

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

Summer

You Weren't There

Did you ever come into a movie in the middle? Sometimes it feels good, especially if it's a suspense movie. You have missed part of the build-up to the suspense. You get to enjoy the plot and characters without all the anxiety.

Meet the Star!

Getting married is a little like coming into a movie halfway. Your new spouse is all grown up. You missed the part with the braces and awkward adolescence, college acceptance drama, and the first bad romance. No suspense about how they will turn out. They're great, star of the show!

Wait, who did what?

But the other part of coming into a movie late is that it can make it somewhat difficult to follow the plot. Why is that character suspicious of the woman? What is the significance of the cactus plant?

The Plot Thickens

Well getting married has those elements too. How your new in-laws behave may be a bit of a mystery to you, but that's because you came in halfway through. The family has had years to establish

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In-laws



Marriage Between Cultures

What do you do if you are from really different backgrounds? Not just little differences, but major ones. African refugees to this country are meeting and marrying white American partners.



Mexicans and Koreans, Filipinos and Pakistanis – whatever your background, once you fall in love it takes work to reconcile your cultures.

Parental roles

In some cultures, parents have a great deal more say-so in the mates their children can marry. Watching a traditional Rwandan ceremony reveals that families still enact a system where the groom's family has to persuade the bride's family that their son is a worthy suitor. How different this is from the way Americans play out their path to marriage!

Know the customs

Parents have much adjusting to do if their child chooses to marry into a very

different culture. One couple, whose son was marrying a Sikh Indian woman, told his parents to expect his wife's parents to give them a present, and they had to figure out if they were just to graciously accept the gift, or have one ready in return. Parents whose son married a Vietnamese woman found out that it was more important for them to attend the engagement ceremony than the wedding.

Challenges but gifts

Marriages between people of different races and cultures are much more common than they once were. And interestingly, many people are more accepting of this change. Some even see it

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You Weren't There (continued from page 1)

their own way of doing things, and you weren't there to understand the beginning of the story. And not only years, but generations. Some of what's going on has to do with what Grandpa did or said.

Families have their own unique ways of doing things. The way they talk to each other or solve conflicts, the foods they eat, the things that make them laugh, – these are all part of the signature that family puts on the world.

No Reruns

So here is where the comparison with movie watching breaks down. You can't go back and watch how your spouse's family became the family they are. You can pick up clues though. Listen to the family stories. Talk to your parents-in-law, your spouse's siblings or aunts and uncles. Be prepared to find out the good things about the family you have just joined. This new branch of your family may be a resource for you. They may have skills your family didn't have, or connections to people, events or institutions that you could find useful. A young man we know found out that his



fiancée's brother knew a famous football player. He got to go to the super bowl through that in-law connection!

Continuing the Story

Most important, if you have children, your in-laws will be important characters in their lives. You will want to feel comfortable with your children's other grandparents, aunts and uncles. These people, who were a big

part of helping your spouse become the person they are today are worth the time and effort to get to know.

Welcome to the Script!

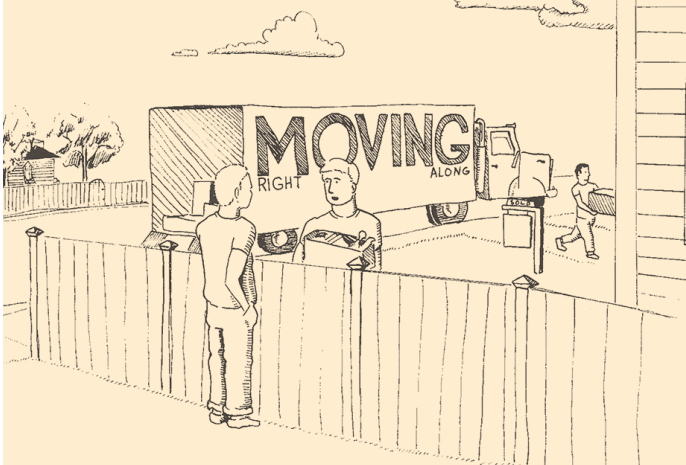
So while you'll never get to see the beginning of the story, you are now in a position to shape the story from here on, because you are now part of the story. Dive in, and play your part from the heart. ■



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Prepare and prevent, don't repair and repent
AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Can't find a good time for marriage prep? Join us for an online *Zoom* session

We use Zoom to provide six interactive sessions of marriage preparation. Contact us at foundationseditor@gmail.com for more details



“Confidentially, this is the third time we've been relocated by the In-law Protection Program.”

