

WEEK FIVE

**THE IMPACT  
OF FAMILY  
PAST & PRESENT**



## IMPACT OF FAMILY – PAST AND PRESENT

- Family background has a big influence on a marriage
- The expectations of different generations can cause tension within the wider family
- We either repeat or react against the way our parents behaved, particularly when we are relaxed or stressed
  - The positive: be grateful for what was good in your own and your husband/wife's upbringing
  - The different: recognise each other's different expectations of family traditions and husband/wife roles and work out your way of doing things
  - The negative: difficult relationships with our wider family, or childhood pain, can put a strain on our marriage. In essence, it's important to address these issues so we can understand each other and move forward as a couple

## STAGES OF GROWING UP

### 1. Early years

Our parents' role:

- To meet our physical and emotional needs
- To set appropriate boundaries
- To show unconditional love
- To provide a role model of a good marriage

### 2. Teenage years

Our parents' role:

- To give increasing independence
- To continue to meet our physical and emotional needs and set boundaries
- To show unconditional love
- To teach us to consider their needs and start to give something back

### 3. Coming of age/leaving home

Our parents' role:

- To support and advise (we may still have looked to our parental home for advice, comfort, money or help with the laundry)
- To allow independence and encourage us to make our own decisions
- To make the transition to an adult relationship

### 4. Getting married

As a married couple, independence must be complete:

- A new centre of gravity
- Establish your own home as a new decision making structure
- Seek to meet each other's needs
- Develop a relationship of mutual support with parents and parents-in-law
- Put in place boundaries, not to cut you off from parents, but to connect as a couple with them in a new way

## EXERCISE 1

### BETWEEN THE AGES OF 8-12:

1. Where did you live?
2. What was your family car?
3. What was your favourite toy?
4. When did Jesus become more than just a word to you?

## BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

### 1. RESOLVE ANY CONFLICT

- All relationships involve some conflict
- Identify the issue causing tension and consider discussing it with parents/in-laws
- Apologise when you have been wrong
- Choose to forgive and move on

### 2. CONSIDER THEIR NEEDS

- Show gratitude to your parents
- Don't abuse their availability
- Maintain contact
- Take the initiative to telephone regularly, visit, enable them to see their grandchildren etc.
  - Give support
  - Offer advice when needed
  - Give practical help
  - Consider living nearby/together

### 3. MAKE OUR OWN DECISIONS

- Listen to parents' advice
- Never decide on an important issue with parents without discussing it together first
- Agree on your policy and stand together
- Do not give away the ups and downs of your relationship
- Provides a sense of emotional closeness

### 4. LOOKING AT OUR PAST

- Negative experiences from our past can affect the way we react to our partner
- Can lead to buried hurt and anger that comes out against our husband/wife
- Recognise childhood needs that were not met during your upbringing and any buried hurt and anger
- Adult relationships require us to accept our parents as they are/were rather than as we would like them to be/to have been

*'As far as it depends on you live at peace with everyone.'* Romans 12:18

*'Honour your father and mother.'* Exodus 20:12

## EXERCISE 2: REFLECT ON YOUR UPBRINGING

### A. Your immediate family relationships

The big circle drawn below represents yourself. Draw circles to represent the members of your immediate family.

1. Each of you spend three to four minutes drawing circles according to the closeness of the relationships between your immediate family as you were growing up, where:

Touching = relationship (i.e., good, open communication)

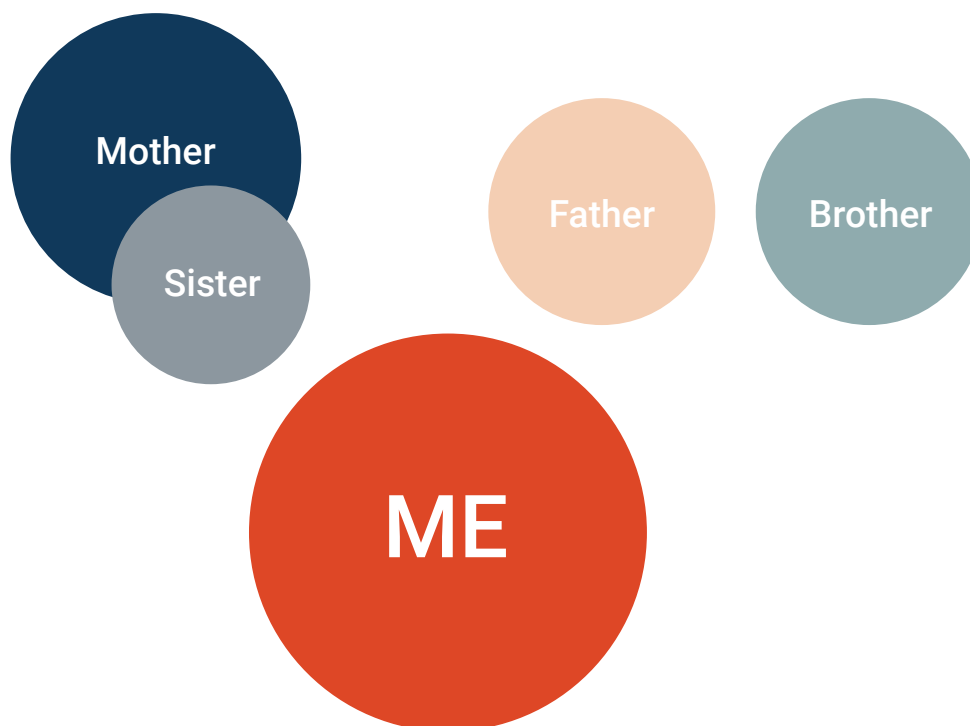
Overlapping = close relationship (i.e., good, open communication and conflict well resolved)

Separate = lack of relationship (i.e., divorced, separated or no communication)

2. Mark in the names.

3. Look at each other's arrangements.

**For example:**



**B. Your parents'/step-parents' (or whoever brought you up) relationship with you.**

Please consider the following questions and tick the relevant boxes:

**Did your parents or step-parents**

**Father or  
Step-Father**

**Mother or  
Step-Mother**

(tick if 'Yes')

|  |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Praise you as a child?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meet your physical needs (food, clothes, home etc.)?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Give you a sense of security?                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Respect your uniqueness?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Encourage you in your development?                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Set clear rules / appropriate boundaries for you?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comfort you when you were upset?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Give you increasing freedom appropriate to your age?               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Give you presents?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Take an interest in your life?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Treat their children equally?                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Admit their mistakes and apologise when necessary?                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Forgive you for your mistakes?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have realistic expectations of what was appropriate for your age?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Accept your friends?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Help you relate well to your siblings and peers?                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Establish clear family rules?                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Give discipline in a consistent and fair manner?                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spend ample time with you (i.e. play with you, talk to you, etc.)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show you physical affection (i.e., hug you, kiss you, etc.)?       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**C. Your parents'/step-parents' relationship with each other**

(or primary adult relationship you observed as you grew up)

| <b>Did your parents or step-parents</b>                   | <b>Yes</b>               | <b>Sometimes</b>         | <b>No</b>                | <b>Don't know</b>        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Have a strong, loving relationship?                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show interest in each other?                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have fun together?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spend time together on their own?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show each other affection?                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Help each other in small and big tasks?                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Encourage each other with praise and appreciation?        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show each other respect?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Communicate honestly & directly?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Listen to each other without interrupting or criticising? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Resolve conflicts effectively?                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Apologise to and forgive each other when appropriate?     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Give each other presents?                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have mutual interests?                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show a willingness to negotiate?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remain faithful to each other?                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**When you've finished A, B and C above, please discuss the following questions together:**

- What do you need to be grateful for from your relationship with your parents?
- Did you have any unmet childhood needs?
- Are you aware of these adversely affecting your marriage?
- Are you aware of the benefits to your marriage/family life through imitating your parents/step-parents/main caregivers?
- Are you aware of ways you adversely affect your marriage/family life through imitating your parents/step-parents/main caregivers?

## **HEALING CHILDHOOD PAIN**

### **1. Recognise unmet childhood needs**

- Do not be surprised if you encounter strong feelings as you do this
- Give God permission to open your heart and express your feelings to Him

### **2. Grieve with each other**

- Allow your husband or wife to talk about what has been lost and give him / her emotional support.
- Receive comfort from your partner but do not demand it

### **3. Forgive**

- Give up any desire to repay the hurt
- Give up continuing expectations and longings of what you have wanted your parents or others to be for you
- Remember forgiveness is an ongoing act of the will and is essential for healing

### **4. Look to God and move on**

- Nothing is beyond God's power to heal and restore
- Pray for yourself and each other
- Ask God to heal the sense of loss and to help you to know His love
- Dwell on the promises of God in the Bible
- Believe God's unconditional love for you as you are now
- Do not use childhood pain as an excuse for not meeting your partner's needs

