



Building Faith in Families

Meaning-Making Through the
Fruit of the Spirit

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Why This Matters

Families are searching for:

- Stability
- Identity
- Meaning

Symptoms often reflect:

- Disconnection
- Lack of purpose
- Emotional dysregulation

Faith can serve as:

- Anchor
- Framework
- Motivator for Change

The Problem in Families

- Families often:
 - React instead of respond
 - Focus on behavior without meaning
 - Struggle to define shared values
 - Have no direction as a family
 - Have difficulty maintaining history and tradition
- Therapy challenge:
 - Moving from symptom reduction → meaning development

What is Meaning-Making?

- Meaning-making is a process of helping clients:
 - Interpret experiences
 - Assign purpose to suffering
 - Connect behavior to values
- Meaning for a family:
 - Unifies
 - Gives direction
 - Makes stronger connections
- Key question:
 - “What does this mean about who you are and who you want to be?”

Role of Faith and Meaning

- Provides:
 - Identity for individuals and families
 - Direction
 - Moral framework
- Increases
 - Hope
 - Resilience
 - Long-term change

Role of Faith and Meaning

- Faith can provide meaning to feelings and circumstances
- Faith can create purpose
- Purpose can give further meaning

Discussion #1

- Why is meaning so powerful?

Humans Are Meaning-Making Creatures

- People can survive tremendous hardship when they find meaning
- Families often suffer more from lack of purpose than lack of information
- Meaning answers:
 - Why are we here?
 - What do we stand for?
 - What kind of family do we want to become?

Meaning and the Brain

- Meaning reduces uncertainty
- Meaning increases resilience
- Purpose decreases hopelessness
- Shared family values create emotional safety

Question

- How do we work individuals and families toward positive meaning?
- The Fruits of the Spirit are a path and framework to work individuals and families toward meaning

Scripture Framework For Using Fruits of the Spirit

- Faith description/definition
- Galatians 5:22–23
 - Love
 - Joy
 - Peace
 - Patience
 - Kindness
 - Goodness
 - Faithfulness
 - Gentleness
 - Self-Control

Clinical Reframe

- The Fruit of the Spirit can also be viewed as:
 - Emotional regulation skills
 - Relational competencies
 - Internal value system

Family Example

- The Jackson Family
 - Parents disconnected
 - Teenage son acting out/defiant
 - Constant conflict
 - No shared vision
 - Sporadic church involvement—but all believe in God

FAMILY SYSTEMS + FAITH

Family Systems Perspective

- Individuals cannot be understood in isolation
- Behavior is relational
- Symptoms often serve as a function

Faith as a Regulator

- Shared beliefs create:
 - Predictability
 - Structure
 - Emotional safety
- Faith language becomes:
 - Common emotional language

Identity in Families

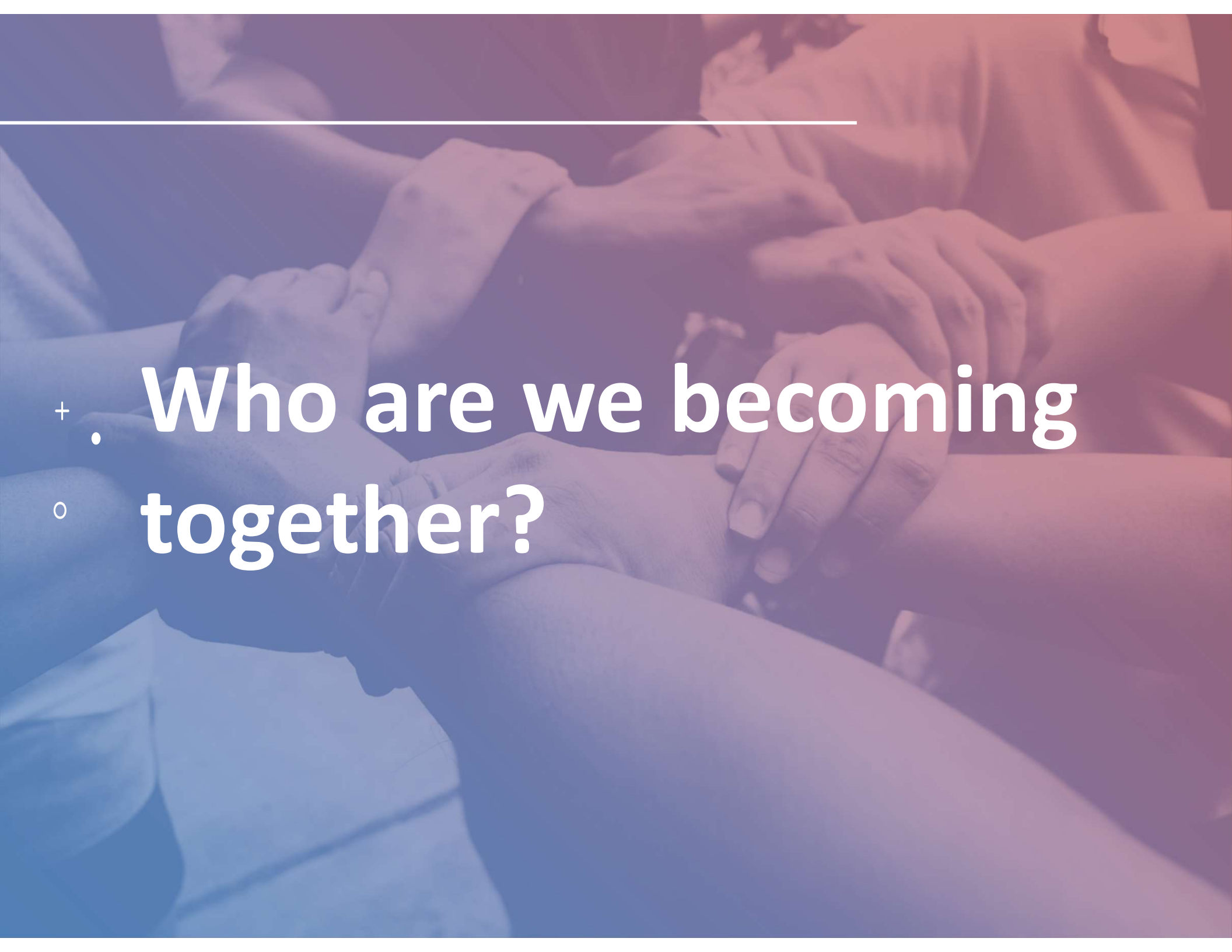
- Dysfunctional identity:
 - “We are chaotic”
 - “We fight”
 - “We yell”
- Reframed identity
 - “We are growing in patience”
 - “We value kindness”
- From chaos → growth
- From reaction → intention

Therapist Role

- Guide meaning—not impose belief
- Translate faith into function
- Help families live out values
- Help positive behavior establish and negative behavior extinguish

What is Your Family Becoming?

- What do you want your family to be known for?
- What values define your home?
- Which fruit of the spirit would you most hope for your children to learn?



**Who are we becoming
together?**

Jackson Family

- Parents decide things have to change, but do not know how
- They decide to attend church regularly, read the bible, and start family therapy.

Discussion #2

- What role has faith played in the healthiest family you have worked with?

THE FRUIT AS CLINICAL TARGETS

Overview of the 9 Traits

- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control
- Each fruit represents:
 - A need
 - A behavior
 - A relational impact



Rooted in Christ • Growing in Grace • Bearing Good Fruit

Family Fruit Assessment

- Using the wheel:
 - Which fruit is strongest in your family?
 - Which fruit is the weakest in your family?
 - Which fruit creates the greatest problems when absent?

Discussion #3

- Which fruit is most commonly missing in struggling families?

