

# Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

## Healthy Family Structure

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*"For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh," (Gen. 2:24).*

*"[God] will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern" (Matthew 6:33, NLT).*

*"One thing we failed to do in our marriage: We didn't protect ourselves from our children, from my parents, or from his job. We didn't have any boundaries to protect each other from the rest of the world. I think that was the biggest problem that finally sunk our marital ship." (A divorcee.)*

If you did the homework assignment from the previous chapter, you now have a small snapshot of your life. If you really got into the project, you probably have a small example of how complex you are. When two people marry, they represent two enormously complex beings, making promises to “love, honor, cherish, obey” etc., until death parts them. In order to help couples achieve that lofty objective, this chapter will provide insight into some insights from the field of family systems theory ~ specifically, the field of “structuralism.” This chapter is about creating a healthy family structure. Although that term may not mean much at this moment, by the time you reach the end of this chapter it will probably make more sense. Hopefully, you’ll see the value of it.

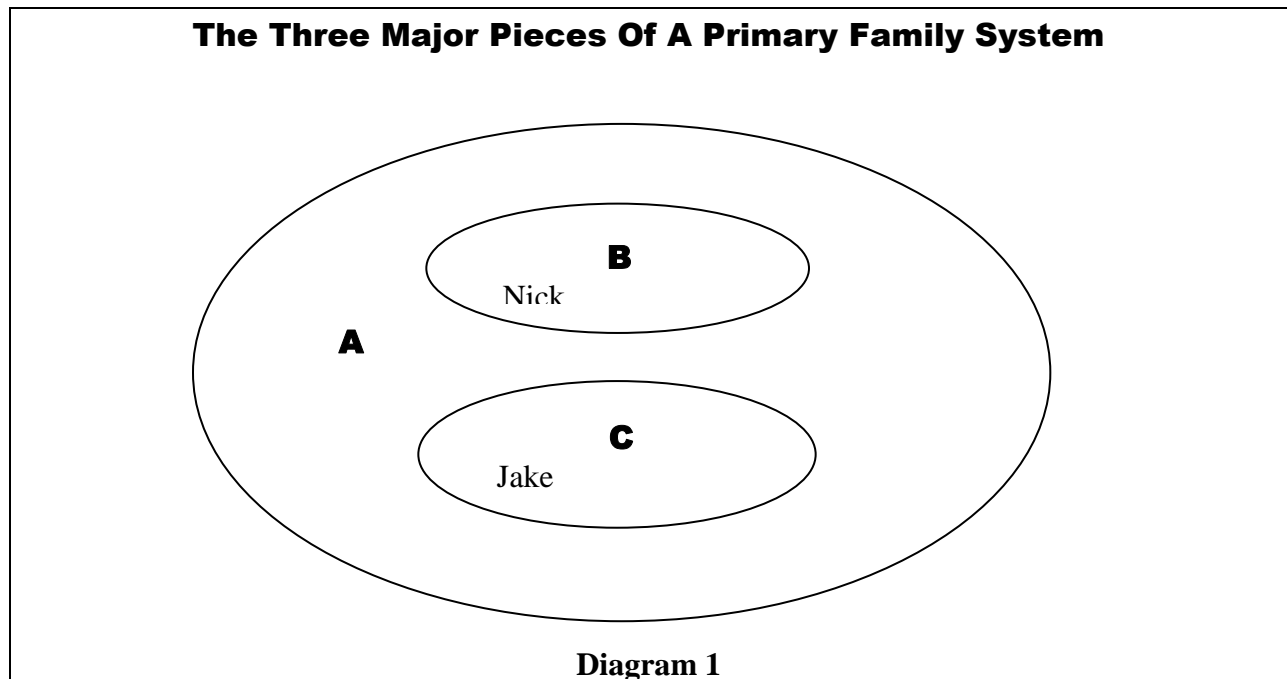
In this chapter you’ll be introduced to terms like “boundaries” and “sub-systems.” The chapter is intended to provide a way of protecting the husband/wife relationship, recognizing when others outside that relationship are having an inappropriate amount of influence, and what to do about it. The chapter could tend to become a little on the “theoretical” side, so short hypothetical case study examples will be added, to flesh out some of the theory.

### I. THREE FAMILY SUB-SYSTEMS

In order to gain a very preliminary and basic understanding of what will be discussed in this chapter, a diagram is presented for your study. A few terms will be used which might be new to you, but as you learn to use them they’ll help guide you within an understanding of your own marriage, family, and extended family. In this diagram (below) letter "A" represents the Primary Family Sub-System. Letter "B" represents the Spousal Sub-System, sometimes also

referred to as the Parental Sub-System. Letter "C" represents the Children's Sub-System. Each of these sub-systems has its own traits and boundaries.

Take a few moments and study this diagram. It's a big like an egg. There's a shell around it and then like an egg, inside the shell there are two distinct components. Like an egg, if the "yolk" loses its identity and becomes all "white" then there's a problem. The other problem would be for the "white" to lose its identity and become all "yolk." Both need to maintain their separate identities in order for the egg to function.



### **A. The Primary Family Sub-System**

For the moment we're going to define "primary family" as being father, mother, and children. We'll bring other relatives into the discussion later. People like grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and mom's and dad's siblings, fit into a category we'll identify as "secondary family." They're important, but they're not "primary family." For sake of understanding how families function, we need to understand the shell, yolk and white of the primary family.

Nick and Sandy were married when they were 22. When they were 24 they had their first son, Jake. When they were 26 they had a daughter, Connie. Nick, Sandy, Jake and Connie are the "Primary Family" sub-system, represented by Letter A in Diagram I. Everyone else is outside ~ uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins ~ they're all related, but none are inside the "Primary Family."

The concept of a "Primary Family" is actually seen within scripture. Genesis 2:23-25 reflects the moment after God had created man and wife. The text says, *"At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out*

*of a man." This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one (NLT).*

When Nick and Sandy were married, they both left their parents' homes and formed a new household. When a man and woman leave their parents' home to marry, it's not because they wish to show any disrespect for their parents. It's because God created in them a desire to start their own family system. Hopefully, as they left home to marry,....