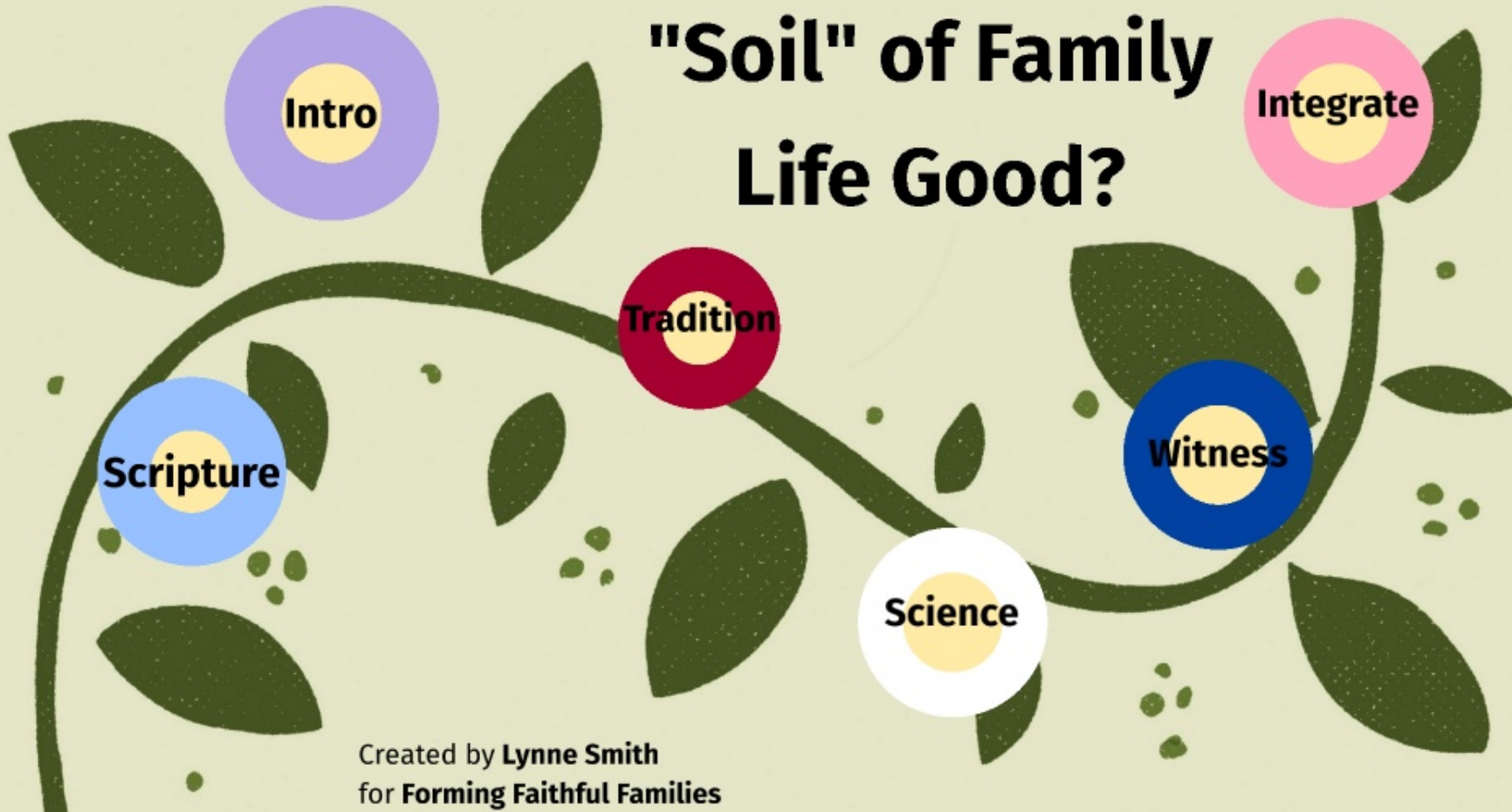


What Makes the "Soil" of Family Life Good?



Created by **Lynne Smith**
for **Forming Faithful Families**

Introduction

Family Life is the "soil" in which children grow.

Have you ever thought about the type of "soil" that you are cultivating in your home?