Love

- Clinical meaning:
 - Attachment
 - Sacrificial care
- Family Application
 - Meeting emotional needs intentionally

Greek terms/views of love:

- Agape-unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless love
- Philia-deep friendship or brotherly love
- Storge-natural of familial love
- Pragma-longstanding/enduring love
- Eros-romantic, passionate, or sexual love
- Ludus-playful or uncommitted love
- Philautia-self-love or self-care
- Mania-obsessive or possessive love

Love Intervention

- Practice exercise:
 - Ask “What does love look like in action in your home?”
 - Each person defines “feeling loved”
 - Easily ties into a discussion of Love Languages

Joy

- Not happiness → deeper sense of contentment
- Rooted in meaning, not circumstances

Joy Intervention

- Gratitude + Meaning journaling
- Family ritual: Weekly “joy moments”

Peace

- Internal calm + relational stability
- Opposite of chaos

Peace Intervention

- Conflict de-escalation plans
- Emotional regulation strategies
 - Mindfulness and grounding
 - Cognitive reappraisal
 - Pauses before reacting

Patience

- Tolerance for discomfort
- Delayed reaction

Patience Intervention

- Pause techniques:
 - Stop → Think → Respond
- Family rule: Slow conversations

Kindness

- Active care in small actions
- Care that builds trust

Kindness Intervention

- Daily/Weekly kindness challenge
- Track behaviors

Goodness

- Integrity + moral alignment
 - Honest, good deeds/behavior

Goodness Intervention

- Values clarification exercise
- “Who do we want to be as a family?”

Faithfulness

- Reliability + commitment

Faithfulness Intervention

- Accountability agreements
- Follow-through tracking

Gentleness

- Strength under control
- Safe, calm communication

Gentleness Intervention

- Tone awareness training
- “Say it softer” exercise

Self-Control

- Emotional regulation (expand further)
- Impulse control (expand further)

Self-Control Intervention

- Trigger mapping
- Replacement behaviors

Fruit of the Spirit and Regulation

- Love → Attachment Security
- Peace → Nervous System Regulation
- Patience → Executive Function Control
- Self-Control → Impulse Management
- Kindness → Relationship Repair
- Faithfulness → Trust building
- Gentleness → Conflict Resolution

Jackson Family

- Therapist helped family settle conflict to a low level and had family start with working on showing kindness, which led to working on goodness
- Teenager pulled away from a particular friend that was influencing him and started showing goodness to his closest 2 friends
- Bible reading started to shift from sporadic to several times a week planned

INTEGRATION INTO FAMILY WORK

Putting It Together

- Families choose 2-3 fruits to focus on
- Build weekly goals

Family Session Structure

- Check-in
- Review chosen fruit
- Practice related intervention
- Assign home practice

Meaning-Making Questions

- “What does this teach you about your family?”
 - “Who are you becoming?”
 - “What matters most here?”
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- Remember, these questions look for the meaning behind behaviors or reactions

Meaning-Making Exercises

- Family identifies:
 - Current struggle
 - Missing fruit or fruit that should have been applied
- Role play new behavior
- Focus on the meaning behind the behavior and how new behavior improves the situation

Jackson Family

- Family decided on values and goals
- Teenager started attending youth group at their church, parents joined a small group
- Eventually started serving food through a homeless outreach ministry
- Family started to be seen for kindness, goodness, generosity, caring, and faithfulness

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH FAITH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Discussion #4

- What concerns do you have about integrating faith into therapy?

Ethics

- Respect client beliefs
- Obtain consent
- Avoid imposing values

When to Use Faith-Based Interventions

- Client initiated
- Aligned with values
- When clinically appropriate

Risks

- Alienation
- Misinterpretation
- Over-spiritualizing

Ethical Frameworks

- Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence

FINAL INTEGRATION

Therapist Reflection

- How comfortable are you integrating faith?
- Where are your growth areas?

Key Takeaways

- Faith → Meaning → Regulation → Behavior Change → Maintained Change
- Faith provides meaning
- Meaning drives behavior
- Behavior change shapes families

Closing

- Word of encouragement from Gresh
- Questions