



## *What is Enmeshment?*

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How to, uh, leaving Cleve part two. Today we're dealing with enmeshment. This is where you're too close, too bonded, not enough boundaries or differentiation, and, uh, and that can lead to some dysfunction in generational family systems. That being said, two resources to help you. One is my wife Grace and I have got a podcast called Real Marriage. You can tune into it. We talk about these issues as, uh, pertain to marriage in your marriage if you want to join us. And then there's also, uh, a workbook. It's a 21 day journey. It has scripture, a little bit of journaling, prayer time with the Holy Spirit. Want you to get a copy and use it for yourself. And if you're married, you and your spouse can do it together. If you're watching online, just scan the QR code and we'll bring you to the landing page to get this as well as other resources. If you're part of the Trinity Church family here, you can scan the QR code in front of you, uh, and we'll send you a free PDF copy. Or you can grab a copy in the store on the way out. And, uh, we've got print copies for you. Let me share my heart for this series. I love you and I care. And here's what I've seen in three decades of ministry. Sometimes dear people that do love the Lord and are trying hard, have difficult, maybe even painful, maybe even burdensome, anxious lives because they're trying to do life in a family system that's just not set up for success. And sometimes these people just think that putting in more effort will produce a different result. And sometimes by getting a new perspective and changing a few behaviors and a few, uh, conclusions, it unlocks a different future. And what happens in our family is this, you grow up in a family that's the only family you've ever known. You assume that's normal and that's how you do family. And then when you open the word of God, you get a new perspective on your family and you start to figure out, okay, there were some things that they did good that I'm excited about. There's some things that we can do better and some changes that would be, uh, beneficial to make. And I love you and I want health for you. And if you're married, your marriage matters. If you have kids, your kids matter. Your family matters. Your legacy matters. Your grandkids matter. And, and I'm in the process myself. Grace and I have been together married 31 years. We got five kids, three are married, we got two grandkids trying to figure out, okay, how do we love and serve the extended family for generations and set them up for success. That being said, uh, we'll go back to the foundational scripture in Genesis two. This is before sin enters the world. This is God's divine design for marriage and family and generational legacy. Jesus quotes it twice. Paul quotes it once. So if the Holy Spirit says the same thing through Moses, Jesus, and Paul, we should all pay attention. And here it goes. Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife? That's our series leave. And Cleve, they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked and the man and his wife were not ashamed. So marriage is two things. According to God, it's covenant and consummation. So it's spiritual and physical between a man and a woman. And number two, it's leave and cleave. And leave is simply this. When you're growing up, your devotion, your commitment, your emotional attachment, your priority is to your mom, your dad, your brothers, your sisters, your grandma, your grandpa, your extended family. When you get married, you leave your mother and father, you still love them, but you leave them. You care for them, but you're not carrying them. And then you shift your priorities to your spouse. Now you're going to cleave with, and the word there is passionately, vigorously, intentionally pursue. So growing up, you're all about your mom and dad and siblings. I love you. But now I'm about my spouse and our kids and the new family that we've started together. That's what it means to leave in Cleve. And here's how we're showing this. When it comes to leaving Cleve, there are some options. Today we're gonna deal with enmeshment on the left. This is not leaving and cleaving. And you can't cleave unless you leave. And this is too much fusion. This is herd thinking. This is so much being part of your birth family that you can't launch a new family. We'll talk about this

in the sermon. In a future sermon, we'll deal with cutoff. And as I said, we're a nation of cutoffs. Most of our ancestors moved here from another country. Our state is a state of cutoff. Most of our family moved here from another state. Sometimes cutoff is because there's a war or there is, uh, an economic depression. And sometimes it's because there's toxic, unhealthy family members. And we need to so those branches off the family tree just because they're gonna infect the whole tree. We'll talk about those in a future sermon. This leads to tension. And usually in a family system, uh, one leans toward enmeshment, the other leans toward cutoff, and that produces in the marriage tension. The healthy leave and Cleve is differentiation. You're connected to your birth family, but you're not codependent on them. You love them, but you leave them. You care for them, but you're not carrying them. Those will be the future sermons. Today, what we're gonna deal with is enmeshment. And in saying this, two things. I know for sure some of you, you've already got a little bit of anxiety and you're just anticipating like, oh my gosh, am I gonna learn some things about my family? Yes. Okay. So just, just hang in there and go with me. I do love you. Number two, for some of you, these are brand new words. And part of the reason I'm using new language is a lot of our current language, like codependency, we've, we've already got a lot of baggage associated with those terms and a lot of presumptions and assumptions. So I'm trying to get new words to open new categories, but I'm gonna deal with four things that cause in mesh. First is immaturity. Uh, it says this of Jesus in Luke 2 52. And what's interesting is our God came to the earth. He was a, a baby in his mother's womb, born as a child. He grew up, went through the teen years, 20 somethings differentiated, left his father and mother started his ministry and was a fully functioning adult. So he's been through all the stages of human development. I've listed these in the workbook, but here's the summary. Jesus increased in wisdom. That's his mental, emotional, spiritual health stature. That's his physical growth and favor. That's his reputation and character with God and man. So Jesus was mature at every stage of his life. Uh, so when he was two, he was a, he was a mature 2-year-old when he was 12, he was a mature 12-year-old when he was 22 or 32. He was mature for those ages as well. If Jesus would've acted the same at two that he did at 32, we would call him immature. So mature. And so you can't look at a two old and be like, you're being so immature. They're two, they're immature. Now the hope is that they would outgrow acting like they're two. And by the time they're 12 and 22 and 32, they're making progress and they're mature for that age. So Jesus matured. And so to be human is to mature. Paul says it this way, in one Corinthians 13, 11, when I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. So here's what Paul says. When you're a child, the way you think and feel and act and speak, it's childish. But that's not a sin. 'cause you're a, you're a child, right? Sometimes parents get angry at a child. They're like, they're being so childish. They're a child. They're, they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do. A child is going to be childish. The goal is though, Paul says, when I became a man, I stopped being a child. I didn't think like a child. I didn't act like a child. I didn't speak like a child. There's a difference between being a child and being a man. And so what we're talking about here is enmeshment happens when there's immaturity and immaturity is someone in the family, the child or grandchild is unwilling for some reason to move forward into maturity. A couple things I say about this, how many of you are parents? You got kids? How many of you're grandparents? You got grandkids? Here's one thing you need to know. Physical maturity and character development happen differently. If you have a child and you give them a fairly healthy diet, they're naturally going to what physically grow. Is it true with their character that if you just let it take its natural course, they're going to be become more and more mature? No. Character development is unlike physical