This study explores that question, equips, and encourages you to create loving, connected, deep "soil" in which to raise your children.

Learn

Connect

Framework for Learning a conversation...



Scripture

Tradition

Science

Witness

Scripture



This study takes Scripture seriously, seriously enough to study the text in the original language and wrestle with its meaning.

The text of this study is a parable, a story. But not just any story, rather the type of story that provides insight, revelation. This is the type of story that points to something beyond the details it shares.

Think of a time when you felt connected to God. If you are willing, share the story.

Tradition



The voice of tradition speaks into our lives continually. The traditions of our faith, our family, our profession, our community shape expectations for our decisions, our behaviors, and our commitments. Traditions can be comforting. Traditions can be confining.

Think: "that's what we always do"; "you should"; "it's worked for 30 years"...

Think back to your teen years.
Describe a tradition you found to be comforting. Describe a tradition you found to be confining.

Scientific Research



The world that God created is lawful, where reliable principles can be observed and studied. Science gives us language to describe and knowledge to understand God's creativity.

The field of scientific research adds its voice to our conversation.



Think about a snowflake. What can the snowflake tell us about God and the lawfulness of our world?

Vital Witness



The conversation would not be complete without each person's vital witness. Each of us is unique with our own story, our own witness. Our collective stories affirm and challenge what we know through Scripture, Tradition, and Science. They are the case studies through which we can discern the deeper question and the deeper meaning.

What brought you here today?

What do you expect/hope to learn?

Covenant

Authentic connection requires vulnerability.

Vulnerability requires safety.

Safety requires **covenant**.



**Creating
Covenant**

Commitment

Framework

Following are some suggested questions to guide the creation of your covenant agreement. Add or subtract questions as needed for your particular group.

- How often will we meet? And for how long?
- What are the expectations surrounding attendance?
- At the completion of our study, how can people leave and how can people join?
- How will we ensure everyone has an opportunity to share?
- How will we ensure no one person dominates the conversation?
- How will we handle conflict when it arises?
- Who will facilitate our gatherings?

Commit to Learn and Grow Together

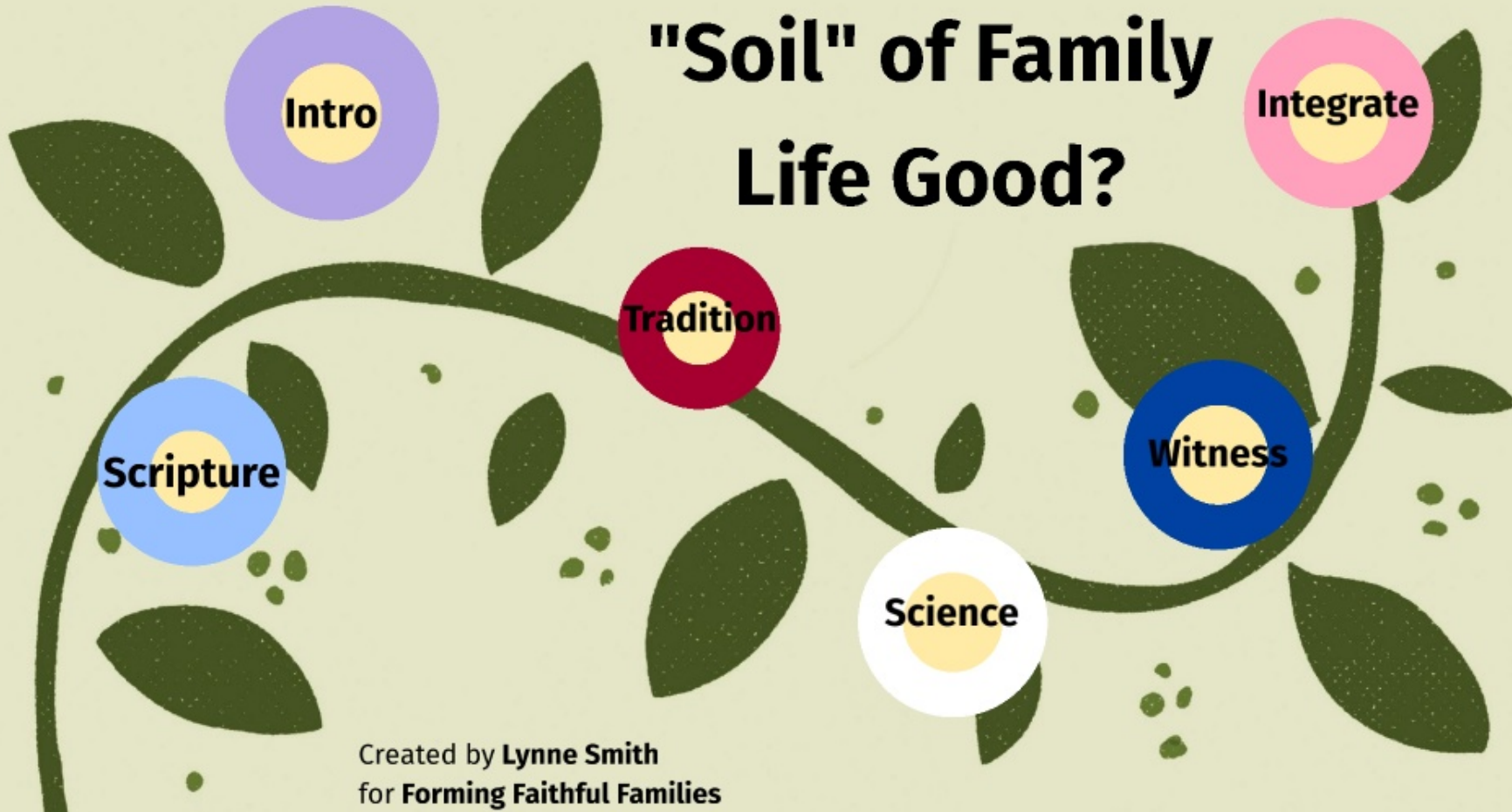
Consider writing down
your covenant
agreement.

