

The Impact of Your Family Heritage

In this chapter we are going to look at the impact and the importance of your family of origin. The family that you grew up in is often referred to as your family of origin. It is where you came from. This family had an impact on your life that was very powerful and significant. As I mentioned in the first chapter, your family of origin plays a key role in forming your values and your outlook on life.

You developed your sense of identity in your family of origin. Life's most basic questions are answered during this stage of your life: Questions such as, "Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here?" Your family is also the place where you first experienced loving relationships. (Or abusive relationships) It is the place where you learned to express love to others. (Or to withhold love from others) Your family modeled for you (either good or bad) what it means to be a father, a husband, a wife, a mother, a son, a daughter, a brother or a sister.

Identity Formation

1. Family Bonding. Bonding is the forming of deep and loving attachments with others. In Ephesians 3:17 the Apostle Paul prays that we will be "rooted and established in love." In Colossians 3:14 he encourages us to "put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity". Paul wants us to be bonded together in the love of God when we become part of the family of God.

Family bonding defines what can be called your family identity. When you introduce yourself to others you identify yourself by saying your name. You have a family name and given names. Your family name defines your family identity and your given names define your individual or personal identity.

For example, my family name is Ballard. The name Ballard identifies the family that I was born in to. It is my family identity. My values, mannerisms, and certain physical characteristics originate from the Ballard family. To understand and appreciate me, you need to understand my family identity. There are many characteristics that are common to the members of my family. Every Ballard shares a common family identity.

In **Asian** cultures, parents give names to their children that define their personal character and skill. For example, parents may choose a name that speaks out wealth and fortune. Or they may choose another name that describes beauty and appearance. Another name would indicate mind and intelligence. Lastly, parents might choose a name that represents strength and power. This becomes the child's personal and family identity. His values and certain physical characteristics originate from his family name. To understand and appreciate this person, we need to understand his family identity

There are other "family" groups that have influenced you and that have help form your identity. Ethnic "families", social "families" and religious "families" all play a role in shaping your identity. If, for example, if you grew up in **Korea** and were bonded to the **Korean** culture, your identity is associated with that culture. All **Korean** people have certain common characteristics

Family of Origin 1

and values. Your identity has been formed and influenced by **Korean** values.

If you accepted Jesus Christ and embraced Christianity in your life, you became part of the family of God. At the point you became a Christian, you took on a new identity in Christ. Your values and worldview changed. The Bible says that you became a “new creation” and that “old things passed away” and new things came.

2. Boundary Definition Defining your personal boundaries is the second major factor in identity formation. You have a “family” identity as we just saw, but, in addition, you have an individual identity, as well. You are a unique individual and you are different from every other member of your family. I, for example, am not just a Ballard. I am LARRY Ballard! I share many of the common characteristics of the Ballard family, but I do not share all of them. I am different from every other Ballard in the world, including my brothers, my sisters, my father and my mother.

You, for example, may be **Korean** and, therefore, share many of the values and characteristics of the Korean people. However, you are a unique individual and are, therefore, different from every other **Korean** person in the world. Your ethnic identity is **Korean**, but your individual identity makes you distinct from all the other **Koreans**.

We see this concept expressed in first Corinthians chapter twelve. There the apostle Paul declares that Christians are all part of one body yet, at the same time, they are individual members of that body. We have a corporate (family) identity as the Body of Christ, but we have an individual identity as unique members of that body.

“The body is a unity, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.” I Corinthians 12:12

“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.” I Corinthians 12:14

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” I Corinthians 12:27

Different Family Types

Just as each individual has a distinct personality, each family has a distinct “family” personality. Every group of individuals exhibits certain characteristics that makes it distinct from every other group. Family personalities can be broken down into four different types, based on the balance between family bonding and personal boundaries.

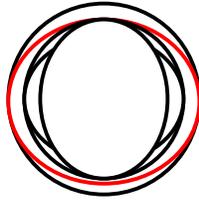
A. Extremely Close Families. These families are very strong on family bonding but they are very weak on defining personal boundaries. Extremely close families emphasize the commitment to the family. The individual is secondary to the family. You make family decisions and not individual decisions in these families. Family loyalty is demanded and loyalties outside the family are not permitted.

Most **Asian** cultures, including the **Korean** culture, are considered to be group cultures. In group cultures, decisions are usually made within the group. This process usually takes multiple meetings before any decisions are made. **Western** cultures, like **American**, are considered to be

Family of Origin 2

individualistic cultures. In this setting, decisions are usually made more by the individual rather than the group.

The diagram below illustrates an extremely close family. The red circle represents the family and the black circles represent the family members, father, mother, and children. As you can see it is difficult to distinguish between the different members in this family.



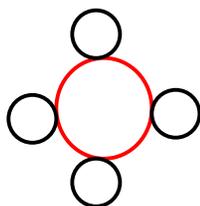
In an extremely close family, you are expected to participate in family events and your absence is considered disloyalty. Individual friendships outside the family are not permitted. You have “family” friends, not individual friends. Individuals of extremely close families are not allowed to think for themselves or to make decisions that are contrary to what the family decides.

Dave and his wife, a newlywed couple, lived in a three-bedroom apartment. Unfortunately neither of them cooked. So they invited Dave’s parents to live with them. After a year, Dave’s brother got divorced. He came to live with his mom and brought his son with him. A year later the same thing happened to his sister and she came to live with Dave and his wife too. Then Dave’s wife became pregnant. Eventually this brought chaos and conflict to the whole group because life became too entangled for this family.

B. Extremely Distant Families. These families are very strong on defining individual boundaries but are very weak on family bonding. Extremely distant families emphasize the importance of the individual. The family is secondary to the individual. You are expected to make your own decisions and to be personally responsible.

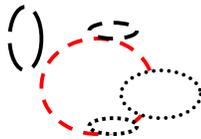
There is very little loyalty to the family and there is almost no common decision-making in the extremely distant family. These families rarely gather together for special celebrations and each person lives his life separately from other family members.

The diagram below illustrates the extremely distant family. The red circle represents the family and the black circles represent the family members; father, mother, and children. In this family you can identify the individual members very clearly, but they do not have any contact with each other.



C. Confused Families. These families are very weak on both family bonding and boundary definition. Confused families lack a commitment to the family. They also lack a clear definition of individual responsibility. These families are often paralyzed in their ability to function both, as a family unit, and as individuals. Confusion arises because the distinction between the family and the individual is not clear. People are unsure what is the responsibility of the family and what is the responsibility of the individual.

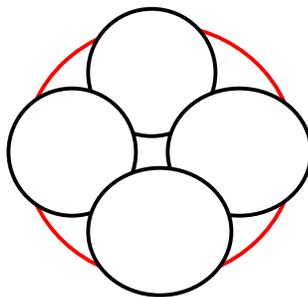
The diagram below illustrates the confused family. There is no clear definition for either the family or for the individual members.



D. Intimate Families. These families are strong on family bonding and are also strong on boundary definition. There is a healthy balance between the commitment to the family and the responsibility of the individual. Family loyalty is expected, but not demanded, in an intimate family. Individual responsibility is encouraged with the understanding that you are accountable to your family.

Extremely close families can generally be described as having an unhealthy dependency. Extremely distant families often have an unhealthy independency. Intimate families are generally interdependent. Strengths balance weaknesses. Family members need each other but they are not overly dependent on one another. Your goal should be to create an intimate family that is healthy and balanced.

The diagram below illustrates the intimate family. The red circle represents the family and the black circles represent the family members, father, mother, and children. There is a balance between the family and the individual.



Leaving, Being United, and Becoming One

God's plan for marriage is stated in Genesis chapter two and verse twenty-four. This verse is repeated in the New Testament on three different occasions. Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew

Family of Origin 4

19:5 when he was discussing the issue of divorce. Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 5:31 in his discussion about the roles of husbands and wives in marriage. He also quotes this verse in I Corinthians 6:16 when he warns the Corinthians to avoid sexual immorality.

I have mentioned this plan previously but now I want us to take a deeper look at the principles it contains. There are three distinct phases in this process of leaving your family of origin and forming a new family. The first phase is 1) Leaving your father and mother. The second phase is 2) Being united with your spouse and the third phase is 3) Becoming one flesh. I want us to look at this transition from your family of origin to your new family. How you make this transition will determine how healthy and successful your new marriage will be.

After several years of preparing for their marriage, **Pin tou and Mei li** moved in with **Pin tou's** parents. **Pin tou** was very happy with their new living arrangement. Before their marriage they had lived separately with their individual families. Now they could live together and see **Pin tou's** parents more often. Once they started a family of their own, **Pin tou's** Mom could help with the children.

In this example we can see how culture influences the family system. We need to understand the difference between biblical truth and cultural traditions. In other words, we need to ask ourselves some very important questions about these relationships. What happens in a marriage relationship when parents are too attached? What happens when a spouse is more dependent on his parents than his mate? How can you separate from your parents and still honor them? Once you begin to consider these questions, you can begin to separate your culture from the truth.

A. Leaving Your Father and Mother.

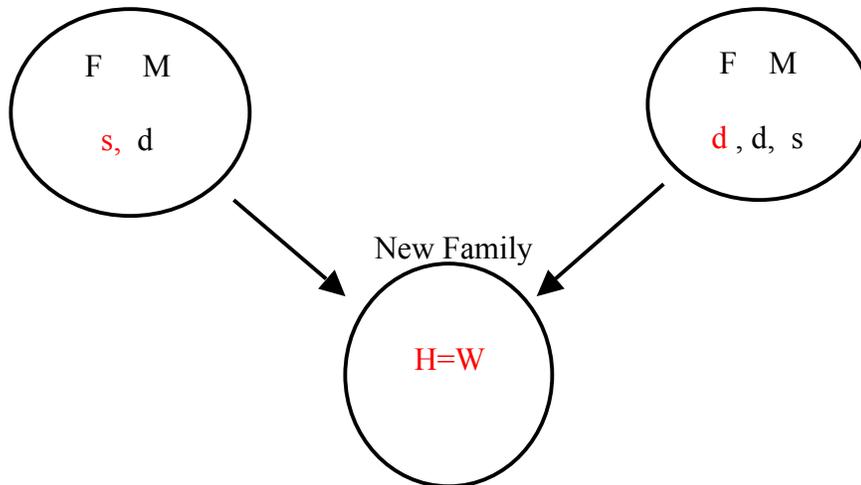
Each culture has an expected pattern for this process to take place. There may be variations in how this transition happens, but the principle is universal. A shift needs to take place in the role that a parent plays in the life of its child when the child gets married.

Leaving your father and mother is not primarily a geographic issue, although making a geographic change can sometimes be helpful. It is primarily a spiritual issue, an emotional issue, a financial issue, and a relationship issue. A child can move thousands of miles away from its parents but still not have left its parents. The emotional ties and parental controls can extend across the miles of physical separation. By the same token, a child can continue living under the same roof with its parent and yet has successfully “left” its father and mother. The appropriate change in relationship can take place without a change in location. It is much more challenging to make such a change without physical separation, but, nevertheless, it can be made.

Let's look at some of the issues that emerge when a child seeks to make this transition from home. In order to understand this process better, let's use the following diagram as a point of reference.

Male's Family of Origin

Female's Family of Origin



The two circles at the top of the diagram represent the families of origin of both the male and the female. The capital “F” and “M” represent the parents (Father and Mother) in each home. The small “s” and “d” represent the sons and daughters in each family. The arrows in the diagram show a son (s) and a daughter (d) leaving their father and mother and being joined together in the third circle as a husband and wife (H, W) which is labeled “New Family.”

1. Insufficient Development

The first issue I want to look at is the issue of insufficient development. There is a basic parenting input that needs to be imparted to a child as it develops in its family. If that input is missing or lacking for some reason, then a child does not fully mature and is not ready for adult responsibilities. That child will have difficulty embracing the responsibilities involved in building a successful marriage.

In Luke chapter two we have the story of the boy Jesus traveling to Jerusalem with his parents when he was twelve years old to participate in the Feast of Passover. His parents depart for home after the Feast of Passover ends, but they do not realize that Jesus is still in Jerusalem. They return to Jerusalem and eventually find him. He is in the temple talking with the teachers of the law, who were amazed at the depth of his spiritual understanding.

Jesus returns home with his parents and the Bible says he continued to live with them and was obedient to them. In verse 52 we read a description of what happened in his life during that time of development.

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Jesus developed in four areas of his life during those years.

1. Wisdom-Personality development
2. Stature-Physical development
3. Favor with God-Spiritual development

4. Favor with men-Social development.

Even though Jesus was advanced in his spiritual understanding, he still needed to develop in these other areas of his life before he was released into his ministry.

Some children do not receive this basic parenting input while they are growing up. They develop physically but they do not develop in other areas of their life. These children grow up and have adult bodies but they have the emotional development, for example, of a thirteen-year old. These “adults” sometimes have the social skills of teenagers. When these underdeveloped “adults” enter into marriage relationships, their marriages are doomed to fail because they lack the essential skills that make for successful marriages. These people aren’t ready for marriage. They don’t need a marriage partner they need a parent!

Insufficient development happens because of a breakdown in a child’s family of origin. In some cases there has been the loss of a parent by death. If, for example, a child’s father died when he or she was young, it grows up without the input of a father in its life. A similar issue surfaces if someone’s parents divorce each other. In that case, again, a child grows up with little or no relationship with one of its parents. That lack of contact with his or her parent hinders normal child development.

A child may also fail to develop sufficiently because of abuse, chemical addictions, violence, and other dysfunctions in his or her family. When such a child becomes an adult it needs additional parenting input to make up the lack that was there during its years of development. As I mentioned, this person’s primary need is not for a marriage partner. Their primary need is for a parent.

Unfortunately, these individuals are vulnerable emotionally and can be attracted to a parent figure in marriage. A woman, for example, who never had a father, may be attracted to an older man who can fill the void in her life that was left due to the lack of a father. Instead of a husband/wife relationship developing, a father/daughter relationship develops in her marriage. Obviously, this arrangement is not what God intended for marriage.

What can be done for the person who grew up in a situation where he or she was not sufficiently developed? First of all, the Lord himself can step in where there has been a void of natural parenting. He promises to be a father to us and to take us up if we have been forsaken by our parents.

Psalm 68:5 tells us that God will be a, “father to the fatherless, a defender of widows”.

Psalm 27:10 says, “Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me”.

No matter how difficult or painful your childhood years were, God promises to be a father to you and to receive you. When you come to the Lord, he promises to heal you and restore you. He will take up the role of a missing or absent father in your life. He will instruct you and teach you those things that were missing in your natural home.

In addition, God will minister to you through His people, the family of God, to restore your life wherever there has been a lack in your own family. He will use spiritual fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, to make up the missing pieces in your development. The family of God can be a place of healing and restoration to those seeking to overcome the pains of their childhood dysfunctions.

2. Unresolved issues

Some children have unresolved issues with their parents that they carry with them when they leave home. An unresolved issue provides a point of focus for new relationships outside the immediate family. For example, let's say that you grew up in a home where your father was very domineering, stubborn and controlling. His character flaws provoked a reaction inside of your heart and you never found the way to respond to your father positively.

His attitudes and actions caused a reaction in you that was never resolved before you left your home. When you leave home, you will carry this unresolved issue with you wherever you go. It follows you into your marriage. It shows up in your relationship with your employer and in your relationships at church. You may have thought you left this problem behind you when you got away from your father, but it follows you into all your new relationships.

For example, at some point your marriage partner will act in a way that reminds you of your father (or mother). You look at your spouse one day and declare, "You are just like my dad!" (Or mother!). "You are so stubborn and controlling!" you cry in frustration. Why does this happen? Did you have the misfortune of marrying someone exactly like your father or mother?

The reason this reaction emerges is that you carried with you into your marriage an unresolved issue. In this case the issue is your father's stubborn and controlling behavior. It could also be your mother's negative and critical attitude. The problem started in your relationship with your parent, but it carries over into other relationships, as well. You discover that you do not have the grace to successfully relate to stubborn people.

Stubbornness is a sensitive issue for you and your reaction is out of proportion to the offense. For example, you may marry a man with a minor stubbornness issue. But, because of the unresolved issue in your heart, his stubbornness will be amplified into a major problem. Your reaction is similar to what would happen if you broke a bone in your arm. Suppose you broke your left arm and it was still not fully healed. Any physical contact with that arm, no matter how minor, will produce an extreme reaction from you. The same degree of physical contact on your healthy right arm will produce only a minor reaction.

A reaction that is greater than would normally be expected is an indication that you have an unresolved issue in your heart. If you notice such reactions in your own heart, ask the Lord to show you what issues are still not resolved. Some of your reactions in your marriage have very little to do with your marriage. Instead, they are rooted in your relationship with your father or mother. Struggles in your current relationship may have their origins in a previous relationship. Successfully resolving your marital conflicts involves addressing these root issues first.

Let's turn our attention now to how you can overcome these unresolved issues in your life. First

Family of Origin 8

of all, you cannot deny the issue or avoid it. You cannot just ignore your father and try to live your life as though he doesn't exist. Secondly, you probably can't move back home and live with your father again for an indefinite period of time. The pain and breach is often so severe that you would not be able to handle that level of intensity. Too much interaction between you and your father will not heal the breach. Instead, it will cause further breakdowns.

The best approach is a process that can be called, "Controlled, Limited, Contact." You need to have contact with your father, but it needs to happen in a controlled way. It needs to have some limits. For this process to be successful, you need to have some safe, supportive relationships in your life. These relationships give you objective input and provide a place for you to regroup after painful encounters with your father. Your spouse, a Christian friend or a home fellowship can provide this important support for you.

Here is a typical example of how this process works. **Peter** began to experience healing and change in his life after he left home and became a Christian. He got involved in a small group of caring Christians. He experienced breakthroughs in his life and the Holy Spirit began to convict him of his need to forgive his father. He also saw the need to seek his father's forgiveness, as well.

At the encouragement of his Christian friends, he decided to contact his father by phone. **Peter** was excited by the changes God had brought into his life and he felt that he was a different person now. However, within a few minutes after making contact with his father, the two of them began arguing and reacting in the same old patterns. **Peter** hung up the phone feeling frustrated and defeated.

He went back to his wife and his Christian friends and shared what had happened. Everyone prayed for **Peter** and encouraged him to persevere and to not give up. Sometime later **Peter** attempted to make another contact with his father. This time, he was able to talk with his father for a longer period of time before the conversation broke down.

Peter came away from this second contact with his father feeling very discouraged again. However, his Christian friends reminded him, that he had made some progress with his father. The two of them were able to talk together for a few more minutes before the conversation broke down. **Peter** found the strength and grace to continue this process with his father over several years. He was eventually able to have more extended times with his father as he continued to reach out to him. He was finally rewarded with a healed and restored relationship.

Restoration takes time. Healing does not happen instantaneously in many situations. You are on a journey and it will require regular contact with your father or mother. However, the contact needs to be brief initially. Then it can increase as additional healing takes place. The rebuilding process will take place if you are patient and persistent.

3. Dependency

Some children remain in a dependent relationship with their parents beyond the point that is healthy. Some parents will not release their children and want to keep them in a dependent relationship beyond what is healthy also.

What happens in marriage relationships when parents are too attached? In these cases, the children are not allowed to mature. Much of the authority in the family still rest with the parents. They still make decisions for their children, even financial decisions. In this situation, the parents control their children's marriage relationships. This leaves spouses full of resentment towards their partner's parents. Such resentment eventually turns into conflicts that leave the spouses broken-hearted.

God designed the family to be a place of blessing and nurturing for you to grow and develop. The family provides a place of safety and protection for you as you mature. The goal is for you to become an adult that can leave home and establish a new family. If a child does not want to grow up or its parents do not allow their child to grow up, the family becomes a place of bondage and control instead of a place of blessing and nurturing.

In Deuteronomy 32:10-11 the Lord compares his relationship with Israel to the relationship of a mother eagle to her young eaglets.

“In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste, He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.”

There comes a moment when the mother eagle recognizes that it is time for her eaglets to leave the nest. They, obviously, are in no hurry to leave such a comfortable and pleasant environment. The nest is safe and warm. Mother eagle provides all the meals each day and life is very enjoyable for them. The eaglets need some encouragement to make the transition from their present situation.

The first thing that the mother eagle does to initiate this transition is to, literally, tear up the nest. She removes the comfortable, secure, environment of the eaglets. They can't settle down and enjoy the nest in the same way they did in the past. God does a similar thing in your life when it is time for a change. Things that once were comfortable and pleasant suddenly do not feel the same anymore. You can't settle in to your nest in the way you did in the past. These changes are often indicators that it is time to make a transition in your life.

The next thing the mother eagle does is to push her young eaglets out of the nest. She literally forces them to fly. She, of course, doesn't abandon them or let them fall to their destruction. Instead, she swoops down below them and catches them, if they fail to use their wings to fly on their own. She then carries them back to the safety of the nest and begins the process all over until they learn to fly on their own.

This picture of the eagle and her young is a perfect illustration of this process of leaving your father and mother. It is a fearful and uncertain transition. The temptation for both you and your parents is to avoid this step all together. It is much safer to keep the nest together and to stay in the comfort of your familiar surroundings. However, the destiny of the eaglet is not in its mother's nest. Its destiny is found in leaving the nest and learning to fly on its own. Its calling is to be joined to another eagle and to create a new nest and to raise its own eaglets. Your destiny is

Family of Origin 10

also found in leaving your nest and flying on your own.

4. A Transitional Breakdown

What do you do if you believe that it is the Lord's will for you to marry someone but your parents do not agree with that decision? This is one of the most challenging and painful situations you can face. You find yourself trying to balance two important biblical principles.

The first principle is the command in Scripture to honor and obey the Lord no matter what the cost. The second principle is the command in Scripture to honor your father and mother. Normally, these principles will be in agreement and you will not have to make a choice between the two. However, there are situations where there is a conflict between what your parents want and what you believe to be God's will in your life.

Let's look at some things you can do when such a dilemma arises.

First of all, it is important that you pray further about this situation. Ask God to examine your motives and to show you any "blind spots" in your own heart. Ask God to work in the hearts of your parents, as well. Pray that God will reveal His will clearly and that He will remove any hindrances from accepting His will, either in your heart or in your parents' hearts.

Secondly, communicate further with your parents and seek to discover the reasons for their hesitancy to bless your marriage. Sometimes there are other issues that are causing the problem and once those issues are addressed, your parent's opposition to the marriage will clear up. Try to listen to their concerns and to understand their perspective.

Thirdly, do everything you can to honor and respect your parents during this process. Even if you don't agree with their perspective, you can still honor them and treat them in a respectful way. Show them that you value and honor their perspective.

Fourthly, take some additional time to wait before going ahead with the decision. Don't force a quick decision. Be willing to give up your expectations as to when you should get married. Allow the Lord time to change hearts or to bring additional insights. Your parent's reluctance may not mean "no" it may mean, "wait".

Fifthly, trust the Lord to accomplish His will. He is the sovereign Lord and he rules over everything. He is bigger than your parents and he knows what is best for you. If this decision is really his will, he will make a way when it seems like there is no way.

Sixthly, pursue outside counsel to get some objective input about what to do. Seek counsel from an older Christian friend or from your pastor. You do not have an objective viewpoint about the situation and it is helpful to get the perspective of someone who can see things more clearly than you can. The Scriptures tell us that a wise person listens to advice.

Finally, if you have done all these things and your parents are still opposed to your decision to marry this person, you may have to respectfully go against their wishes. Some parents simply are opposed to their child marrying a Christian and they will never approve of that choice. Other parents are self-centered and do not have the interests of their child in mind. They are only

Family of Origin 11

thinking about their own future. They may be selfishly unwilling to release their child to marry anyone.

Such a decision to go against a parent's wishes should not be done quickly or without careful consideration. In fact, it should be a rare exception rather than the normal practice. If you decide to go against your parent's wishes, you need to be prepared for the possible consequences of your decision. They may break off their relationship with you and you could lose their support and blessing.

In addition, you will put your new marriage under added stress and pressure. You will live under the pressure to prove that you were right and that your parents were wrong. Normal conflicts that come up after you are married will take on abnormal significance because of your parent's opposition. During times of normal conflict, you will be vulnerable to thoughts such as, "Maybe my parents were right!"

B. Being United To Your Partner

The second phase described in Genesis 2:24 is the phase of "being united to your partner". The first phase, which we just looked at, was "leaving your father and mother". You don't just leave your parents for the sake of leaving. You leave them for the sake of being united to someone else.

The concept described by this phase is similar to the concept of welding two pieces of metal together. A proper weld will actually be stronger than either of the pieces of metal being welded together. The phrase implies a very strong and powerful joining together of two lives. It carries with it the idea of holding on to one another tightly. In order for a marriage to be successful, the husband and wife need to commit themselves totally to one another. Their strongest loyalty needs to be to one another.

Your primary commitment when you were growing up was to your parents. Your first loyalty was to them and your strongest bond was with your mother and father. You were accountable to them and they were the ones you communicated with about the important issues of life. When you leave your father and mother and are united to your marriage partner, your relationship with your parent changes.

Your parent now becomes a supportive and secondary relationship in your life instead of the primary relationship. Your marriage partner becomes your primary relationship. Your commitment to your spouse now takes precedent over your commitment to your parents. This transition is very difficult for some **Asian** families because parent/child loyalties are very strong in **Asian** cultures. Some parents expect and demand a primary place in their child's life, even after he or she is married. They expect him or her to be more loyal to them than to his or her partner. This expectation can cause tension between their child and his or her spouse.

Sometimes going against cultural norms is considered equal to going against your parent's authority. In **Asian** cultures, this is devastating to the family as a whole. Parents, to a large degree, depend on their children for their future needs and security. The Bible says that we are to care for our elder parents (Mark 7:6-13). But there needs to be a balance in our relationships.

Family of Origin 12

Marriage is built upon the husband/wife commitment. This commitment is to be the strongest bond in the family. If a son, for example, remains more committed to his parents after he is married, than he is to his wife, it will weaken his marriage commitment. If parents do not release their son to be united with his wife, there will be tension over his loyalty to his family verses his loyalty to his wife.

Making the transition from your family of origin into marriage is not easy. It involves leaving the secure and the familiar environment of your family and stepping into a relationship that is new and untested. You know who you are in your own family, but you don't know who you are yet in your marriage. There are many fears and uncertainties you face as you begin this journey into marriage. The temptation you encounter is to return home to what is familiar, when challenges and difficulties arise in your marriage. However, if you "hold on tightly" to your partner, God will see you through the difficult times and help you to "become one flesh."

C. Becoming One Flesh

God's goal in marriage, as we mentioned earlier, is "oneness." He wants you and your spouse to become one flesh. In Matthew 19:6, as you may remember, Jesus said, "So they are no longer two, but one". Marriage, by definition, involves an irrevocable transaction. A union takes place that cannot be reversed. Even though people break their marriage vows and divorce one another, they are unable to completely separate from one another. When a divorce takes place, part of a person stays with his or her partner. Divorce is not a separation of two people, it is the tearing apart of one shared life.

"Becoming one" happens both instantaneously and over time. Two people are joined together and "become one" when they are officially declared married by a pastor or state official during their wedding ceremony. They also "become one flesh" when they consummate their marital relationship sexually. In addition, a Christian husband and wife are "joined together by the Lord" and become "one in spirit". This deep and powerful spiritual union is something that comes from the Holy Spirit.

"Becoming one" also happens over a period of time, as you share your life together. Paul appeals to us in I Corinthians 1:10, "That all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." Jesus prayed in John 17:11, "that they may be one as we are one."

Walking in unity does not mean that you give up your individual identity and that you and your partner become identical. Rather, it means that you walk together in mutual respect, humility and love. You speak the truth to one another, as Paul expressed in Ephesians 4:15. You commit yourself to mutually submit to the Lord and to one another. You also resist the temptation to walk in pride and independence.

God wants you to embrace the vision of "Building a House of Oneness," incorporating the principles I describe in that section of this book. It is a challenging and exciting process to leave your father and mother and start your own family. God designed this process as the way to be fruitful and multiply. You have the privilege of extending His kingdom throughout the world as you faithfully obey His command to replenish the earth and fill it with His glory.

Before you go on to the next chapter, take a few minutes to review the points of this chapter to see which ones apply to your life. In particular, reflect on the issues of:

1. Insufficient development
2. Unresolved issues
3. Dependency
4. Breakdowns during the transition into marriage

Bring to the Lord any issues that are still affecting your life presently.

Application Prayer

Father, I thank you for the identity that I have in Jesus Christ. You have created me and I am your child. Thank you for the formation of my life through my family. Free me from any memories that have negatively affected my identity and help me to be secure in who I am in Christ.

Show me any unresolved issues that are in my life because of the family I grew up in. I don't want to run from these issues or ignore them. Bring me into the freedom that you want me to have as a child of God.

I ask you to send people into my life who can mentor me in the undeveloped areas of my life. Give me spiritual fathers and mothers who can help me grow emotionally, spiritually and relationally. Provide the discipline and training that I didn't receive from my own father and mother. I want to be fully mature in every area of my life.

Show me how to rightly honor my father and mother as I take steps to "leave" them in a biblical way. Keep me from being wrongly dependent upon them financially, emotionally, and physically. I want a healthy and mature relationship with my parents. Help me to make the transition from being a dependent child to being a secure and healthy adult. In Jesus Name! Amen.