development. Physical development is a process that sort of is initiated by God's divine design because we're sinners by nature and choice, and we're prone toward foolishness. Unless you work on character, you don't just naturally mature. And a lot of parents, and I'm not picking on you parents, but I'm trying to help, what parents will say is, oh, they'll outgrow it. No, they won't because you don't grow in character unless you put in some effort, practice some self-discipline, learn some lessons. And sometimes parents will make excuses like, well, yeah, that, that's their age, but they're gonna outgrow it. Just because they're growing physically doesn't mean they're maturing in character. In addition, number two, immaturity happens in one of two ways. Either the parent doesn't want the child to grow up or is over parenting them, or the child doesn't wanna grow up and take on the adult responsibility. Have you ever seen this? We all chuckle. Yes. We've all seen those people. And so what can happen is either the child doesn't wanna move on to the next phase of development, or the parent doesn't want them to because they love that stage. This is sometimes where some of you love the baby face, you're like, I love the baby face, but at some point they're gonna need to grow up. Right? Or some of you are like, I I like it when they're toddlers. It's so cute. But at some point they, they need to grow up and mature and take responsibility for themselves. So it can either be the child or the parent that doesn't want the maturity process to ensue. So here's, this is where it gets officially meddling. So I won't tell you this 'cause it's offensive, but I'll ask you so you can offend yourself. Okay, here's a question. So when there's a mother and a father, which is most likely to over parent, mother. Mother, the mother. Well, I didn't say that, but you did. So two or three witnesses, I agree with you, thank you moms for being honest, because usually mom is pulling toward enmeshment. Dad is pushing toward differentiation. True. So when mom looks at her, let's say baby boy, she's like, that's my baby boy. Dad's like, no, that's a future man. I see him at 32. You see him at two. Okay? And he's, he's 20. So, so we gotta, we gotta move forward. True or false, this leads to tension sometimes between mom and dad. Yeah, mom's like, you're being too hard on him. He's a man. He'll get used to it in 50 years, right? So, um, and so what happens is, usually dad's pushing toward differentiation and launching mom's pulling toward enmeshment and over parenting. Let me defend mom here. There's a reason why this is hard for mom. So when mom gets pregnant with the baby, there is no differentiation. Like the baby's in her and she's feeding the baby with her nutrition and body. There's no differentiation. They're completely enmeshed. Then the baby is born and she is the caregiver for the child. And, and let me say this too, I've got this in the workbook. The latest brain science and neural pathways and attachment theory has shown that when a woman gets pregnant and births a child, it literally re hardwires her brain and her body. She now becomes a mom. She's devoted to and caregiving toward this child, unlike any relationship she's ever had. This is why on social media today, it's very popular to see women in their twenties. They're like, I don't wanna have kids. I'm living my single life. Here I am, you know, on the beach, pretending like I'm happy. And so what happens is they say, I don't feel like having a child. Well, it's because if you get married and pregnant, God hardwired your brain and your body that you will literally be re hardwired so that now you want to nurture and you want to care and you want to be a mother. Okay? How many of you women this happened? You're like, I wasn't super into motherhood and I got pregnant. I was like, oh mom, I just, I found my inner mom. And that's, that's because that's the way God designed you. And so what happens then is if mom is completely hardwired to care for the child and then she is the caretaker for the child, as the child grows up, it's hard for mom to release and let the child differentiate and eventually leave and launch as an independent person. In addition, what we're seeing statistically, and I think I've got this in the workbook as well, what they have tracked in recent decades, like 30, 40

