

Family System Assessments

I want to welcome you back to the pastoral care in marriage class. Today, we're going to get into family systems assessment. And what we're going to be looking at is how to dig a little deeper as you're listening to people. The other thing I've noticed is as pastoral care providers, as pastors, leaders, church planters, evangelists, we are not counselors. So, even as we are listening and learning about some of the reasons people do what they do, understand that for us, we're going to be dealing with the garden-variety types of things often. These are those things where people come to a wall, or a marriage is having an argument, someone's asking advice on how to communicate better, and we're going to be able to listen and use many of these skills in family assessment and genogram understanding to really help those in our church and those in our charge.

But I want you to know that we're not counselors. So, a lot of times we can use these family system tools and if they're sort of out of our league, maybe there's a medical issue involved or there is a form of depression that needs medical attention, by all means, this class is not designed to make you psychiatrists. We are about caring for our people. And the more tools that we have, the more we can learn, that's better. So, when I talk about family systems assessments, I'm really talking about how to, in general, help people by being even a better listener, finding out those buttons that push people, those things to do to really help people.

Now, here's the bottom line. When someone comes to you or a couple comes for marriage counseling or there's a family counseling issue, understand that there's a lot of reasons for every behavior. And part of that in your listening, in your questioning, is basically help people see as they relate to each other that there's a lot of reasons, people might have behaved how they behaved. How a child may have often acted up, how a family got into such an argument that they now don't know what to do. How a marriage can have such hurt and pain. And it might not even be the hurt or pain of the specific argument. It might be something that's hurt and painful from years and years ago.

Every behavior. There's the now. There's also the past. There's also beliefs and understandings. I'm going to go over some of those realizations that there are reasons for every behavior. There's a book that I'm taking a lot of this out of that is a suggested reading. It's *Why You Do What You Do* that you can find in your course outline as a suggested reason. First of all, there's alternative communications than

just verbal. And we've got to help people understand that just because what is said is not really what is meant. Actions speak louder than words.

The before and after event of current communications have bearing on future communications. So, when a couple is talking and before this happened there was great stress, the communications may not be that clear because the stress is louder at that time. Or after the communications, something else happened. And then couples, they fast-forward a little bit, but there are still those context issues that can affect communications. Every family develops unique communication style to fit their temperaments.

For instance, I have Dutch background. It's really interesting Dutch people don't hug that much, okay? So, let's say a Dutch guy marries an Italian woman. Now, I'm the one doing caricatures here. Okay? Now, well, maybe in an Italian family they're hugging more and to feel love, there's like a hug. Well, if an Italian woman marries a Dutch guy, the Dutch guy is not thinking that she needs hugs. The Dutch guy is thinking she needs to be provided for. Okay? So, that's his way of communicating and his style is much more, at times, rational not as comfortable with emotion whereas her style might be totally the opposite. And they got that from their family.

A lot of times when behavior has happened and communication occurs, misunderstandings occur that are out there but they're not really being looked at. And as a pastor, when the barriers go up, somebody is misunderstanding. And maybe when they come talk to you, what you'll do is you'll help them see where there misunderstandings are at. If someone often gets mad, usually there's a misunderstanding behind that. A lot of times, it's easy to go and say, "Why are you mad?" You look at the behavior. But there's usually a misunderstanding and try to do that.

Family genograms affect communication. And we're going to talk about that in a further session. Sometimes, just the family you come from and what specifically happened in your family affects how you communicate. And there's reasons for someone's behavior. Outside the family rules affect communications too. I'll give you some examples. There are certain politically correct statements that are just out there.

If you were to say things, you can't say it that way because it's just not accepted to say that way. Maybe it was accepted in the 1950's to say certain things, but it's not acceptable now. Maybe it was never acceptable to say things in the 1950's and they did it. But if you said that now, it would even be

more negative. So there are reasons for every behavior and every communication issue is part of those reasons.

Let's talk then what lies beneath communication or even conflict. When these issues come, what lies beneath it? What you think, feel, behave are hidden in your actions. And I'll give you a case study on that. Let's say you, as a pastor, come upon a teen pregnancy. And at one level the parents and the teen are meeting with you now, and there's all sorts of like, "My daughter got pregnant and she violated God's law" and there's all of this stuff that's coming.

And then as things come out, you find out at the end of the day that teen got pregnant because that teen was looking for love and she got pregnant and she doesn't like maybe some of the negative things that've occurred because she was pregnant. But what she, deep down, loves is that somebody loved her enough and is accepting, let's say her boyfriend, is keeping her close. Now, that's a little bit of a conflict here but notice that what's underneath are sometimes hidden. Even negative things that occur are opportunities to grow and get closer and to bring resolve. It's not saying that teen pregnancy was right. It's not saying it should've happened. Was there sin involved? Yes.

All of those things are happening, but as you get communication going, and get people talking, you'll discover, as a pastor, underlying things that you never thought were going to happen and they just often come out and you can address them. I have seen, as a pastor, where there's this thing on the surface that comes out and then something else comes out. And then finally what comes out is that a father and mother and child are really not connecting. And this negative thing plays itself out for them to be able to talk to one another finally for the first time in a long time.

Here are some of the things to keep in mind as a pastoral care provider. Every family member has a different understanding even of the family. And that's hilarious too when you see some of the situations. Each personality has different understandings of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. I think about that in my own family. I have an oldest son who's actually he's a pastor. He's sharp but all the qualities of an oldest child.

Then I have my next daughter who is a paralegal. And all the qualities of very specific, everything detailed, accountability, and what's actually being said. And I have a third daughter, who is like, an artist. Paints, draws, writes all those things. A fourth daughter who doesn't fit the pattern of the first three and that of the youngest child of five children. Now, I will tell you that each of these personalities communicate differently. If you take my second and my third daughter, put them in the same room

those communication styles are very different and there can be conflict or misunderstandings just based upon communication style.

As a pastor, when we're meeting with people, understand that we need to help them see that. Sometimes, you'll have like a command man father who just can't understand the artist child. "I said it this way and this is the way it is." And the artist child doesn't see the world in those ways. As a pastor, you can kind of help each other understand each other. In a lot of ways, you tailor-make your communication style to those you are communicating to. Like for instance, if you're talking to a really rigid person, the best thing to do is to understand what he's saying and use the language by which he speaks or she speaks. Don't start going freestyle because that person will not trust that what you say will have any impact in their lives.

When you're communicating to people and helping in listening to the struggles that they are going through, trying to figure out their family systems a little bit as you're ministering to them. There are several more things that factor into this and even when you help people communicate to one another, like life experience. Good, bad experience of the past influence how people view each other, how they communicate, how we view people and communicate with each other.

I've seen so often, somebody will come in to even my church. I'll say something in the sermon, and what I said in the sermon is maybe something about maybe it's Mother's Day and you say something about what a nice experience it was for my mother to make chocolate chip cookies when I was on my twelfth birthday. And I talk about that endearingly. And all of a sudden a gal starts to break down and cries. Or a guy often gets closed and afterwards you talk with him a bit.

You find out that on their twelfth birthday the father and mother split in divorce, okay? Now, that's a huge past experience, and that past experience now shapes how someone even sees motherness or fatherness. And these are the types of things when you're doing counseling, you're looking at them not because past experiences make someone a victim of those experiences but understand that those experiences affect communication and behavior.

So, what are you trying to do as a pastor then? Okay, so what we talked about so far is there's underlying reasons people do things. And we'll be talking about that even further and if you read the book, *Why You Do What You Do*, you can get even deeper into some of that stuff. But understand as a pastor what you are trying to do is trying to help your parishioners, those in your charge, to get to that

self-awareness so that they're just not reacting and responding to pain, hurt, past issues but they're actually standing above themselves, so they can understand themselves and understand others.

What you're going to help them do is really learning how to get to know themselves to allow themselves to connect, to communicate more effectively. And that's part of even genograms that we're going to talk about as part of listening. And help them to be truthful. If there is an untruthful self, it hurts communications. Like you'll find that "I'm not a procrastinator," the wife says when the reality is, everybody knows that she is a procrastinator. She's late to everything. She puts things off. She says she's going to do a project. It's done at the last minute.

But then, if she were to announce "I am not a procrastinator," well okay now, put that in her marriage. And now, you have in the marriage these behaviors that create conflict when the person is not really truthful about who they are. So, a part of what you want to do as a pastor is help people get to that self-awareness. How do you do that? Here's a couple of things that I've learned over the years is be okay with modeling that you understand yourself.

I'll often joke with people, "Yeah, I'm a last born child," "Oh really? Are you the typical last born?" "Oh yeah." And then I'll talk about the good and the bad and the ugly in that in a certain winsome way. "Yeah, you know, I know I got to be the attention so much. But on the other hand, that allows me to get bold and do certain things and I got to be careful not to talk too much and be the center of attention. I got to make sure that other people have the stage." I will be okay with sharing about my self-awareness, learnings about myself on things that let the person know that it's okay. It's not shameful to be human. It's not shameful to have strengths and weaknesses. It's not shameful to be honest with who you are. In a relationship if someone lacks that self-honesty, it's very hard to overcome a lot of walls and barriers.

Now, in counseling, what you'll find when people start getting to know themselves, once you help them in doing that, you'll find that the whole emotion issue comes up. And I will say that there's kind of two extremes on the emotion issues. There's the one where somebody's just always emotional and always throwing up their emotions on everybody else, and then there's the "I'm not comfortable with emotions, and I'm not going to say what I really feel about something."

And emotions are made by God. They're made by God to, in the sense, be a barometer of how someone is feeling. Emotions can be trusted to indicate that something might be wrong. Or maybe emotions are merely there to enhance something needs attention. Something's not wrong but something is not totally right either. God made them. If God made them, they have a purpose and they

have a purpose for our well-being. And as a pastor and leader, you are going to deal with a lot of different emotions.

And as you're dealing with emotions, have this concept that emotions are good. Now, a lot of you men out there who are pastors, sometimes, you feel you could certainly understand, that there's trouble with it. You're not necessarily comfortable. But emotions need to be put in balance. If your only emotions and your only logic or whatever, both extremes will hurt pastoral care. Each person must learn to understand the basic emotional languages.

Now, it's fascinating when you'll find a husband and wife, newly married and they're young, and pastoral care is so fascinating to me, how this whole issue of understanding their emotional language. Often in that first year of marriage definitely is a struggle for many people. But as a pastor, you want to help people understand that emotions are good, made by God. Now, what do emotions do? And often emotions are the window into the soul, the window into what someone needs to be healed. I'm just going to go with some emotions and then talk about what the emotions might reveal.

Let's just take number 1, anger. Now, there are actually positives to anger. If someone has that intensity, one positive in many times anger, you stand up for the righteous. Righteous anger is talked about in the Bible. There are causes. When someone gets angry, there's often a boundary alert system. If someone angers you, they might be hurting yourself or themselves in violating a very important boundary. Shortly in this class, we're going to talk all about boundaries and then even come back to this and know what I'm talking about. I don't want to get into what boundaries are yet. We'll wait until Dr. Drew Brown talks about this later in the class.

Anger could alert a hormonal alert system and where something inside a person biologically needs attention. But anger can also have negatives. If somebody gets angry about something, "I'm so mad!", it could be that there's a hurt deep inside. There's a past hurt. There's a bitter root, or the beginning of a bitter root that's in there, that boundary, broken was there. Maybe there's an abuse issue. See, a lot of people have said that anger is hurt externalized.

If somebody's angry about something, on one level you can say, "Don't be angry!" or "You shouldn't be angry." Or the other way is, you can, as a pastor "So, that really bugs you. Why?" And, you because they're angry, we'll get insights and how to bless them, help them, encourage them, give them a scripture, pray for them. If you just, sort of like, "I'm uncomfortable with anger and I don't want to deal with it," in a sense, you're cutting off the potential to really get deeper into communications.

Let's take another one. Jealousy. There's a positive side to jealousy. God said, "I'm a jealous God." One positive is that it speaks to the need for affirmation. "Look, I'm God," the Lord says, "There's nobody else. And I am to be praised and glorified," God says, "Nobody else." But, there's also a negative. People can be jealous for no reason or constantly compare their insecurities. Now, you can say to someone, "You know you shouldn't be jealous, Marge." Or you can actually listen, "Why are you jealous?" And, in the motions, get insights. They give their reasons behind the behaviors. Earlier I talked about various reasons and I didn't really get into some of the insights. But jealousy, could be an insight into why someone does what they do.

Guilt. Somebody feels like, "I really feel guilty," Now, on the positive, if there's need to remorse, and you need forgiveness, God puts that guilt in there. But on the negative, somebody might be too hard on themselves, maybe they get depressed. Maybe they're hopeless. Maybe it brings up issues about unrealistic guilt that came into their lives when they're overly hard on themselves, even going beyond what the Bible talks about with how to live our lives. But guilt.

So, when someone says, "I feel really guilty," our knee-jerk reaction is to just deal with the emotion. "Well, Jesus paid it all." Okay? Or we say, "Okay, why do you feel guilty?" Maybe you need to call up George and say, "George, I am sorry. I hurt you." Or maybe, it's like a person was raised their whole life never being able to please their father and mother. And their father and mother used the Bible or God card against them. So then, what happens is they feel that no matter what they do, they feel guilty or bad. Well, now, the guilt emotion allowed you to find out what was the reason behind some of these behaviors.

Pride is emotion. Now, on the positive, personal accomplishments, desire to excel, all those things are wonderful. But, on the negative, pride can be selfishness, too high of ego, diminished importance of others. Now it's really simple to say, "You're being awfully proud about that. Be careful." Or you could say, "You're proud about that" and acknowledge the good. But have them talk and find out that place where that pride doesn't go too far. And if it exposes something, you can minister to that which is exposed.

Worry. Very common emotion. Now, there's a positive to worry. Genuine concern, protectiveness but there's also negatives. When someone worries, it's easy to say, "Stop worrying! The Bible says we should not worry." Well, maybe there's rational fears and paranoia and the people you worry about may feel smothered even. Causes, health issues. See, when someone comes to us, these emotions are given by God to help us minister to people, to help us understand what is behind some of the behaviors. It

takes communication at a deeper level. If you allow emotions to be expressed, you're going to be able to communicate and teach others to communicate even stronger. Without emotions, communication often is one-dimensional. With emotions in there, you get more insights. And it's fascinating.

Let's just take one and I'll throw an extra one in it. Let's just take lust or desire maybe the emotion should be desire. Now, on the positive side, it's like desire could be like, created by God to be human, be sexual within marriage and all these other things okay? On the negative, lust, we would call it, could be looking to own someone else, looking to objectify the opposite sex. The visual that God makes you goes too far. Okay, now, somebody comes to you and they say, "Pastor, help me with my lust." Okay, now you could say, "Well, just don't lust" or you could just dismiss it. Or you could help them to dig deep. What's really going on there, what really is a way to get that health in order. To get into the window of their heart in order to support them and encourage them.

The function of emotions. It's awfully tempting to say, "You know what, just don't feel that way." Instead encourage the person more in the line of "Emotions are good but emotions are not everything." Emotions give us more communication but understand that these are to be in balance and to not be afraid of emotions. God made emotions for a very important reason.

And one more thing, encourage your people, as well as yourself, that emotions are under the Lordship, the Savior-ship of the priesthood of Christ. That even the emotions, are just not good in terms of "because they're emotions." They're created good that is that we have emotions. But some of the emotions are not founded. You need to create a world and atmosphere where balance is there and that the Lordship is Christ is even over emotions while at the same time recognizing that emotions are made by God and they're very good.

I want to end with, most of my presentations, with a case study. And today is, I couldn't help but give the case study on emotions. So, here's the case study. Bubba and Tammy come in and they're newly married and they have a major conflict after three or four months. And the man is just like totally shutting down and he reports, "I just don't know what to say to her," he says. And "What do you mean, Bubba?" Then, Bubba says, "Well, I say this and she right away flies off the handle and I say that, and she right away flies off the handle." And so, you start talking.

And then his wife speaks up and says, "I'm just being transparent and I'm just telling you—I'm just telling Bubba the way it is. And I am comfortable and he is not." And Bubba he does have five emotions bad, glad, sad, mad and that's it. And he's okay with that but his wife has thousands of emotions. She's

got sub-emotions. Her mad emotion has like twenty-five different nuances. Okay? So, now you have it. You got blue and you got pink, together, there in your office. Now, you can't leave and say, "You know, man, you just got to start learning how to feel what your wife is feeling." There's no way that guy's ever going to do that. And the woman, "You know what? You just have to have less emotions like your husband. Okay? Goodbye, see you later." Nahh! Not going to work. So, what do you do?

Well, here is what I've learned over the years. For the man, I pretty much encourage him to not see emotions as threats. That's the crucial first thing. And that when his wife expresses her emotions intentionally listen and appreciate and learn what exactly she is trying to say. And try to recount back to her, "So, you're feeling this way, honey." And for a guy I'll often say is a lot of times just the make-up of many women is they just want to be hugged. They just want to express their emotions, and they don't want you to fix them. So, one of the things I encourage guys to do is don't look down on emotions and don't try to fix them.

Now, there's some great books on this that this very case study. *Love and Respect* deals with a lot of these types of things. Many of the writing of Gary Smalley deal with these kind of issues. And basically, I would recommend to you as a pastoral leader is get some more information about this. But, the bottom line, you want the guy to not feel that their wife's emotions, and often it's that type of thing, is some bad thing. Try helping him see those emotions reveal more to him on how to love her.

Now, for a woman, I would say, "Don't try to fix him either." Some of the great traits about being a man is that their minds are not clouded by all kinds of emotions. And don't try to constantly badger him about what he's feeling because many times he doesn't know what he's feeling and that's a good thing in the marriage. Now, does this mean that a guy should not learn how to get more emotions and understand them? No, he should. And does it mean that a woman should not try to hold back and be a little more balanced in her emotional response? Yeah, that would be good.

But understand that you're not going to change each other to be the other person. You married a man. You married a woman. That gender, that difference was made by God. And to understand that pink and blue divide takes years. And to rest in the comfort that God has designed it that way, and over time, you will, as a couple, learn more about how blue communicates, how pink communicates, how man and woman together subdue the earth.

I would say, communications and family systems and as we get into genograms, and we get into other things understand this. What you're trying to do is trying to help people communicate, help

people to understand that self-awareness so that they're just not reacting and their emotions are flying out the handle but more and more communicating. Now, as a pastor, you can't fix everything. Even the stuff that you learn today, you just can't apply and say, "I'm going to fix every marriage, every family, every hurt." No. All you're doing is getting more into communication, understanding more on how people think and helping them to be able to voice to each other their hearts, their dreams to one another.

So, that's it for today and as you think about this, here's sort of—it's not really an assignment. But with your spouse or someone, the next time emotions come up and everything like that, instead of just sort of fixing them, try a little bit about what we talked about in the class. "Why do you feel angry? Why do you feel hurt right now? What is that about?" in a non-judgmental inquisitiveness and you'll be surprised. You're going to learn a lot not just about how to be a better pastoral care provider. You're also going to be a better person in terms of how you'll communicate with others.