Exercise

IN-LAWS: Who are They?

Make a list of your in-laws. This includes your spouse's parents and if it applies, stepparents. What are their names? What do they like to be called? Mom and Dad? Mr. and Mrs.? Their first names?

Do you know what they believe...

About life?

About you?

About their son or daughter?

What are you like when you are with them?

Polite? Honest? Annoyed? Annoying? Sad? Happy? Uncomfortable? Guarded?

What is your spouse like with them?

Good child? Rebellious teenager? Dependent? Can you describe how they are with their parents?

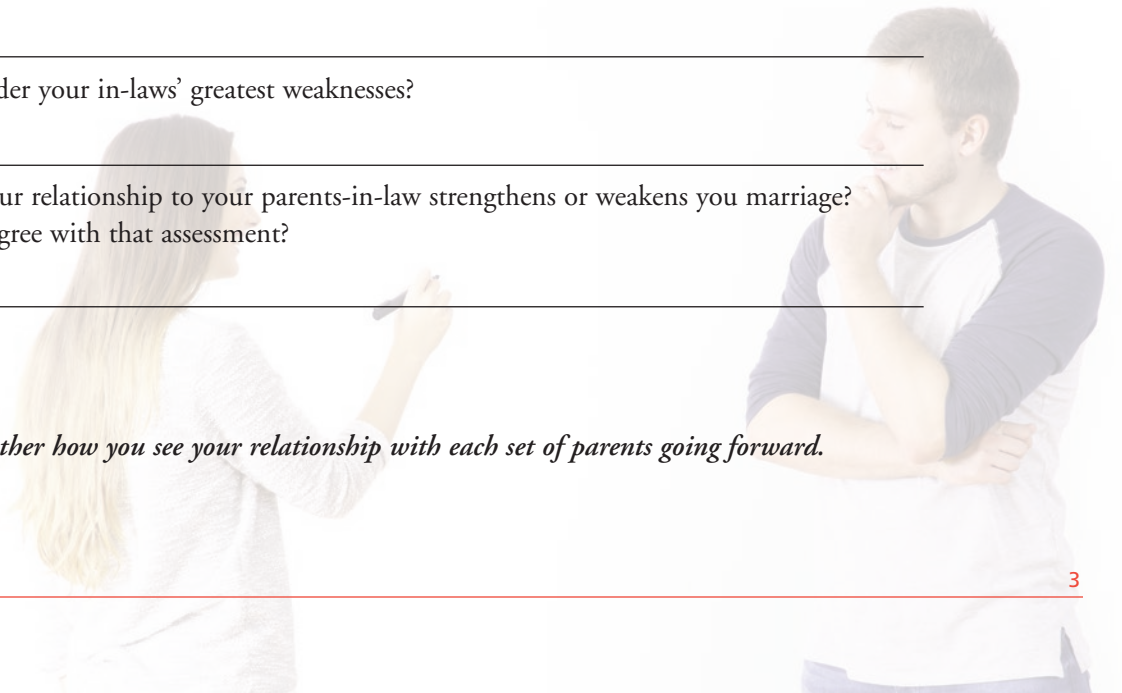
What do you consider your in-laws' greatest strengths?

What do you consider your in-laws' greatest weaknesses?

Do you feel that your relationship to your parents-in-law strengthens or weakens you marriage?

Does your spouse agree with that assessment?

Discuss with each other how you see your relationship with each set of parents going forward.



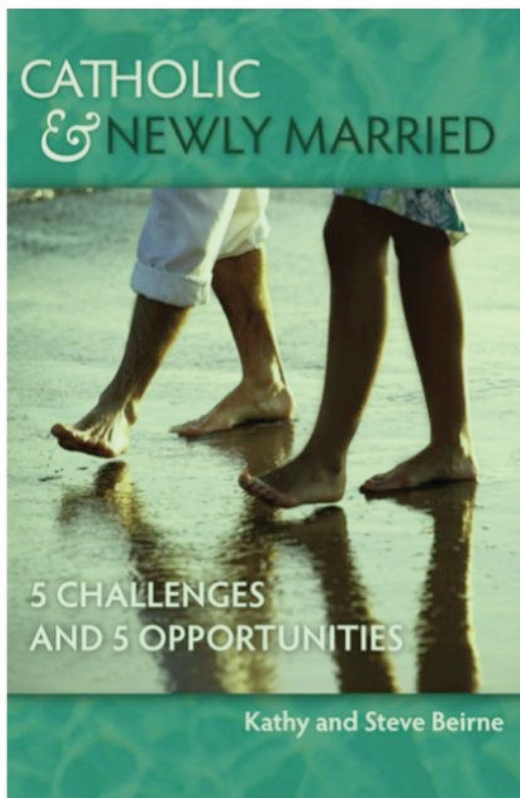
Marriage Between Cultures (continued from page 1)

as a good for society. So if you are in an intercultural marriage, know that you have the same task ahead of you as any other couple. You need to love and respect one another, and find a common ground between your two backgrounds. And you will each need to keep your families aware of how they can best support your new relationship. After all, any grandchildren will be the gift that transcend the differences.

If you have a story to share about adjusting to an intercultural marriage please send it to us so we can pass it on to other couples. Send your story to foundationseditor@gmail.com ■



5 things that are top topics in the early years of marriage



Learn how to recognize and deal with the opportunities and challenges of

- communication
- intimacy
- in-laws
- religious differences
- finances

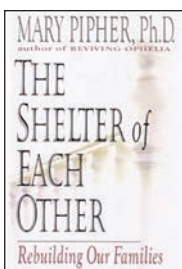
in this helpful little book.

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Book Reviews

The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding our families

By Mary Pipher, PhD



Mary Pipher is a psychologist who has an interest in how families work. She often sees parents and children who struggle with difficult problems. The children are often in trouble in school or even with the police. The parents may be ill or frustrated, and are exhausted by the effort of raising their children.

After many years of working with distressed individuals and families, Pipher thinks she sees some issues that should be of concern to all of us. Society has a stake in healthy families, because many of our resources are used to deal with the fallout from unhappy kids acting out in destructive ways. Suicide is at an all-time high among teens, eating disorders are common and both are situations that bring parents to Dr. Pipher for help.

In *The Shelter of Each Other*, the author asserts that contemporary society is creating conditions that are stressing families. While the parents and children are manifesting signs of dysfunction, it is largely because we live in a

Society has a stake in healthy families

culture that is hostile to healthy family life.

Pipher cited loss of community as an important element in the struggles families are having. A sense of community once allowed children to feel safe in their neighborhoods. They could move from house to house in the neighborhood without fear of being hurt, and parents knew that the neighbors would keep an eye on the kids from their front porch.

Pipher takes therapists to task for stressing individual fulfillment at the expense of family unity. It is a posture that contributes to the isolation that people are already prone to.

She also blames consumerism. We are constantly being bombarded with advertisements, inducing us to buy more and more. And now we don't even have to go to the mall to shop – the internet is there all day and night to cater to our every whim.

Dr. Pipher is encouraging us to take a look at our lifestyles and be intentional about our use of time. She invites us to make spending time together our priority, and not watching our screens together, but talking, playing, walking, doing chores.

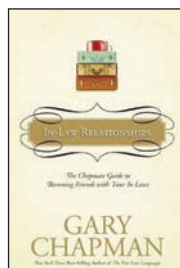
Include the in-laws in your life. If you have children, their grandparents are a wonderful resource for them. Getting to know their relatives will put them in touch with the stories of the families that produced their parents. It allows them to

understand the culture you came from. The stories are what they will remember when they are grown and they will act as both motivators and cautionary tales.

The title of this book comes from an Irish saying, “We live in the shelter of each other.” In our stressful times, nothing could be a greater comfort.

