

Family Closeness

Note: This was written in response to a question about how to help a family develop and maintain closeness.

Dear Sister Patti,

I will answer you the best that I can. I would have answered sooner, but I wanted to talk to my dear wife so we could combine our thoughts.

First, I will say that we have been blessed with a very happy family, both the immediate family and the extended family. For this we are extremely thankful and give God ALL the praise! We have not always done everything right, and we have made many mistakes, but our Lord has been very gracious.

To begin with, the husband and wife need to be in agreement that family life is very important. They have to pull together. Therefore, anyone who highly values family needs to be careful who they marry. In-laws can play a very important in these matters. One of the reasons we are so close is because of the good example set by my in-laws. My father-in-law, Brother Tony Machiavello, who has gone to be with the Lord, was our family "patriarch." He was very godly, but he was also a lot of fun. Every time we visited in their home, we would always have a word of prayer, and oftentimes the reading of a chapter from the Bible and some songs. Thanksgiving was always our favorite time of the year. Everyone from out of town made a special effort to be there. We planned for weeks ahead. We all helped prepare the food. My job, for example, was to get a couple or three gallons of apple cider. Even the children would bake cookies and cakes. Every family would practice on skits. Those who could play the piano and had other skills would get ready.

On Thanksgiving Day, we would sit down to a heavily loaded table. Brother Tony would give a speech about how good God had been the past year, and would exhort us to serve Him. Then, while he carved the turkey, we would go around the table and each person would tell something he or she was thankful for. I am talking about a lot of people. Three children, their spouses, and 26 grandchildren! Everybody in the family knew that we put a high priority on this and on other family functions. We corresponded about these things and planned them. A great deal of effort goes into these kinds of things. However, the effort is more than worth it. We have memories that are more precious than gold or silver. We still carry on even though Brother Tony has gone to be with the Lord. One of the Thanksgiving events now is to go to his grave and to joyfully sing "In the Sweet By and By."

When we are together we also play a lot of football, basketball, and other fun things. Children have a lot of energy and you have to find a healthy outlet for that.

One thing that makes for family unity is the fact that our lives center around the Primitive Baptist faith. Most of us are church members. We love to go to church. We love to fellowship with church people. We sometimes have family prayer meetings. We also possess for the most part the same values. We try to influence our children to live godly lives. That is much more important to us than them being rich or famous. Our number one priority is that our children serve the Lord. We constantly tell them this. We enjoy our religion. We practice hospitality and consider it a great honor when visiting preachers and other brothers and sisters in Christ stay in our homes. This takes some work and expense, but what a

joy it is. Our children have church friends in many different places. We enjoy visiting other sister churches when possible.

Since we emphasize family unity, it is a fact that most of our children's best friends are their brothers and sisters and their cousins. They write, email and telephone their cousins quite often.

My dear wife, my mother-in-law, and some of the other good women in our family are always working to make memories. We make a big deal out of every birthday, anniversary, graduation, ordination, etc. that we can. I should have overdosed on birthday cake and ice cream a long time ago! We support each other. We are there for each other. We have driven many miles and made many sacrifices to share in special occasions. We have shared joy and sorrow together. Our women have helped when other women in the family had babies. In fact, my daughter and my sister-in-law recently delivered my latest grandchild at home. Of course, they are nurses and midwives, and I realize that not everyone can do this. When there is a death in the family we all give our best support and comfort. At least one of my children has constantly stayed with my mother-in-law since she has lost her husband. We try to reach out to others also. On those Thanksgivings, after the dinner and we have rested and played some, we invite a number of friends and brothers and sisters in the church over for a singing.

I will say that my in-laws have taught me how to be a good grandparent. My children almost fight for the opportunity to go to their grandparents' house to spend the night. Some grandparents do not want to go to much trouble to accommodate a bunch of grandkids, but they are making a big mistake. As long as my children have a home, their grandmother will have a home too. Brother Tony has fed many a hamburger from the grill to his grandkids. The grandchildren have to behave when are at their grandparents home. They have the same values that we parents do.

The reason I haven't mentioned my own dear father and mother is because they went to be with the Lord before I was married. However, they were the same kind of people as my in-laws and would have fit right in with what I have described.

I hope that this has been helpful. The bottom line is that to have a closeknit family, you have got to be committed to it, and to be willing to put a great deal of effort into it. I believe that the women are the key and we men need to take the spiritual lead and to help our women out all we can. We must sacrifice some of our free time, hobbies, etc., and to invest this time into building the family.

As the children get older, get out of school, move off, get jobs, have different schedules, etc, things become more difficult. However, you must plan, pray, and do the best you can.

We spend a lot of time with our children. We have always been blessed to either have our own little private school or to homeschool. I have driven many miles with a bunch of my boys and others to play basketball. I have kept score at many games. When the children need to talk, we try to always be there for them. Sometimes, late at night, I have heard my dear wife give sound advice to one of the older children who needed good counsel. Sometimes we get so tired that we think we just can't do it, but we remember how important it is, pray for strength, and go on.

Family life is very important. God set up the family in the Garden of Eden. The family is the basic unit of society. I read somewhere that the family is the BULL'S EYE ON SATAN'S TARGET! Satan hates families. We must do the best we can to preserve them.

God bless,
Brother Zack Guess

Dear Sister Patti,

There is a very important matter that I would like to add to my last post. There are some who are not blessed to be in ideal circumstances as far as family is concerned. They should not be discouraged or despair. They must do the best they can, and pray for the amazing blessings of God on their efforts.

For example, there are some who are not married to those who believe as they do in a religious way. It is much better when husband and wife agree on religion. My two married children have spouses who are wonderful Christians and Primitive Baptists, for which we are very thankful. However, when people find themselves in other circumstances there is much hope. Timothy was probably Paul's favorite preacher. Paul says about Timothy in Philippians 2:19, 20 "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state."

However, Timothy was raised in less than ideal circumstances. Evidently his father was an unbeliever. We know that he was not a Jew, because he had refused to have Timothy circumcised. When Paul wanted Timothy to be used to preach the gospel to the Jews, he had Timothy circumcised after he became an adult. We read of this in Acts 16:3 "Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews, which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek." I do not know when Timothy's mother was converted to become a Christian, but it must have been early in her marriage. We do know two things about Timothy: we know that he was taught the Bible at a very early age and we know that both his grandmother and mother were devout Christians. We know that he was taught the Bible from an early age from 2 Timothy 3:15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The word translated "child" here means a very young child or an infant. It is apparent that the mother and grandmother did the best they could under the circumstances. I do not believe that they rebelled against the Greek father. I believe that they just looked for opportunities to do what they could. The Bible tells the high regard that Paul had for the mother and grandmother as he spoke of them in 2 Timothy 1:5 "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also."

Doing the best they could, and no doubt being constant and fervent in prayer, they had the blessing of seeing Timothy used greatly of the Lord. What a great blessing this is to any truly devout Christian.

God bless,
Brother Zack Guess