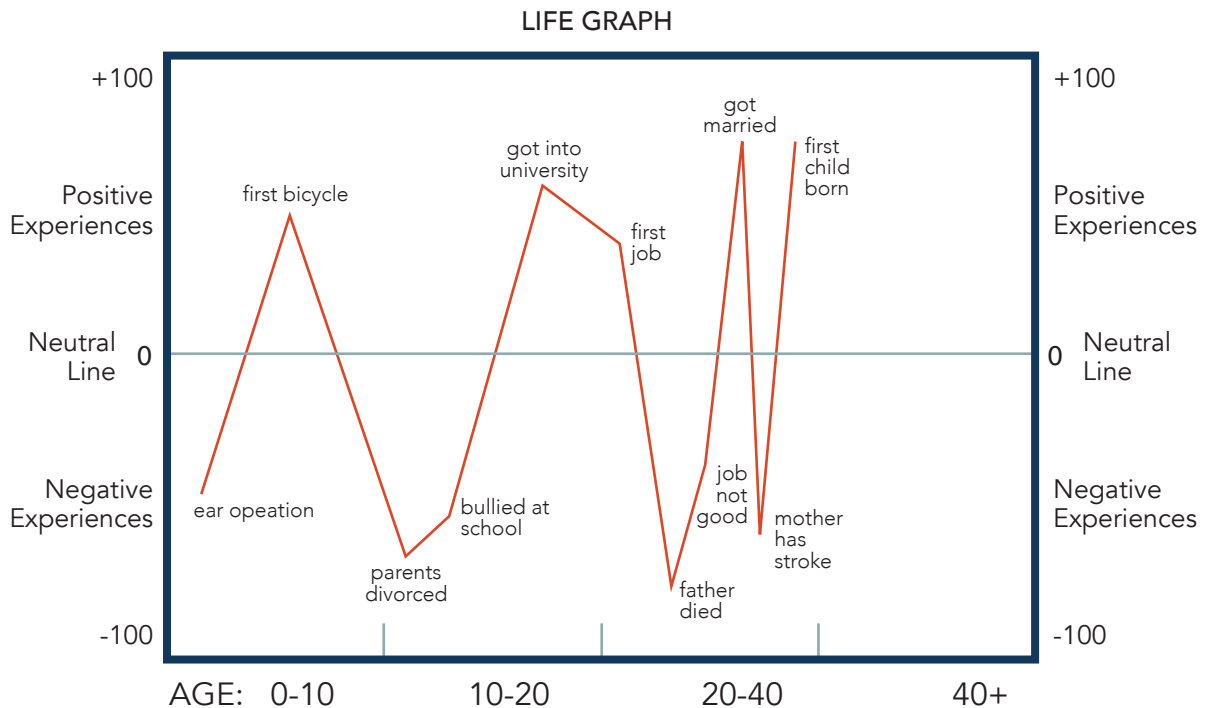
## **Supporting each other**

Ask your husband or wife if there's one thing they're concerned about at the moment. Then, if you're comfortable praying, pray for each other. Otherwise express your support in some other way.

## EXERCISE 1: RELATING TO PARENTS

### A. Being aware of the past

Spend ten minutes filling in your "Life Graph" overleaf as in the example below.



- Record the most significant events that come to mind
- Put positive experiences, ranked between 0 and +100, above the "neutral line"
- Put negative experiences, ranked between 0 and -100, below the "neutral line"
- Show each other your graphs
- Consider whether you have been able to forgive those who have hurt you
- Tell your husband or wife what you felt then and what you feel now about these events
- Where others have hurt one of you during your upbringing, check that you are both going through the four steps for "healing childhood pain"



**LIFE GRAPH**

**A. Supporting each other**

Each of you should fill in the following questions on your own and then exchange your answers. Please consider carefully what your partner has written. Discuss the significant issues – pay particular attention to an issue that your partner has highlighted, and you have not. You may need to adjust some of your own answers as a result.

1. Do your parents (seek to) control or interfere in your decisions and the direction of your lives? If so, specify the ways.

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2. Is there an unhealthy emotional dependence between you and a parent, or your partner and a parent? If so, in what way?

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3. Are there issues relating to your parents (in-law) that cause tension or arguments between you?

For example: "There is often tension between us when I have spent a long time on the telephone with one of my parents."

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4. In what way could you support your partner with regard to your parents and in-laws?

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5. In what way could your partner support you with regard to your parents and in-laws?

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6. Do you or your partner have unmet childhood needs? If so, how could you help your partner?

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How could your partner help you?

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**B. Supporting your parents**

1. How could you express your gratitude towards your parents (and / or parents-in-law)?

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2. How can you best keep in touch with your parents (and / or parents-in-law)? telephone calls, timing and length of visits, and other ways of communicating with them.

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3. Consider the needs of your parents and parents-in-law. From the list on the next page, check the relevant boxes for the needs of both your parents and parents-in-law. Besides the boxes you have checked, write the ways you could help meet those needs.

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**Husband's parent(s)**

**Needs:**

**Wife's parent(s)**

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Advice

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Companionship

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Conversation

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Encouragement

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Practical Help

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Security

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Understanding

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Need

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Need

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_