a child willfully disobeys you. I believe the reason the Bible talks about using a rod of correction is because a parent should never use his or her hand to punish the child. You should only use your hand to caress and love your child. A rod of correction is a neutral object. When our girls were growing up, we had a "trouble stick" we kept in a bottom drawer. It was a piece of wood about the size of a paint stirrer. When our girls needed a spanking, they would get the trouble stick themselves, which was part of the punishment stage itself. Parents, if you have to punish your children with a rod of correction, here are some important tips. First, never punish them when you're angry. Second, always explain to them before the punishment *why* you are doing it. And third, let them go to their room for a few minutes and contemplate the important principle of "you reap what you sow" or "cause and effect." Don't worry, they'll soon figure it out. And then go into their room and hug them and assure them you love them and how you don't want to have to punish them.

The other side of discipline is pointing your child in the right direction. If there is one thing I would suggest you train into your child it would be responsibility. Think about raising your child using a dependency/responsibility scale. When a child is born, the dependency scale is at 100% and the responsibility scale is at 0%. Your child depends on you for everything. You feed them, change their diapers, bathe them, dress them, and put them to bed. As a parent, your goal should be that every year you help the dependency scale to go down and the responsibility scale to go up. So that by the time your child is an adult, the dependency scale is at 0% and the responsibility scale is 100%.

The problem today is that are teenagers and even adults who are still in the dependency stage instead of the responsibility stage. Parents, let me give you a great example of how you can make this happen. Has your child ever come to you and said, "I'm bored."? When most parents hear that, they start pitching out ideas to their child. "Why don't you go outside and play?" "No, that's boring." "Why don't you call some of your friends to come over?" "No, they're not at home. I'm bored!" If the parent falls into the trap of feeling that it is their job to find something for them to do, they'll keep pitching ideas. "Why don't you read a book, or draw a picture, or read *War and Peace*?" "Boring, boring, booooring. What else you got?" If you keep pitching them ideas, you're teaching your child this lesson: "Mom and dad, my boredom is YOUR fault. It's YOUR job to keep me entertained." And if that's what they learn, they'll go through life expecting someone else to make life more interesting and entertaining. I think I might have told my parents once that I was bored when I was in the 8th grade and do you know what my dad said? He said, "Then get a job." So that's what I did. I worked at the Florala Seed and Feed store every Saturday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for \$4 a day. It certainly wasn't boring! But my parents taught me that my boredom wasn't their problem, it was mine. So if your kid says, "I'm bored" why don't you say, "Boredom is a real problem, and I'm sure you'll figure out how to deal with it. If you don't know how, get a job." That's teaching your child responsibility. On the dependency/responsibility scale, where are your kids now?

(4) WE ALL DESPERATELY NEED A FAMILY

Whether you're young, old, single or married, you need a family. If your biological family isn't meeting that need, God will take care of you. The Bible says, "His name is the Lord...a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows...God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:4-6)

Loneliness is the reason why many people are desperate. Consider all the popular songs about loneliness. Roy Orbison sang, "Only the lonely know the way I feel tonight." Elvis crooned, "Are you lonesome tonight?" Hank Williams sang, "I'm so lonesome I could cry." And the Beatles sang, "Ah, look at all the lonely people." Someone said cities are just places where thousands of people can be lonely together.

If you feel lonely, God is concerned about your loneliness. When He had created Adam, He looked at Him in the Garden of Eden and He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." That observation still holds true. One of the best places to find companionship, friendship, and love today is in the church. When I talk about our church I never call it an organization. Instead I call us a family. We have the same Father and that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.

I can remember as a child walking into the local post office and seeing a poster of Uncle Sam. He was looking right at me, pointing his finger at me and the caption said, "Uncle Sam wants you." I didn't have a clue who Uncle Sam was, but I felt good just knowing that someone wanted me! Imagine Jesus Christ is looking into your eyes. He's pointing His nail pierced hand at you saying, "I want you. I love you. I died for you." The way you get in touch with Him is by joining in with His family, the church of the Lord Jesus. If you are desperate for a family today, you've come to the right place.

CONCLUSION

Just the title of the show, "Desperate Housewives" strikes a sensitive nerve in our nation because so many people are desperate. Our English word "desperate" comes from a Latin word that literally means "no hope." Every 40 seconds someone in America attempts suicide, and every 16 minutes someone is successful at taking their own life. And men are taking their lives four times as often as women—and why do we call them the weaker sex?

There's a lot of desperation out there. Are you feeling a sense of desperation in your life right now? Desperation doesn't have to lead to despair; it can lead you to God. Sometimes people don't seek God until they reach what I call the POTD: The Point of Total Desperation. You often have to be POTD'd before you seek God, not a potted plant, but a POTD'd person! King David was the father of one of the most dysfunctional families in all of history. He drifted away from God and He later wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." (Psalm 119:67) David faced troubles, but He allowed his desperation to drive Him back to God. Don't let your desperation drive you from God; let it drive you into His loving arms.

One of the most famous American writers of the 19th century was Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau was not a Christian, but he was a keen observer of nature, both human nature and wildlife. One of his most famous quotes was: "Most people lead lives of quiet desperation (you've probably heard that part of the quote, but the most interesting part is the second half that

isn't as familiar) and go to the grave with the song still in them." Sadly, that might have been Thoreau's experience. He contracted tuberculosis at an early age and never had much energy. He was such a loner, that he spent two years in solitude on Walden Pond. He died at age 44 never having married. He died alone and poor. Sadly, it seems that Thoreau lived a life of quiet desperation and went to the grave with his song still in him, but you don't have to.

Compare Thoreau's words with those of Jesus who said, "I have come that they might have LIFE; and have it to the full." (John 10:10) And you don't have to go to the grave with your song still in your heart. God's love allows you to sing even during the darkest times. After David got right with God he could say, "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me." (Psalm 42:8) Job went through some dark, desperate times, but he also said, "God my Maker, who gives songs in the night." (Job 35:10) It is one thing to sing during the daylight when everything looks better, but only God can give you a song in the nighttime of your desperation. And if you will seek Him, your desperation can turn into celebration.

Sometimes at the strangest times, even when I wake up at night I find myself humming one of the first songs I learned as a boy, "There's within my heart a melody; Jesus whispers sweet and low; Fear not I am with you, peace be still; In all of life's ebb and flow; Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Sweetest name I know; Fills my every longing, Keeps me singing as I go!"

OUTLINE

(1) AMERICAN HOMES DESPERATELY NEED HELP

"Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred." *Proverbs 15:16-17*

(2) COUPLES DESPERATELY NEED KINDNESS

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. A hot tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." *Proverbs 15:1, 18*

(3) KIDS DESPERATELY NEED DIRECTION

"A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke." *Proverbs 13:1*
"He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding."
Proverbs 15:32

(4) WE ALL DESPERATELY NEED A FAMILY

"His name is the Lord...a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows...God sets the lonely in families." *Psalms 68:4-6*



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes