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**Families On The Edge**  
***“Environment Is Everything”***  
(Part 1)

**Intro:** There is no doubt that families today are struggling. Not just to make ends meet, but struggling relationally. 50% divorce rate / escalating conflict between parents and children / Many homes are just filled with relational stress and tension. It just seems that so many families are teetering on the edge of relational collapse. The question is why? (Series)

- Today I want to share one very important reason why our families today struggle so much relationally and how we begin to pull our families back from the edge.
- When it comes to our families, we must understand that “Environment Is Everything.” What do I mean?
- **Illustrate:** I like to grow things. (flowers in yard / hanging baskets / planters) BUT the season for this is past. WHY? The environment has changed. If I took healthy flowers and planted them outside they would die. WHY? Wrong environment. You must have the right environment for growing things. Our families work much in the same way. If we do not have the right relational environments in our homes, we relationally die.
- Jesus recognized the need for the right environment.

Mark 4:1-20 – Parable of soils – **Summarize** – Jesus applied this story to the environment of a person’s heart. Jesus taught that environment is everything. The seed was the same. The only difference was the environment. We can take this truth and apply it in our families. You may be actually trying the right things to improve your marriage / your parenting / but it’s having no effect. WHY? Wrong environment! The environment must change first. All the effort in the world can’t overcome the wrong environment. Let’s look at 4 types of family environments.

- Road Side: Hard environment – Rigid / critical / relationally closed off / distant/ nobody listens to each other / authoritarian / dictatorship / much conflict
- Rocky Soil – Shallow environment – superficial / surface / no depth of relationship / lack of trust / lack of intimacy / only safe conversations /
- Weedy Soil – Busy environment – overcommitted / no boundaries / overworked / chaotic / life squeezes out relationships / Life dictates priorities
- Good Soil – Healthy environment - This is where things grow / healthy / productive / -

If we want to pull our families back from the edge, we must be willing to change the environments of our homes. It's not just about attempting the right things. We must do the right things in the right environment. Let me give you 3 ways to do this.

## **I. Be Honest About Your Own Relational Environment**

### **A. Evaluate the relational environment of your home**

*Haggai 1:7* “*This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Consider how things are going for you!’*” (NLT) How's that working for you?

1. Let's go back to Jesus' parable and look at our families based upon these four environments. Let's try to answer that question? How are things working?
2. Slide: Be brutally honest. Which one best represents the environment of your household? Talk to your spouse about this. (Don't blame each other!) Talk to some of your close friends. Ask them what they see.
3. This may be painful, but it's pain that will lead you to what you really desire. It's pain that leads to growth and life change. It's OK to admit it when things aren't working like they should.
4. After the birth of our second daughter over 17 years ago, one day Lisa and I just looked at each other and said; Are you happy...NO! Neither am I. This isn't working very well is it? Let's change it! AND, we've been working on it and evaluating it ever since.

### **B. Admit the environment needs to change**

*Prov. 11:2* “*Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*” (NLT)

1. Don't allow pride to destroy your family. No one has the perfect family environment. We all have to be continually working at these things. Move away from denial / or blame / move away from the thinking that it's impossible to change – fatalistic. Let's embrace some humility so our families can change.
2. You may be thinking; Why do we have this environment? Often what happens is that we simply reproduce what is familiar. If these were the environments you grew up in, the tendency is to reproduce it.
3. Many times home environments are generational. If you grew up in a hard, critical environment, you will have a tendency to reproduce that unless you take specific actions to change the environment.
4. This principal works in the positive or the negative. Some of you grew up in very positive family environments and therefore, the tendency is to reproduce that in your family now. This is why this issue is so important. What are we passing on to our children and their future family? What environment are we passing on?
5. We will always gravitate towards the familiar even if we didn't like it. Even if we swore we would never be like dad / mom / I will never raise my family like this. The tendency is to always reproduce what we know.
6. The first step is to be honest about our environment and be willing to admit this isn't

working. It needs to change.

- So, how do we bring about change?

## II. Be Intentional About Changing The Relational Environment

### A. Know what a healthy relational environment looks like

*Prov. 2:2-3* “Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding.” (NLT) How do I do this relationally?

1. Know what God has to say about relationships. God’s word has so much to say about the relational environments of our homes. It is the greatest relational book I know of. It is amazing how relevant it is for today’s issues.
  2. Tune your ears to wisdom. Take a class! Are you willing to take classes on marriage / parenting to gain understanding? None of these skills come naturally. They have to be learned and practiced. We offer these opportunities here.
- I find often that men struggle with this more than the women. “I don’t need no class!” This is where some humility comes in. These things don’t come by osmosis.
    3. If we want to change things in our lives we can’t just identify what’s wrong, we have to replace it with what is healthy. You can’t leave a void.
    4. Let’s have a simply working definition of a healthy relational environment where everyone grows. Let’s use the word FAMILY as an acronym and define an environment where relationships flourish and grow.
  - **F – Fun** *Prov. 15:15* “... a cheerful heart has a **continual feast**.” (NASB) Is anyone having any fun yet? Is there laughter in your home? Is there a feast or a hunger strike? Emotional Famine? Sometimes we just take life too seriously.
  - **A – Affirming** – *I Thess 5:11* “Therefore **encourage** one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” (NASB) To affirm someone is to believe in them. It is purposely saying things to build them up...give them confidence. It’s not pointing out what they’re not, but pointing out who they are. (My Girls uniqueness by God – share)
  - **M – Memories** – *Phil. 1:3* “I thank my God every time I remember you.” (NIV) How do we want our kids to remember their time growing up in our home? I want them praising God as they remember. Are we making memories with our family? Memories with our kids? My daughter is talking about redecorating her room. One of the ways is to have an entire wall of pictures. I asked what pictures? “Pictures of everything we’ve done together.” We underestimate the power of shared memories.
  - **I – Intentional** – *II John 1:8* “Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be **diligent** so that you receive your full reward.” (NLT) In order to experience the full reward in our families we must be intentional. We are responsible for creating the environment. Decide what environment you want then be intentional about creating it. Make choices that foster it. It doesn’t happen by itself. It takes diligence! Years ago Lisa and I decided to be intentional. (explain)

- **L – Loving** – *I Cor. 13:2 “If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing.” (NLT)* You see, we can do all the right things without a loving environment and it doesn’t work. Unconditional love must be part of the environments of our homes. Love must never be something that is earned. Love is unconditional regardless of behavior. How are we communicating this?
- **Y – Yielding** - *Phil. 2:3-4 “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.” (NLT)* Selfishness just doesn’t create a very healthy home environment. Often we must yield our preferences for the sake of someone else. Are we more concerned with getting our way or meeting someone’s needs? The #1 terminal disease of all relationships is selfishness.

Now that we know what a healthy family environment looks like...

#### B. Be committed to cultivate a healthy environment in your home

1. The good soil was not that way by accident. It is cultivated / tended / kept / monitored / it was prepared. If we desire a good relational environments in our homes then we must be committed to cultivate it continually. Being intentional!

*Prov. 21:5 “ Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.” (NLT)* There is a lot of environmental poverty in our homes today. Doesn’t have to be!

2. **Here’s an assignment:** Sit down with the FAMILY acronym and plan ways to accomplish each characteristic of a healthy family. Be intentional. If you’re married, sit down with your spouse and do this together. (explain)
3. Don’t give up! Your kids may not be immediately responsive / or your spouse...but don’t quit! We overcome evil with good. Healthy will overcome unhealthy. Stay the course! You will eventually see change.

- Some of you may be thinking that this sounds impossible. I can’t do this. There’s one more very important key.

### III. Be Willing To Be Changed From The Inside

#### A. Know the source our the negative environment

1. These negative environments exist in our homes because they already exist in us. It’s a pre-existing condition. I don’t say this to create any guilt; but we need to know.
2. We all have negative patterns of thinking / unhealthy habits of behavior / ways of relating to each other that simply don’t work. Sometimes they just don’t seem to go away either. Often we can feel controlled by them...or trapped in them.

*Rom. 7:15 “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” (NLT)*

3. Who can’t relate with this? “Why did I do this? / Why did I say that? Why can’t I do

what I know will make my family better? I really don't want to reproduce what I grew up with. What's wrong with me?

4. Sometimes it is just so difficult to move past hurt / pain / the negativity we grew up in and walk in something new. What do we do? It's easy to feel hopeless?

B. Allow Jesus to change the environment of your life

1. The environment of your household can change as you allow Jesus to change you. As you are changed so will your home. He can change the condition of your heart. In fact, He promises to if we let Him.

*Ezek. 36:26 "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." (NLT)*

2. How's that for an amazing promise. He can give us a spiritual / emotional / relational heart transplant. How does He do this? Through Christ!

*II Cor. 5:17 "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (NLT)*

3. You can try your best to create a new environment in your home without a new you. Unfortunately, you're going to keep hitting the same old walls. Your old resources just can't do it.
4. God offers us the opportunity for real change when we allow Him to change us. If we're willing to embrace a relationship with Jesus and simply admit we need a new heart...a new spirit...a new life, this is exactly what He gives us.

5. If we allow God to transform the environment of our hearts, we now have the ability to bring transformation to the environments of our homes. Your family can now begin to reflect your new heart!

6. If you really have a desire to change the atmosphere of your family / home, will you allow Jesus to change you? This is where the real change begins.

What is the relational environment of your home? (Hard / Rocky / Weedy / Good)

Will you be intentional with creating a new environment in your family?

Will you let Jesus change the environment of your life? Maybe today it's time to ask Him for a new heart...a new spirit...a new life.