years, children are getting less and less alone time for non organized play without parental oversight helicopter parents, right? You need, we need to parent our kids, but they need a little differentiation time where the boys are trying to figure out how to play sports without killing each other, right? And the girls are trying to figure out how to resolve their relational, emotional drama without the parents getting in the middle all the time. So the more that we over parent, the more that we under mature the next generation. In addition, um, again, this is, this is, I have a lot of hard things to say. Uh, so, and I'm not picking on single moms here, but I want to note something. 'cause I love you. If you don't have a husband, you are almost guaranteed to enmesh with your child and over parent, especially if it's a son. Why? Because if you have a husband, he's going to take some of your time and energy. If he's not there, where does all your time and energy go to your son? Right? And it's hard to see them as an adult because they've only been your little boy. I can show you statistically, I've done the data analysis, single motherhood and young men who are failing to launch. It is a corresponding graph because when there's a dad in a home, he's like, differentiation, you need to go. That's my wife. Get a job. And that's what dad does. Dad, okay? That's what dad does. Okay? If dad's not there, then the boy thinks, well, mom's always taking care of me. I'm signing up for a lifetime supply of mom taking care of me. And that's what we're seeing with a whole generation of young men. So sometimes the failure to launch is the parents are unwilling to release the child to have some difficulty, to experience some pain and loss. And sometimes the child moves toward adulthood, but they don't wanna take on all the responsibility. No. And part of this is the result of a whole generation of experimental parenting from a guy named Dr. Spock. With a name like that, you would think he'd be smarter, but, but here's what Dr. Spock did. He wrote a book called, uh, baby in Childcare, sold 50 million copies of the book. He was considered the generational expert on parenting. He wasn't a Christian, didn't believe in the Bible. Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Kids need to be saved. None of that. Instead, what he decided was, children are born basically good. Okay? You are all chuckling. So we just found the parents, uh, if you're a parent, you don't need to teach your child to be selfish, lie or do evil. They're just, I got this right? So, and so what he decided was the child is basically good, and the child will just naturally progress in character as they would physically. And all you need to do is feed them a steady diet of self-esteem. You're a good person. We're gonna tell you how great you are. The world is waiting for you. We can all be president. You're, you're a snowflake. There's no one like you, you're gonna change the world. No pressure, Tommy. So then Tommy grows up. And what Tommy realizes is life is hard. And some of the pain in Tommy's life, um, is hard for Tommy to embrace. Tommy, you made a bad decision that cost you some, some things that you, you, you treated that person poorly. So that affected your relationship. So what happens then? Tommy grows up and Tommy assumes, I'm going to develop. I'm going to win. I'm going to succeed. I, I am going to achieve and accomplish. And when they don't, they think, well, it can't be me. It can't be any of the decisions I've made. I'm a, I'm a good person. So if I didn't achieve my potential, I must be a victim of a system that has oppressed me and kept me from achieving my full potential. And that thinking caused an entire generation of people who aren't launching and working and growing and maturing, but assuming that they're victims entitled to be cared for as well. Um, so immaturity is caused by essent. One other thing that happens, uh, I feel like everything I say is like a grenade with a pin pulled, and I'm trying to share it with you. Um, so how many of you, uh, don't raise your hand, but like, birthdays, weddings, Christmas, thanksgiving, it's awkward to get back together with your family. Okay? I said not to raise your hand. So, um, somebody like, I can't help it, you know, I just said, so here's why it's hard, because sometimes when you grow up in a family, true or false,

we've got roles. You're the cute one. You're the caregiver, you're the smart one, you're the drunk brother, right? Um, your mom's favorite. Your dad's favorite, right? And then you leave your father and mother, you move out of the house. Maybe you get married, you have kids, you got your own family. Now you've differentiated, you're different than you were growing up. But what happens when the whole family gets back together? There's a lot of pressure to be enmeshed and go back to your old role. I call it reverting roles. And this causes anxiety when you're getting back together with your family, because here's how they cause you to revert roles. Sometimes it's nicknames. We give names to the people we love and hate the most. Yep. And sometimes they're the same person. And sometimes then the family tells stories and it almost turns into a roast, right? Like, remember when you were 12, remember when you were 14? You're like, ah, I actually forgot about it. Thanks to the counselor. Please don't bring that up. You know, I'm trying to forget that part of my life. And what happens then is if you get married and you've got your own family and you've differentiated and you get together with your extended family, this puts a lot of pressure on you and it creates a very awkward, anxious environment for your spouse. 'cause they're like, I don't like it when they talk to you like that. And I don't like when they talk about you like that, and that's not who you are. And maybe you did that when you were in junior high, but that was 20 years ago. And I don't like how they force you back into your role. In addition, um, enmeshment is caused by immaturity. Uh, this will be offensive, um, just a little, you know, alert to raise a man takes a man, okay? Um, here's something even more offensive, there's men. Okay? So, um, so Alexis, we're offending. So, and statistically what they have shown is for a young man to become a grown man, it takes a man to help him differentiate and mature into manhood. That masculinity and adult male responsibility is literally caught from a father or a father figure. That being said, if you are a single mom, raising a son, we love you. God bless you. This is not a discouragement, this is not a criticism, but they need a grandpa, an uncle, uh, they need a spiritual father, a pastor, a coach. Somebody's gotta be that sort of father figure in their life so that they can learn how to become a man from a man. And, uh, so here's what happens in parenting. When they're little, you're their caregiver. As they get older, you become their coach. Okay? So when they're little, so a baby is born, what do the parents, let's say mom, what does mom do for the newborn baby? Everything. Everything, right? She burps the child, she cleans the child, she feeds the child. She caregivers for the child, right? She tends to the child. Eventually. The goal is as they're maturing, and this starts in the preteen, the teen years into the twenties, now you're coaching, you're like, I'm not gonna feed you. I'm gonna teach you how to feed yourself. That's true. I'm not gonna pay your bills. I'm gonna teach you how to make money and stick to a budget. I am not going to fix all your problems. I'll coach you as wise counsel to deal with your problems. But I'm going from being on the field to being on the sidelines. I'm a cheerleader and I'm a coach. I'm for you and I'm here to help. But it's your life. These are your decisions. These are your responsibilities. Now, in raising a son, there comes a point where a shift needs to happen so that enmeshment doesn't continue. So grace and I had this conversation. We got three boys, two girls, grace, outstanding, world class, loving caregiving mom. The boys reached a certain age, different ages, but kind of all pre-teen. This is the age where the boys get a little taller, their boys gets a little deeper, and they need their dad a little more, okay? And I, I remember telling Grace with the boys at that age, I'm like, I love you. You've been great up until this point. You've kind of been in the driver's seat and I've been in the passenger seat parenting. Now we're switching seats. These boys need a dad and I gotta raise them to be men. And your instinct is to care for them. And I need to coach them. I love you. We need to be unified, but at this point, I need to take the lead in raising the sons.

