



# *Is Anxiety Ruining Your Family?*

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Pastor Mark here, a special, special, special, uh, series of conversations with my wife, grace. We've been married faithfully 31 years, and, um, in a series right now leaving Cleave on family systems and how to architect your immediate and extended family to bless your marriage and children for generations. It's basically what to do and what not to do. In addition to the sermons, you can find at [realfaith.com/cleave](http://realfaith.com/cleave), I've got a special four-part series with my wife, grace, where we talk about this very practically and share from our own marriage and experience. And so I really hope you enjoy it. And again, you can find all the content including the workbook, along with the sermons, [realfaith.com/cleave](http://realfaith.com/cleave), CLEAVE. Ready to go? Sure. Okay. Uh, mark and Grace Driscoll here. Welcome back to The Real Marriage Podcast. Uh, we're doing a short series on leave and cleave and, uh, if you go to [realfaith.com](http://realfaith.com), there's also full sermons and a full workbook. It's a 21 day journey, um, to help couples figure out how to have a healthy family system and have that conversation with themselves and their extended family. And so, uh, the concept of leaving Cleve, uh, comes from Genesis 2 24 in the King James version. And I'm gonna, we're gonna talk about enmeshment today, so I'm gonna sketch it out. I'm gonna verbal processor and visual, and then I wanna talk to you about enmeshment. So, um, here's kind of how I see it. Um, there's a tension within each person to be an individual and to be part of a group. We don't want to be completely alone, but we don't want to be controlled by other people. Um, and so on one side, uh, we'll call it cutoff, and this comes from, uh, Bowen's family systems. This is some of their language. Uh, and meme would be on the other side. There's always tension here. And so throughout life In different seasons, like when you're, you know, a baby, you're here. Ideally when you're a teenager, you're here. And when you become an adult, you're moving toward here. Independence and differentiation. Um, and then really the healthy, So enmeshment is fully dependent. Your Communication, your needs are being met fully by each other. Um, or the person caring for you. Um, everything is connected. There's nothing yet that's not connected in your life when you're enmeshed. Okay. So enmeshment is, you really don't have an identity as an individual. Yeah. Um, and you're so concerned about your family that, um, you have a hard time becoming an adult, making your own plans, living your own life, because what happens in here, um, there are things, uh, some nodal events will happen. Talk about this and The fight, flight, freeze concepts then, and Then the caregiver. Mm-Hmm. So, nodal events are big events that kind of shake the entire family. Think of it like an earthquake, and there's tremors and everybody feels it. And it can last for generations. So, um, that can be somebody marries into the family or somebody dies or divorces out of the family, an addition or subtraction of the fa to the extended family. Um, this can be somebody gets cancer, somebody, um, it could be an issue like moving across state Mm-Hmm. Or immigration to a new country or living through bankruptcy or war or bankruptcy struggle. Big events. And the different people in the family respond differently. Some fight and they escalate and they get emotional and they carry a lot of anxiety. And since a family's an emotional system, the anxiety gets transferred. Um, and then flight, some people just disappear. They'll either emotionally disappear, uh, they'll physically leave. Teenagers will run away from home, or they shut down. They shut down, or they just move halfway across the country to get away from it. Freeze. Some people are so overwhelmed by the nodal event and all the emotions and all the processing in the family, they just don't know what to say or do they just kind of freeze? I was Commenting Covid. Yeah. In, in Covid. This was for sure. And then care, there's usually in a family, somebody who's like, people are hurting, I'm gonna take care of everybody. And they become the burden carrier and they take responsibility and they're like, you know, my brother's not doing good, I'm gonna save him. And they can get a savior complex And they need to be needed. So, Well, these people always graduate, gra um,

they gravitate rather toward enmeshment. And so let's talk about, um, we'll talk about these in the next, so to today we'll talk about enmeshment. Next episode we'll talk about cutoff. And then, uh, last episode we'll talk about differentiation. So enmeshment, what is that? Who is that? What does that look like? Um, it's common for women. Um, women tend to be really enmeshed with their parents, more so than boys, but More emotionally connected in These days and times that we're facing, we see a lot of over mother boys as well. So enmeshment would be, you know, I am, we talked about this just in our relationship where I would call, when we would get in a fight, I would call my mom when we were newly married instead of praying, going to the Lord or having wise counsel outside of the extended family that we both agreed on and trusted, or just praying and going to you and saying, okay, how do we figure this out? I instead would go to my mom saying, I need you to pray. We're fighting about this. Arguing about, how do you know? I, I would try and get advice, but it's not fair for my mom, for you or for me to put that on her. That's not her responsibility anymore once I'm married. And there's a difference between privacy and secrecy. That's right. Secrecy is something really bad is happening and we're trying to hide it so we don't get caught. Privacy is just not your business. Right. So let's say you're a 13-year-old girl, you know, and you've got a crush on a boy and every day after school you talk to your mom about that. Once you're a 33-year-old married woman, um, you can't be sharing Right. All the intimate details. I was very through that of your life. Yeah. Just as an example, all of a sudden it's like, what was, 'cause what was okay at one life stage Yes. Is unhealthy at the next. And so, you know, I think one of the reasons why it's harder for moms to allow differentiation is, I mean, just talk about what it's like to act when a, when a when a life starts, there is no differentiation between the mother and the baby. I mean, it's complete enmeshment is where it starts. Yeah. And I was a stay-at-home mom. And so for me it was even more so, which I believe got intended it that way. 'cause that's the bonding and connection that's supposed to happen with your child. But as they get older and as you train them up to mature and grow and be outside of the, the family unit and not be enmeshed, there's a process that's supposed to happen. I was more the caregiver, and so I would serve incessantly. Like I just served my kids, I did everything for them, thinking that out of that they would learn to serve, but instead they thought, oh, this is great. I'm just gonna Keep receiving. Yeah. It's so nice to have free staff. Yeah. And that's not healthy for boys either. Like, I can train my daughters up and how to be, you know, busy at home and, um, and live with discernment and wisdom in the world. Um, but for boys, you gotta come in and as a dad and help them not be enmeshed with me anymore. At, at a certain point. And you, you did that and we had to figure that out. But for moms, there is like a, in each stage there's a release, there's a process of almost, it's not bad grieving, it's healthy grief. It's like, okay, they're moving into their next season of maturity. I need to release a little more and release a little more as they're ready and as they're maturing and growing. But there's a, a, a grief for a mom because it means I'm not as needed and it's a good thing. But it's, and emotionally it can be hard. It pulls at the heartstrings. And so if we don't do that in each season, we just keep holding on as moms until they leave the home. And then we still try and stay in their life and help them make all those decisions and, and try and speak too much Or don't even allow them to leave. So this is the enmeshment means you can't leave mother and father. That's right. You're still financially dependent, you're emotionally dependent, uh, maybe even physically dependent. This is where you have an entire generation of young men that have been over mothered, under fathered. They are enmeshed, they're not leaving home and they're not launching, they're not in the workforce. Statistically, uh, we've got the lowest percentage of able bodied young men in the history of the country that have just exited the workforce. They are literally just living with their mother. And,

uh, they're completely over mothered. And, and part of what you've got with the enmeshment is the men are not leaving their mother and father and oftentimes they don't even have a father. Yeah. And so if you're in a single parent home where let's say, uh, there's only a mother, the odds are the children are going to be over mother. Mm-Hmm. And they're, and if, and the children are going to be enmeshed. Well, and studies show that boys learn to be men by watching their fathers. Exactly. And if there's not a father in the home, they're only watching their mothers, which mothers are great, but they're not good fathers. Yeah. Well, a good mom is a bad dad. A good dad is a bad mom. That's where if you are a young man and you wanna leave your mother and father and differentiate and be an adult and get ready to get married and have your own family, if you don't have a father in your life, then that's where church comes in. Yes. And you've gotta find the equivalent of a spiritual father. Yeah. Paul says of Titus, uh, Timothy on s you're my sons. And so, um, the Bible says that when we're in church, older men should be like fathers. And so this is where church is really critical and important. 'cause the church is another kind of family. It's an extended spiritual family. Yeah. And for single moms too. That's the only option they have. Yeah. And a lot of times too, if you grow up in a single parent home, if you say you're a young man is like you're concerned about your mom and you're, you're like, if I leave, she's all alone. And who's gonna look after her? And who's gonna take care of her? And so the, these can be some, um, some some sad circumstances Yeah. That produce some limitations. Mm-Hmm. Um, but if you do marry, but you don't leave your mother and father and you're still enmeshed and you don't have that bright line between now we're a family leaving mother and father to cleave or pursue one another, then what happens is the marriage suffers for the extended family. Yeah. So maybe talk about that. 'cause usually a mom wants to pull toward enmeshment. And usually it's a dad who pushes toward differentiation or cutoff. That's why when, uh, our boys hit a certain age, I said, you've been a wonderful mom. You've done a great job. I'm now going into the driver's seat. You're in the passenger seat. It takes a man to raise a man. Mm-Hmm. And now that they're taller than you and stronger than you, They don't wanna listen to you. Yeah. They still need to honor their mother. Need respect. Yeah. But at the end of the day, like, you know, dad's gotta pick up from here. 'cause I understand guys. Mm-Hmm. Um, but what happens to a married couple if either the husband or the wife is enmeshed with their extended family and they've not left their mother and father, Uh, they can't really become one flesh because they're still trying to navigate and being pulled in the direction of the extended family. And so it makes it really hard to focus just on you as a new husband or a new wife, and make a life that is what God is calling you to. Because you're hearing all these voices of what you're supposed to be doing from extended family, which may or may not be good, but it's not always the Holy Spirit. And so when I'm focused on you and your needs and our needs together to build a healthy family, then we can cleave and become one flesh. But if I've got all this, I'm trying to, well, but I need to do this for my mom or my sister or my brother, or my aunt or my uncle, or especially if you're the caregiver. Yes. Then I am not able to keep my law of priority with my husband, um, as, as easily. And so my, I have too many distractions from what God has called me to do in marriage. So we've got, uh, three married kids. So what would their priorities have been before they married versus after they married? Um, for our daughters, I mean, I think it's, it's a little different between sons and daughters, but for our sons, they need to, to figure out how to, you know, get a job, make money, provide how to, you know, mature in certain areas so that they'd be ready to have a wife and future kids. Um, so they needed to have you help them figure that out. Um, and they needed to still honor me. And, and the cool thing about our boys is that they would come to me about relationship stuff. So when they were interested in a gal, they would

come to me and, okay, how do I understand this about her? And how do I talk to her about this? How do I consider her in this? So I was included in that part, which isn't in measurement, it's just wise Counsel. No, what that is, you go from a caregiver to a coach. Yep. A caregiver is, I'm going to take care of you and a coach is I'm gonna teach you how to make your own decisions, carry your own responsibilities. But now that they're married, they do that with their wife. Now if they want our counsel as a couple and wanna ask us questions, we're, we're happy to share whatever, and they can choose to or not take the council. Um, but it's different now. He, you know, my sons don't have to come to me and ask me all those questions, where with our daughters, they, I wanted to teach them how to honor their future husband and be respectful, um, and what that would look like and care for their husband someday. Um, and run a home and, you know, figure out who, what their identity was with a future spouse. Um, and so now that our one daughter is married, her husband helps her do that and she's able to honor him and work through that. She doesn't have to come to me and, you know, ask the same questions that she used to ask me because he's taking care of her and she trusts him and he trusts her and they're figuring it out. Well. And so like before we marry, one of the great errors I think that Christian families make, they say, here's my priorities, God and family. No. Um, God Yes. And then spouse. Yep. 'cause we were a family before we had kids and we still need to be a family after our kids launch and start their own families. And sometimes the reason that there is enmeshment is the marriage of mom and dad is not solid. Right. And so, um, the kids are feeling the pressure glue holding of Yeah. Gluing the marriage together or managing the dysfunction of mom and dad. That leads to a lot of enmeshment. Um, but for us now, like priorities, God and then our marriage. And then, uh, it wasn't just the kids, but it was each of the five kids and having an individual relationship with them. 