In-Law Relationships: The Chapman Guide to Becoming Friends with Your In-Laws

By Gary Chapman, PhD



The kind of relationship you have with your in-laws is likely to affect the relationship you have with your spouse. We often tend to be defensive of those who raised us, so positive in-law relationships are a great benefit. Living in harmony and seeing the bright side of your spouse's family is a path to deeper togetherness.

On the other hand, difficult in-law relationships can be a source of deep emotional pain and division. When in-law relations are characterized by resentment, anger, and withdrawal, then it can lead to family dysfunction, and beliefs that are frozen in their judgments.

If you have read *The Five Love Languages* (and if you're married and haven't read it, you definitely should) then you know how clear and helpful Gary Chapman can be.

That same ability demonstrated in his most popular book is also apparent in this one on getting along with your in-laws. In seven brief chapters, he outlines ways to approach some of the stickier experiences of forming a relationship with your in-laws. In the first chapter, “Listen before you speak,” he describes how he helped a young woman address a problem with her mother-in-law, who wanted to buy her new dresses every month when they went out to lunch. He gave her a number of prompts to learn about the older woman's life, and what motivated her. By leading the young wife to listen, she became better able to understand and appreciate her mother-in-law.

This is the pattern set up in the various chapters: examples and then a general principle to use in our own journey as in-laws. And the principles are as applicable to older-in-laws too!

Dr. Chapman encourages us to show respect to one another, to negotiate and, as he titles the last chapter, “Above All, Love.”

This book is available in Spanish as well as other languages.

Spirituality

The Bible is full of stories that point out the difficulty of not being part of whatever group you're not a part of, and from the other side, the difficulty of accepting someone who is not part of your group. The Egyptians didn't want to accept the Jews (except as slaves). The Jews didn't want to accept the Gentiles, and the earliest Christians weren't too excited about them either. These examples occur so often in Scripture that either this is something that happens quite often, or there must be a spiritual lesson to be learned from this situation.

You Don't Belong

Feeling like an outsider is one of the scariest feelings in the world. We have all been there, as the kid waiting to be asked to play a game, or the uninvited birthday guest. Being on the outside looking in creates a feeling of fragility like no other. We weigh and measure, trying to figure out what we have to do to be included, and whether it's worth the price we think we'll have to pay. If we are invited in, the feeling of relief seems like it must be actually visible in the air. Feeling like an outsider is also a wonderful way to learn compassion.

Protecting Your Values

Having an outsider invade the sanctuary of your group is another very scary thing. How do you know they will respect your values? What if they lure someone away from membership in your group? What if they impose their new and different ways upon you? Even if you believe they are there in peace, how do you make them feel welcome in your midst? There is such an urge to protect your own, to protect your borders, that it's hard to trust that someone who doesn't know your ways won't cause harm.

Embracing the 'other'

And yet in every marriage each partner comes as an outsider to the other's family, and each family has to learn to accept, and even love, the other, the stranger. Such a challenge we take on, putting aside our very instinctual defenses and instead welcome and be welcomed.

The ministry of Jesus reflected that ability to welcome the stranger, even those who were highly suspect to the Jewish community. As in other aspects of Jesus' ministry, this was a surprising and courageous action that he performed, and a model for us. To be Christlike, we need to be the welcomer, and to stand humbly waiting to be welcomed. Yet another challenge, as though turn the other cheek wasn't enough.

Remember Ruth

Embrace the challenge! Be the stranger without being defensive, and welcome the stranger without fear and you will learn something in the process. And always remember Ruth, the daughter-in-law in the Bible who said to her mother-in-law, "Wherever you go, I will go, wherever you lodge so will I lodge, your people shall be my people, and your god my god." *Ruth 1:16*

If we can learn to be as free from fear as Ruth, as open to the in-laws in our lives, and as trusting of God's hand in our future, we will have conquered the scariest of the marriage ghosts. ■

That was a great breakfast I made, right?



SO, WHAT ARE YOU MAKING FOR

take the quiz at facingahead.com
to learn about sharing chores and
other aspects of your relationship.

dinner?

Foundations *A Newsletter for Married Couples*

A publication of S&K Publishers in partnership with the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers.
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