Wow. Okay? That being said, what happens if you don't do that? Thank you for asking. So what we're looking at is a historical crisis, a cultural crisis. The number of young men, not in the labor force, not in college, not working, not launching, not marrying, but enmeshed, staying home, living with their mother is an all-time record high. And in some cultures, it's even worse than America. So I'll share this, uh, fun news story with you. Italian woman wins court case to evict her two sons, ages 40 and 42. Oh yeah. So here's the story. Mom's 75, she's got two sons, 40 and 42, they don't work. Uh, they won't move, they don't do any household chores. They won't buy any groceries, they won't pay any bills, and they won't help. They're completely enmeshed, enmeshed. So mom keeps telling them, boys, you gotta move out. They won't move out. So she gets a lawyer, files a lawsuit against her sons, sons. What's crazy is her son's got a lawsuit and fought back, and they filled out the paperwork in their mom's house. This is amazing. Okay? Um, hey mom, can you gimme a pen? I gotta write this, you know, legal document to, you know, attack you. Um, and so what happens is the boys lost and they got kicked out of the house, okay? And if they had a son, it wouldn't have, or excuse me, if they had a dad, it wouldn't take an attorney. I'll just point that out as an obvious fact. Dad's like, I got this. We don't need to run up an hourly bill. Okay? So here's what's crazy though. In Italy, I don't know what's, how many of you are Italian? Okay, you people are screwed up. Um, you're screwed up in Italy, um, 72% of men ages 18 to 34 are still living with their mother. The majority don't have a job and are not in school. Okay? So if you're a single guy, you're like, I wanna marry Italian guy, find another plan. Um, but they have a word for these guys. They call 'em, uh, babo cone. Put the headline back up. Babo cone. I'm probably saying it wrong, but babo cone means big babies. Big babies. Oh, that's fun for me. Okay? Um, so immaturity causes enmeshment where you don't leave your father and mother and Cleve your spouse. Anxiety causes enmeshment. Let me explain Anxiety in a family system, fear in the mind creates anxiety in the body. Fear in the mind creates anxiety in the body. Here's what the Bible says about fear two Timothy one, seven, uh, God gave us a spirit, not a fear, okay? Fear comes with a demonic spirit of oppression and confusion and sickness and anxiety. You know, you're oppressed when you're just living under fear. Fear never leads you into the will of God. Only faith leads you into the will of God. The Holy Spirit. He's the spirit of faith. This demonic, counterfeit is the spirit of fear. And when you have fear in the mind, you become a false prophet. You look into the future and you prophesy doom. That never happens, but it causes anxiety in the present. Here's what the Bible says about anxiety. Philippians four, five through seven, the Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious. And right there, lemme just summarize this and then I'll finish reading the verse. The number one command in the Bible is fear not, or do not fear. And then it almost always says nearby for the Lord is with you. It's not that there isn't a problem, but there is the presence of God that is bigger than the problem. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything with prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. We'll guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. What he says is, we're all gonna have anxiety. And that's when you need to pray, and you need to transfer that burden to the Lord. And you need to be cognizant and remembering of God's presence that you're going through it with God. Now here's why this is important. We've established that a family is a relational system of emotional exchanges. Okay? It's a relational system of emotional exchanges. How many of you have had a family where you had a lot of kids, like we had five kids? What happens when one kid gets the cold? Pretty soon we're all sharing the cold because we share, just like we share things good and bad in a family, we share emotions. So if somebody's crying, what's going on? We're all involved. If somebody's rejoicing, Hey, what's

going on? So a family lives under the same skin to quote the clinicians. And we, we share emotions. Perhaps the, perhaps the emotion that's most, uh, instantaneously shared in a family is fear and anxiety. Fear and anxiety. And I just, I feel inclined in the spirit to ask this, was your mom or dad fearful? Did that create an anxious environment? Did they express their fears? Or what could happen to you as a child? And that gave you fear and that brought anxiety into the family. The American Psychological Association defines it. Thus, anxiety is an emotion. Characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. This one is interesting. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or rapid heartbeat. There are two kinds of anxiety. There is chronic and there is acute. So acute anxiety, it's just all at once. You didn't see it coming. You're driving to work, you get in a car wreck, you went to the doctor and they said, you have cancer. Uh, grandma and grandpa were at home and had a stroke. You're, oh my goodness, okay? It's, it's, it's very unseen and sudden that's acute. Chronic is more low level, but it's constant and ongoing. Some of you have habitual physical ailments or struggles every day. It's pain and it's complication and it's, it's trying to work with a, a body that's not entirely healthy. Sometimes this can be a prodigal or wayward child. It's not acute, but it's chronic. Every day you're like, ah, they still aren't turning back toward the Lord. Or this may be a marriage that's in decline. They're just sort of growing apart and it's getting cold and distant and it's not sudden. But it's over time. What happens is when the mind has fear, the body responds with anxiety. Okay? And there are three ways that the body will give you signs that you're experiencing. Fear and anxiety, spinning mind racing, heart churning, gut spinning mind. You just keep thinking about the same thing. Repeating it, going over. What, what am I gonna say? What am I gonna do? If you're in a conversation, you keep saying the same thing, spending mine, you go to sleep and you can't sleep. 'cause spending mine, you go to sleep and you wake up and you can't, can't get back to sleep spending mine. For some it's racing heart, your blood pressure goes up and some of you carry your stress in your mind. Some of you carry your stress, uh, in your heart. And this can lead over time to heart problems. And some of you, you feel your blood pressure rising. You, you can hear your heart beating in your chest when the anxiety rises. For some of you, you carry your stress in churning gut, your stomach issues, um, digestive issues, stomach pain, things of that nature for me, spinning mind. If I, if I'm dealing with anxiety, I'm spinning mine. And it's good to know kind of how you respond. 'cause your body is giving you signs and signals. When you have fear in the mind and it manifests as anxiety in the body. What happens then is it transfers through the family system. If somebody's anxious, this is when you get the family group text. Oh my gosh, this is what's happening. This is when we need to have the family meeting. Uh, this is when you walk into the house and you can realize, okay, they're not doing good. Something's going on. The anxiety travels through the family. And when anxiety hits, the clinicians will tell us that, uh, there were four primary responses. The first three, uh, you're probably familiar with, the fourth is rather new to me. So fight some people escalate. Well, if I feel anxious, I need to go conquer someone or something and, and just be in charge to be in control flight. I'm outta here. I don't like conflict. I'm scared. I'm running. This is the dad who stays late at work. 'cause he doesn't wanna deal with his family. This is the dad who gets a membership at a golf club so that he doesn't have to deal with his family. This is the dad who does hunting and fishing and woodworking and a man cave because he doesn't want to deal with his family. This is the mom who shops all day, spends lots of spa days and self-medicate with drinking in the afternoon, just trying not to deal with it. This is the teenage kid who comes home,



puts their earbuds in and ignores everybody. This is the teenage kid that goes to their room and locks the door. This is the teenage kid who runs away from home. That's flight freeze. These are the people when anxiety and fear hurts. It's like, I don't know. They just are, they're stuck. They're like, I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I'm kind of glitching and they're frozen. The fourth is caregiver. And this is the person who says, I, I'm gonna fix it and maybe even I'm gonna save you or I'm going to save us. Okay, now think of yourself. Fight, flight, freeze caregiver. What happens with the one who is the caregiver? There are positive and negative caregiving methods. Grace and I were talking this. So the way in, so a doctor with a good bedside manner, that's a good caregiver. Hospice care where they come to the house and help someone, that's amazing. That's beautiful. Uh, caregiving. There's also negative unhealthy caregiving. In some families, there's a person who assumes the role or is assigned the role. I'm the caregiver. What that means is everybody who's got a problem, give it to them. And if you do that, you're taking all the fear and anxiety of the entire family system and you're pouring it out on one person, guess what you're doing? You're breaking them. And in some families, the family pressures the caregiver like, okay, your brother's an alcoholic, your brother's a drug addict. Well, you're the, you're the caregiver. You need to go pursue 'em, you need to meet with 'em, you need to fix 'em, you need to save 'em. They're like, whoa, that's their life. We're now doing enmeshment. They don't need to live their life. I need to go live their life with them and for them, which means I need to abandon my life. This is where you're not leaving your mother and father, you're getting pulled back in because of fear and anxiety. This can lead to a savior complex. I'm gonna save the family. I'm gonna save the sibling. I'm gonna save the day. Okay? We're not saviors. Everybody in the family needs to learn to care. And it can't be completely assigned to one person that's going. And lemme say this is, I know this is hard 'cause you, caregivers, you're dear loving, compassionate, empathetic people, but you're not going to be healthy. And you cannot mature if you're not a healthy caregiver. I didn't say if you're a caregiver, I said, if you're an unhealthy caregiver, you can't be healthy because you're taking everyone's anxiety, right? Some of you're the caregivers. And lemme just tell you how I feel like I feel exhausted, I feel overwhelmed. I feel worn out. I feel like nobody cares except for me. I feel like unless I hold it all together, it's all gonna fall apart. I, I feel like nobody takes care of me, but I take care of everybody. And you may actually be true and factual. And it's hard to be mature. Because to be mature, you need to leave your mother and father so you can cleave to your spouse and then launch with a different future. If you're always worried about the latest crisis for someone else, you can't plan your future. These are the people that don't grow up and launch because there were too many crises that they assumed were their responsibility. They never had time to plan their own life. Let's all just take a deep breath, right? I still love you. Do you still love me? Okay, either way, pray about it. I hope you come to the right conclusion. Can I share a story that maybe illustrates this? Um, there was, uh, years ago I was running a college ministry. There was this beautiful couple twenties. Love the Lord, super joyful, very great people. They were dating, they were just a like great fit. You're like, what a great couple. And so everybody's assuming like they're gonna get married. So he uh, asked her parents permission. He bought a ring, he proposed to her and she said no. So he said, what? I thought, he's like, well, can, can we? So I knew them. So I met with them and I said, okay, go ahead, sir. Share what you're feeling. He said, well, I thought we loved each other. She said, oh, we do. She, he said, I thought we wanted to be together. She said, we do. He said, well, I I wanted to marry you. I thought you wanted to marry me. She said, I do. He's like, then why did you say no? She said, my parents don't love each other and they have stuck together for me. She said, they've told me that the only reason we're staying

together is because of you and when you graduate, we're getting a divorce. She said, so I can't leave. She said, my dad and mom, they don't love each other, but they love me. So if I stay in the house, they, they sort of put up with each other and they're not gonna get divorced. She said, I would love to marry you, but I can't because I can't be responsible for my parents' divorce. She's the unhealthy caregiver. What she's saying is, my fear is my parents will get divorced. There's lots of anxiety in the family. I'm the caregiver. I'm gonna save my parents' marriage. And I, I was heartbroken. I told her, I said, I'm so sorry you felt that pressure. She was an only child. I said, and I'm sorry that your parents said that to you. They should never put that pressure on you. And I said, but um, if you don't get married, how many healthy marriages are there in your family? She said, I guess there's zero. 'cause my parents don't have a healthy marriage. I said, if you get married and leave your mother and father and leave your spouse, how many healthy marriages will there be in your family? She said, at least one. I said, so you're not saving them, you're sacrificing yourself. Wow. And the truth is, at the end of the day, if you leave, that doesn't mean they get divorced. They have to decide what they're going to do. And they may decide to forgive each other and get some help and figure it out. But that's not your burden and responsibility. This is where those who sometimes are caregivers in an unhealthy position, they're taking responsibility for other people, bringing anxiety into their own life, thwarting their own maturity and taking away their own future. That being said, I'll give you two more. Uh, favoritism causes enmeshment. We're still on the big idea of enmeshment. And this is not leaving your mother and father so you can cleave to your spouse. So what happens in a system? We'll go clinical for a minute and then we'll go biblical. So what happens is two people have a relationship. When there's too much fear and anxiety in that relationship, they can't manage it. It starts to spill over. So they had a third person, it's called a triangle. If you grew up in a home where mom and dad had a lot of anxiousness and tension, and then one of you took dad's side and one of you took mom's side, now dad's got a triangle, mom's got a triangle, and now you have conflict with your sibling. That's just a multiplication of the conflict that your parents had. The worst triangle perhaps that can happen in a family. Well, and there's a couple of different examples. So husband and a wife aren't getting along, so they start gossiping about one another, or they start talking trash about each other in front of the kids, uh, or they commit adultery and put somebody else in the marriage. One of the most damaging things that can happen when there's anxiety, especially between a mother and a father, a husband and a wife, is they triangle and, and they pick a child to be their favorite. Okay? And this can be mom and dad, both choose the child that is their, they have the same favorite. Okay, well let me, lemme lemme, so the, the prophetic chuckle reminded me of something. So, um, so how, so don't, don't raise your hand if you're here with your siblings, but how many of you were the favorite you knew? You're like, I was a favorite. I knew I was a favorite. We all knew I was a favorite. Okay, and you probably like that, but what did that do with your relationship with your siblings? Great conflict and division? How many of you, you weren't the favorite? You are like, they didn't like me. Like, you know, if it was rock, paper, scissors, Tony always loses goodbye Tony, you know? Um, how does that feel to be the one that's overlooked, rejected and not cared for it? It does damage to a family system. Um, let me give you an example. So years ago I preached through the book of Genesis verse by verse. And what I see, Genesis as in part is a multi-generational, uh, case study in family systems. And it's Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That's the predominance of the storyline of Genesis. Men who get married leave their mother and father have a child, and then they set up their family system. One thing you see in Genesis that is devastating, it's favoritism. It starts generation one with Abraham. Abraham has got a wife named Sarah. They really, really, really want to have a baby.

Their fear is we're not gonna have a baby. God tells them you're gonna have a baby, but God waits a long time and they still don't have the baby. So now their fear, Sarah's barren, we're elderly, we have no baby. All this fear leads to anxiety every day. She's like, I'm not pregnant. Next day I'm still not pregnant. Every day anxiety rises. So Sarah, so Abraham and Sarah now have got anxiety. So Sarah comes up with a plan to do a triangle. Hagar, let's go get another wife. You sleep with her, she'll have a baby. That'll be our baby. Our fear will go away and so will our anxiety case solved. Is that how it works? Oh, no, no. This is now a Jerry Springer episode, and they never end happily ever after. That's not how they end. So Abraham, somehow he agrees with this. He's like, all right, I'll marry and sleep with the other gal. Now what happens is Hagar has a son and then God fulfills his promise to Sarah. She has a son. And so now what you have, you've got Sarah, uh, with Isaac, you have got Hagar with Ishmael, Abraham is in the middle and he's gotta pick his favorite, his favorite wife and his favorite son. This is a broken, dysfunctional family system. He decides I will cut off Hagar and Ishmael and I will choose to triangle with Sarah. And Isaac. Some of you asked, does this have to do with anything? This was about 4,000 years ago, right? Ishmael's sons are the Palestinians. Isaac's sons are the Israelites. Today, the war in Israel is a fight between the descendants of two men who are defending their father and their grandmother. Here's what I'm telling you. Some people are like, yeah, our family's messed up, but I'm sure it'll work itself out. No, we've waited 4,000 years and there wouldn't be a war today if they had obeyed God with their family system and not been forced to play favorites. Fast forward, Abraham is the first generation, uh, Isaac is the second generation. You would think that because he grew up in a family where mom and dad triangled and played favorites, that he wouldn't do that. That's exactly what he does. So what happens with Isaac? And now we're in, uh, we've moved from Genesis 21 to Genesis 25. He's got twin boys. So Isaac's got two sons, he's got Jacob and Esau. And guess what happens? They triangle. Who does dad choose to be his favorite? Esau, we hunt, we fish. He's a man's man. We go kill stuff. He's a dude. Mom's favorite Jacob, he's a mama's boy. Failure to launch soft. He's at home, they're playing favorites. Now mom decides, you know, dad's gonna give the firstborn blessing to Esau. I wanted to go to Jacob. So Jacob let's scheme against dad. He's getting old. He's a little blind. Go in and trick 'em and steal the blessing and the birthright. So they do. This is what happens when a mom and a dad play favorites. Now it creates unholy alliances in the family, and now the siblings are at war. The result is, uh, from these two men comes nothing but conflict. And uh, what's interesting is Rebecca calls Jacob quote my son, you can find this in the workbook. Um, dad, Isaac calls Esau, my son. Literally, dad would be like, that's my son. Mom's like, that's my son. Favorites triangles from Esau comes a group of people called the Edomites. Uh, from Jacob comes a line of people called the Jews or the Hebrews. If you read through the Old Testament, they keep having wars because it's a broken, dysfunctional family system that started with favorites, that continued for generations. Fast forward, ready for the mind melt. Jesus is born. Which side of the family? Abraham and Isaac's side of the family. There's a king who tries to kill Jesus. And all the Jewish baby boys, his name is Herod, he descends from Esau family fight for generations until one generation says, we're not doing this anymore. We're gonna repent, we're gonna obey God, we're gonna reset our family. You would think first generation Abraham, second generation Isaac, third generation Jacob. You would think Jacob would be like, we're not doing favorites like our family's been doing favorites, it's not working. That's exactly what he does. Jacob has a bunch of sons and he favors one. Who is it Joseph? So all the boys go out and do manual labor except for Joseph. He's a failure to launch. Mama's boy stays at home and he's the baby, and he gets to wear a coat of many colors. So he literally just struts around like a peacock and just goes out to the

