

### The CURSE Cycle

**PRINCIPLE TWO:** *I won't move toward healthy relationships until I identify curse-filled relationships.*

The original curse resulted when Adam and Eve took their eyes off God, who is our primary Source. Today, the curse is played out in relationships which make the same mistake: In a curse-full marriage, one partner makes demands on the other as if he/she were the source rather than a resource. So how do we know that we are making another person – and not God – our Source of life? To help us see this more, we'll use the acrostic C.U.R.S.E. where each letter stands for an aspect of curse-full relationships.

C — Controlling  
 U — Unforgiving  
 R — Reactive  
 S — Shaming  
 E — Ego-Driven

**Controlling** - If our sense of well-being and value come from the behavior of another person instead of God, we will give off messages that say to others: *You'd better perform right.* The innate problem is that no human being can perform well enough to my personal self-esteem. However, if we wrongly believe another person is our source, then we must control their poor behavior and do something about.

A husband can try to control his alcoholic wife's drinking by pouring out her booze. A pastor can try to control his congregation's giving by promising them prosperity. Parents try to control the grades of their children by shaming and comparing them to others. A child tries to control his/her parents' temper by being perfect. A wife tries to control her husband's attacks by zeroing out her needs, her will, and her personality, and being "submissive." A Christian's attempts to control God's view of him/her by trying to be holy. If we do not understand the operations of grace, then the curse is free to reign everywhere.

In **John 21**, Jesus gives Peter an indication of the kind of death the apostle was going to die. Peter, surrounded by his fellow disciples, wanted to know what was in store for them: Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] following them; the one who also had leaned back on His breast at the supper . . . Peter therefore seeing him said to Jesus, "*Lord, what about this man?*" Jesus said to [Peter], "*If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!*" As is often true with us, **it was easier for Peter to focus on someone else's walk with Jesus than on his own.** And while we are busy trying to correct and take charge of the spiritual lives of others, Jesus would remind us that the only relationship with the Lord we have to concern ourselves with is our own.

**Unforgiving** - "*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32). If you've read many marriage books, you may have come across the concept of "fair fighting." One of the main ingredients in this success formula is the idea that, when trying to discuss a problem, it is not fair for either party to bring up things from the past. When I say that curse-full relationships are unforgiving, I am not simply talking about a lack of forgiveness for a given incident. I am talking about a lack of forgiveness for things that happened years and even decades before. This can be seen by the amount of time and energy used to rehash old issues for which there still is no forgiveness. One reason why people don't or won't forgive is because it is a way for them to have the upper hand over another; it holds the other in a position of owing a debt they cannot repay.

**Reactive** - People in curse-full relationships have not learned how freeing it is to respond well to someone else's behavior. Healthy responses are based upon what is true, what is beneficial, and what is appropriate. People who are not free react in order to control the situation. When your sense of well-being comes from the performance of another, in fact, you are assigning that person a lot of power over you. Their words and behavior have power to indict or vindicate. The other person has the power to establish your self-esteem or to destroy it. Consequently, when that other person acts in a way that is bad "public relations" for you, you must react immediately in order to get on top of the situation. Under the curse the byword is control or be controlled. What a sad contrast to Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13! Paul says that love "is not provoked." This means that when we learn to rest in God's love, outside factors do not control our response—love does.

**Shame** - Is often used by people as a means of placing themselves over others. *When I give you the message that you are bad or defective, I am placing myself in the position of being more valuable, or more powerful, and the judge of your value as a person.* Shame is used to control the behavior of others. How would you respond, for example, if someone said, "What's wrong with you—why can't you be like your brother?" In shame-filled relationships, a change of behavior is an attempt to escape indictment.

**Ego-Driven** - This is where one person places himself over others, on top of the pile. People in curse-full relationships are ego-driven. That is the fancy psychological equivalent of being selfish. Beneath their line of conscious, or stated, reasoning lies another layer of thought, where the truth is hidden: • I want my children to dress a certain way because of what people will think of me. • I want my spouse to go to church because of what people might say about me if he/she doesn't go. • I need you to cater to me, so I can feel important. • For you to want to do something other than what I want means I must not matter to you. • For you to give someone else attention instead of me means something is wrong with me. Behaviors in these relationships are so ego-driven that even apparent selflessness masks underlying selfish motives: • I must please my spouse in every way and meet every need, so I can feel like a good spouse. • I must speak kindly to my children in public, so others will see me as a good parent. • I must never say no when asked to do something in the church, so others will see me as a dedicated Christian.

What does it feel like to live in a curse-full relationship? The following acronym describes it well.

**T.I.R.E.D.**

- T — Trapped
- I — Indicted
- R — Responsible
- E — Exposed
- D — Defensive

If you are part of a curse-full relationship, you are living in a no-win situation. No matter how well you perform, it will never be good enough. You know how tired and sad you feel.

Most people who feel worn out in a relationship think they are tired because of the other person. *"If he would just change,"* or *"If she would only stop pressuring me, I wouldn't be so tired."* This is not true! You and I are the cause of our own tiredness, by trying to make changes in someone else that we do not have the power to make, or by acquiescing to the controlling demands of others that I change (or else)!

**Discussion Questions** - 1. What are some ways you live under "the curse" in your family relationships? 2. Why is unforgiveness damaging to family relationships? Give some examples. 3. Have you ever felt trapped in a relationship? Why? Do you think it had something to do with your expectations? Explain.