'cause they're different personalities and different maturities and different life stages. And then work, which is, uh, for us ministry. But now, you know, the kids are marrying, they're starting their own family. So it can't just be family. It's like, well, our family and then their families, we wanna love and support and serve their families. And then as they add kids, I mean, it just gets a lot more beautiful and more complicated and there's more people to consider in the system. Um, but within that, I think it is hard because if, um, if you don't agree on this and talk about this, the constant tension is some people in the family are like, I am. I just, I I want out. 'cause it's too much. It's too intense. Yeah. And others are like, and, and a lot of the pressure sometimes is to get sucked back in. And, you know, you've got a real problem when, let's say it's a husband and a wife and every time the family has something, maybe it's too much. Maybe it's too many meetings and family dinners and crises and emergencies and texts at, you know, midnight. And it's like, we don't have a good boundary here. All of their drama ends up in our house and our life. It doesn't mean that you don't care, but you don't carry it. Um, and then you know, you've got a problem when one spouse is like, enough already, I'm done. This is too much. And then the other spouse still gets sucked in. Yeah. And so this is when all of a sudden, um, let's say for example, families getting together for meals multiple times a week and doing all the holidays and vacations together and, and it's extended family is the only concept of family. If you're going and your spouse isn't, you've got major division. Yeah. And they're like, well I gotta, I can't. So I was talking to somebody, um, and they kept going to everything that their extended family ever did and the spouse asked, you know, why do you keep doing that? And they said, well, I can't abandon my family. It's like, no, no, we're a family. That's your extended family. But when that happens, you've got division and Jesus says, a divided house falls down, it doesn't work. And so, you know, this doesn't work, but it really doesn't work when you start adding kids. Well, and I think a change of perspective in that is that if we wanna be a healthy

family, but they're not a healthy extended family and they wanna keep pulling us that way, the best thing we can actually do to love them is to be a healthy family and model what that looks like so that then they realize, oh, I guess we aren't healthy in some areas if we keep enabling by going back and playing that role that they want us to play in the previous years of our life or whatever. Now as a married, new married adult, we're not helping them. There's no way to highlight their issues. And the Lord could work through that with them and maybe they could become healthy too and see that they don't have good boundaries or whatever the issues might be. But when we're willing to work on a healthy relationship, then it's an opportunity for them to do that as well. Well, no, I close with this too. It also is discipling your own children. Yep. If your extended family has a bad system and it's dysfunctional and it's not healthy and it's not, and it's, let's say it's enmeshed and it's everybody's into everybody's business too much. And every holiday is a head-on collision and a lot of tension and vacations come with a lot of expectation. And it's not like there's a bunch of families that are extended families. Um, it's one big, enmeshed family. Um, boy, then your kids are growing up in that environment. Mm-Hmm. And they are thinking that that's how they should do marriage and family. That's where a dysfunctional family system becomes a generational curse. Yes. And, um, and so I'll close of this comes to mind. So we did this, um, thanks for verbal processing with me, babe. We'll deal with cutoff in the next episode. But this is, um, what we talked about with our, our kids that are married before they got married. So, uh, here's uh, grace and I, and we had five kids, now three of them are married. So here's, uh, now one of our other kids is married and one of our kids is married and one of our kids is married. And here's what we have now, now what we've got, we don't have a family. We have four families. Mm-Hmm. And that would be our extended family. And that extended family is made up of four immediate families. So let's say we wanna do Christmas or Thanksgiving or a trip or a vacation or I don't know, we're all getting together for, you know, mom and dad's anniversary or a baby's born or a wedding comes or whatever family Yeah. Dinner Then whatever this is that overlaps the families need to talk about it. Mm-Hmm. And they need to come to an agreement of here's what we're gonna do. And one family may say, you know, for Christmas, we're gonna take a trip, we're not gonna be there. Mm-Hmm. They, they are a family. They have the right to make that decision to it's Thanksgiving and we got time off work and we're just gonna hang out with our immediate family. We're not gonna get with extended family. And so there shouldn't be any, um, judgment. There shouldn't be any attack. Different families get to come to their own decisions. Mm-Hmm. When it's enmeshed, there's one decision for everybody. And if you don't agree with it, the rest of the family pressures you or they cut you off. And we'll deal with that in the next episode. Okay.