field while all the guys are sweating. And you know, he looks like some sort of hip hop guide, an award show law. He's all bedazzled and blinged out. And so what do the brothers do? They hate him. They throw him in a hold. They leave him for dead. They sell him into slavery, and they tell the father that he's dead and they cut him off. The point is this, um, if you don't deal with an issue in your family, it can become a generational curse. In addition, sometimes this is where now we're really into like varsity meddling. Are you ready? Ready. There are certain cultures that live under a generational curse. This is how well, if you're Hispanic, this is how you do family. You're like, well, what does the Bible say? Doesn't matter, we're Hispanic. If you're Italian, this is how we do Italian family. Um, any other groups that it got cold in here and I need support. Any other, any other ethnic groups that have a very strong demanding way of doing family that's not very healthy. Africans, Africans, Germans, native Americans. Everyone. Okay, so, okay, you ready for you ready for more meddling? Yes. When there's an enmeshed dysfunctional family system that doesn't allow leave in Cleve, this is why the parents put a lot of pressure on the children and the grandparents put a lot of pressure on the grandchildren to marry within that ethnic group. Don't marry someone that's not part of our ethnic heritage. They're gonna do family differently and we're not willing to reconsider how we've done it for generations. Wow, I'm getting murdered by eyes. It's crazy. Alright, um, last one. Okay, how about one more? We'll just, we'll just do four, um, and then you can all post a one star review on the internet. Okay, so the number four thing that causes enmeshment, nodal events cause enmeshment, um, Proverbs 3 25 and 26. Do not be afraid of sudden tear. That's a nodal event, right? It's an acute anxiety, um, or of the ruin of the wicked when it comes for the Lord will be your confidence and keep your foot from being caught. So here's what a nodal event is. A nodal event is a big event, positive or negative, that has generational implications. It's like a quake. And then there's aftershocks for generations. There are good and bad nodal events and they affect a family system, birth and death. If somebody is born and somebody dies, those are nodal events. A marriage and a divorce. Those are nodal events. Empty nest, the kids move out. Mom and dad are alone. That's a nodal event. Um, if you move from one country to another, that's a nodal event. If your family moves from one state to another, that's a nodal event. Um, as well, if there is a war, that's a nodal event. If you live through an act of terrorism or if there's an economic depression or recession, those can be nodal events as well. What happens when there is a nodal event? There is pressure toward enmeshment. The family needs to get together to help each other. Okay? This, this, I don't want to tell you, but you need to know. Some families only feel close when there's a crisis. So they keep creating crises. Okay? Woo, there's healing going on in the room. Okay, that's good. And sometimes it's like, why is there always a conflict or a drama or emergency or a group text or a family meeting or a crisis? Because as people try to leave and cleave and differentiate, we want to do enmeshment. So we need to create crises to get everybody back together. We'll talk about this in another sermon, and for the three of you that come back, it'll be life changing. Um, let me close with a story. Can I close with a story? I should close. I'll close with the story. Okay, let me close with the story and it kind of illustrates everything I'm saying. And it's a story, uh, that happened many years ago. And, uh, and I'll tell you this story. There were two nodal events. And the two nodal events were grandpa died of a heart attack. It was acute and sudden and unexpected. And as they spent time with grandma, they realized grandma had dementia and she was in a cognitive decline. Um, when grandpa was around, he took care of her. So he would do the driving, he would pay the bills, he would care for her. He was a good caregiver. Caretaker, he was a loving husband. Once he was gone, they realized, oh, grandma's not doing as well as we thought. She would forget names of family

