

Have you got a piece missing?

For those who have the opportunity to be married an important part of preparation for marriage should be to ask the fundamental question, 'Why am I getting married?' Is it because I want someone to meet my needs? The same question applies to bringing children into the world. Do I 'need' my child? Our first response may well be to deny that we would ever do such a thing but something might



be happening in our hearts that we are totally unaware of. Many parents set out to create a more emotionally healthy environment than they experienced in their childhood but unless the emotional patterns in their hearts are changed they will probably reproduce their own experiences – at least in measure.

We all need security, self-worth and significance. We want to know that we are loved and accepted just as we are and that, deep down, we are 'alright.' If we pass through our developmental years never having that

knowledge built into our lives then we will look for it in our adult relationships – or in our children.

Think of a completed jigsaw as representing someone who knows they have been affirmed (see [Step One: Session 5](#)). The person who has never fully experienced that affirmation feels that a piece of their jigsaw is missing. What a temptation to reach out and take a piece from the person, or people, who are closest to you! It could be a friend or colleague; it can easily occur in church because relationships are readily available - but we will keep our focus on family patterns as it is within our families in our developmental years that our emotional patterns are formed.

So, a mother lacks affirmation – affirmation that could even yet have come through her husband. How easy to reach out and take a piece of her child's jigsaw. There is an underlying 'felt need' to draw an emotional response from her child that makes her feel better about herself. Quite unwittingly she creates emotional scenarios that produce guilt or anxiety in the child if he doesn't respond in the way he now feels his mother expects him to. All this applies equally to a father who has not been adequately affirmed.



When relationships are not right between parents one, or both, may look to their child to supply what is lacking in their relationship. They are looking to be valued, to have a role, to matter to someone. It is not that these desires are wrong in themselves – it is when they arise out of the parents' emotional need that they become damaging to all concerned. If a child can meet the parents' needs then why work at the marriage?

How can a parent recognise when he is doing this?

We will answer the question from a parent's perspective because we are all children! So we will also, in effect, be imagining our parents' answers.

- Do I need my child's approval?
- Do I need him to 'like' me?

- Do I need him to need me?
- Am I over-involved with my child? It is one thing to point him in a positive direction but another to have to know everything.
- Am I content to enjoy my child as a friend as he reaches adulthood?
- Am I hoping that any of my unfulfilled dreams will be realised through my child?

We would have to be honest with ourselves in order to answer these questions accurately because if we were aware of what we were doing we might have already tried to stop. It is also possible to try and change behaviour but if we don't ensure that our own missing piece is supplied from the right source (see [Step One: Session 5](#)) we will still send out those damaging emotional signals.

What is the effect on the child?



If we hold that child to ourselves, he will feel that he cannot cope without us and will always carry within himself that sense of need and emotional dependency. He will always feel that there are certain 'hoops' that he has to jump through in order to gain acceptance and approval – not only in his interaction with his parents but in all his relationships. It makes the necessary process of separation and affirmation unlikely to happen for him. If a parent needs the child to like him then administering discipline objectively can be difficult! Inconsistency and distorted perspectives can

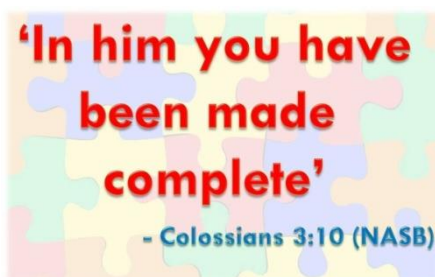
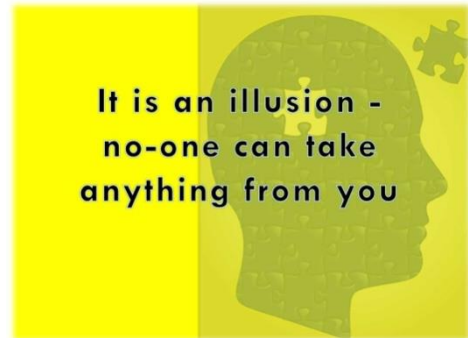
become the order of the day.

The child experiences a real mix of emotions. On one hand he feels held in close to his parent – but on the other, wanting, and needing, to pull away. He might be held close but he feels a strange emptiness. A caring child will condemn himself for being uncaring. He feels he is a bad person. It won't be long before resentment, anger, frustration and low self-esteem fill the void.

If a parent maintains that unhealthy emotional attachment to the child the youngster may struggle to go and establish himself in the world and learn from his mistakes and successes. It is alright for the parent – he doesn't have to face the situations that the child has to face! When it comes to leaving home, the young person can be made to feel guilty for even thinking of going and the actual leaving becomes far too emotional. Regular phone calls and visits are expected and any breach of that routine raises uncomfortable questions. The child will struggle to be himself and will never feel that being himself is good enough. He will tend to transfer parental expectations onto his view of God so life becomes an endless striving to find love and acceptance.

What can we do about it?

If you know that you are anxious, fearful and struggling with acceptance the good news is that – nothing is missing! It is impossible for anyone to take a piece of your jigsaw. All another person can do is to create the illusion of taking something from you. Others can make you feel that something is missing thereby creating dependency – and so are able to exercise control over you. Once we realise that nothing can be taken from us then we don't have to struggle anymore. We can stand back, be still and evaluate our relationships. As we walk with God he will constantly remind us of who we are in Christ.



As we grow up it is important to recognise that we will have to look elsewhere to make up for any emotional deficiencies in what our parents were able to provide. Think of emotional maturity as on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is very mature. Let's assume that your father scored 5 on the scale and your mother 7 – leaving you with a possible maturity level of 6. Stop looking to your parents to take you beyond where they are – they cannot do it. Build your own relationships. Move on – but don't leave them behind because you can still have a good friendship

with them and they will have much to offer in wisdom and advice. Living in the structures that we have already outlined in sessions 2 and 3 – whether in your own new family or the family of God – will provide the context in which you can grow from maturity level 6 through to 10.

If we are prepared to stand up and be different we will produce children who will have no need to take a piece of their children's jigsaw – and so a process that could have gone on down through the generations is stopped. Are you prepared to be different?