members. She would get lost and disoriented, and every time she would go out with a car, she would come back with a dent. So these are two nodal events, two nodal events. What happens then is fear hits the family. Can you sense it? Yeah. Oh my gosh, what's gonna happen? And, and then anxiety. Now there's the group text. Now there's the email chain. Uh, now, now they're calling each other. Now triangles are happening. The these siblings are so stressed out, they gotta call this sibling. And, and these siblings are calling these siblings. And now there's all these interlocking triangles and the anxiety's rising. It's a true story. What happened then was the family decided, enmeshment, we all need to get together and we all need to come to the same conclusion. We gotta figure out how to save grandma. Okay, question. Do we need to care for grandma? A hundred percent. But here's what they did. They called one big meeting. What happens in the family meeting? The least mature members tend to be the most fearful and anxious, and they do most of the talking, and they're triggering fear and anxiety in the whole family system. So this leads to a desire for what counselors will call a quick fix. An immature family system that is enmeshed is always looking for a quick fix. Well, you just need to take that supplement, go to that doctor, meet with that pastor, cast out this demon, read that book and it'll be fine. Usually there is no such thing as a quick fix, right? Usually life is hard and it takes some time and you gotta commit to a process. Sometimes there's a miracle, but usually there's a process. So they, they're, they're in the meeting and they decide, we have to decide right now what we're doing. We gotta fix this. And there's a lot of anxiety. There's one daughter, granddaughter who's the caregiver. She's always been the caregiver, and she is sensing all of this anxiety. Her husband is sitting next to her and he feels very uncomfortable. He said later, he said, in that moment, I should have said, Hey, let's pray. Let's all take 24, 48 hours. Let's differentiate all the couples. Go figure out kind of what your recommendation would be for grandma and let's different families go pray. Maybe make a different recommendation. How much time and energy can you give to care for grandma? And then let's have another meeting and let's figure out what we can all do to provide the best caregiving plan for grandma. He said, I didn't do that. He said, and he said, my wife with tears in her eyes and a lot of emotions, said, well, we have an extra room at our house. Grandma can live with us. Okay, now the husband just had a nodal event. Now he has fear and anxiety and everybody's like, oh, thank you so much. We love you. That's so kind of you. Quick fix. He knows this hasn't fixed anything. There's a lot of work to do. He's driving home with his wife. He tries to broach the subject, honey, we didn't pray about that. We didn't agree to that. We didn't. And she immediately got very emotional. She's like, you need to be more loving. I'm just trying to save grandma. He's like, oh boy. He thinks so. He says, he says, I was gonna give it some time. Figured we'd talk at dinner the next night, let things cool down. He said, I came home from work full plan in place. Grandma's house is going up for sale. Here's the realtor. Um, we're going to go through grandma's stuff in 48 hours. The things she wants to keep, we're gonna keep the rest, we're gonna let the family go through. Then we're gonna have a garage sale. The movers are scheduled, they're coming to your house. Grandma's gonna be here in, you know, certain number of minutes. He's like, oh, Oh no. Everybody shows up at the house with grandma and her stuff. Grandma walks in. Grandma's not doing so good. Come to find grandma. Doesn't do well. Going up and down stairs. The whole family's there. They're all very emotional and grandma's there. It's very awkward. A lot of fear and anxiety. So his wife says, well, she can have my, he grandma can have my husband's office. He works from home or he used to because the bedrooms are upstairs and on the main floor is the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, and his office. So she just kicked him out of his office. Next thing you know, everybody's taking everything out of his office and they're moving grandma in. Is it

awkward in that moment to say something? Yeah. You're like, well grandma, you know, you're kind of, you're in a tough place. So they move grandma in Now, uh, they used to gather in the living room, but now grandma's spending her whole day in the living room. She's sitting in dad's chair watching television, and she really likes to watch political news loudly. This is a true story. And if it's your life, we have a prayer team. Um, and so what happens is now all of a sudden the center of the home is all day and night, very loud political news. Is that a joyful or an anxious environment? That's a very anxious environment. Okay? And so now what happens is, the family used to have family movie night. Not anymore. They used to have family game night. Not anymore. Um, the kids stop bringing their friends over. Grandma goes to bed early and she is a light sleeper. So when grandma goes to bed, everybody goes to their bedroom and shuts the door, and the family's not together. The, the kids grow up and they start to differentiate lunch. Some get married, some go off to college. Fast forward 10 years, I am meeting with the couple And he says, I said, how are you feeling? He said, I feel abandoned. I feel lonely. I feel hurt. I feel rejected. And I, I feel that the day that she made that decision, she chose, she chose her grandmother and her family over me. And he said, I, I'm very lonely and I'm very hurt. And she got emotional. She's like, well, you know, I tried to look. He's like, how many date nights have we not gone on? How many vacations have we not gone on? And he asked, when's the last time you went to church? She said, well, it's been a few years 'cause I can't find someone to care for grandma on Sunday. He said, I used to go to church with the kids and now I go alone. He said, and and he said, we're empty nesters. We should be going on dates and you know, going to see our kids at college and going on vacation. I said, we can't. I asked her, I said, how do you, how do you feel? Here's what she said. She said, I feel exhausted and I don't feel appreciated. She said, I have made massive sacrifices. She didn't use the word care, but to care for. And she said, I was just trying to love and help. And she said, I don't feel, I don't feel appreciated and I feel exhausted. Okay? And you know what? They're both kind of right. Amen. And she said, I was just trying to love and serve my family. He said, me and the kids are your family and you didn't prioritize us. They started bawling. They're very emotional. They love Jesus. They love each other, but they're in a broken system. They can't just try harder and make this work. They need to reset the system. So what I said was, you guys have gotta forgive each other. There's bitterness here. Uh, in addition, you need to repent to your children. We're sorry that, that, that we affected your childhood without even really thinking through the complications and implications. Number one, so that your children don't carry bitterness into their marriage. And number two, that they don't just do what you did. Like, you want them to know that this was not a good family system. I said, and you need to meet with her extended family. And I said, you need to have a hard conversation. They have not financially given they're not serving, they're not helping. They pushed all of this responsibility on you and just said, you're so great. We love you. We appreciate you. Thank you. I said, and it's time for them to step up and it's time for them to take on some responsibility. And it's time for the two of you to reset your marriage. And what I told them was this. I said, you don't need a new spouse, but you need a new marriage. And you don't need a new family, but you need a new family system. Good news. This is the one encouraging point of the whole sermon. They did it. They healed their family, they reconciled with their kids, they got grandmother, the help they need, that she needed, they differentiated and they got to enjoy being a married couple doing life together. I'll never forget it was a Sunday and we had church and uh, they were sitting near me and I saw them holding hands and worshipping. And I had never seen that in my whole life. Okay, here's the big idea. Jesus dies for sin sometimes. The worst Sin infects our family. We need to repent of the sins we've committed. We need to forgive

the sins that they've committed. We need to no longer just be committed to our culture or our extended family, but we need to leave our mother and father and we need to reexamine our culture so that we can architect our marriage and our life and our family according to the word of God. Okay? I want to give you that freedom to do so. I'll leave it there. We will release the, uh, online audience and I'll do a quick update here at, uh, Trinity Church.