Leave enough space
for everyone to sign it.

Gather around a
shared meal to
celebrate this shared
commitment.



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Mark 4:1-9

The Parable of the Good Earth



**Group
Discussion**

Maps

Reflect

Questions

Responding to the Text

- What did you find comforting about this translation of Mark 4:1-9?
- What did you find confrontational about this translation of Mark 4:1-9?

Reflecting on the Text

- How can you be a listener to your own life?
- How can you be a listener to your child's life?

3 New Testament Maps

Scripture bears witness to three fairly distinct forms of the Christian journey:

- **Galilean**
- **Wilderness**
- **Jerusalem**

Galilee

Wilderness

Jerusalem

Galilean Christianity

Describes those who enjoy sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his teaching, then returning home to enjoy "normal" life. Expectations of the Galilean Christian are fairly limited.

Wilderness Christianity

Describes those who have either outgrown their current situation or who have been ejected from their "normal" life by an event or crisis. Jesus experienced the wilderness immediately after his baptism. The wilderness is where we learn the skills of survival, where we learn to gather only the manna that we need for the day, where we learn to trust the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

Jerusalem Christianity

Jesus set his face toward **Jerusalem** when he was clear about his purpose, when he knew the purpose for which his life would be spent. Jerusalem is where we recognize that our life is part of something larger than ourselves and we are willing to be completely spent for that larger purpose.

Reflect and Consider

You

- Where are you on the map?
- What makes you locate yourself there?

Your Child

- Where is your child on the map?
- What makes you locate your child there?

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Integrate

Tradition

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Soil and Fruit

On a white board or a piece of paper, draw two boxes. Above one box, write the word "Environment". Above the other box, write the word "Fruit".

Environment

Fruit

Share

Consider

Reflect

Environment

Share words or phrases that describe expectations of how your children should be raised (environment).

Fruit

Share words or phrases that describe expectations of how your children should "turn out" (fruit).

Consider

Review the expectations that you shared.

- Which expectations were contributed by your family of origin?
(highlight in one color)
- Which expectations were contributed by your faith community?
(highlight in another color)
- Which expectations were contributed by the culture?
(highlight in a different color)

Reflect

Pay attention to what influences your expectations about parenting.

- What did you notice?
- Do any of the expectations conflict?
- How do you resolve those conflicts in your parenting?

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Connection



Emotion

Response

Security

Rituals

What does your child do...

- to let you know he/she is frightened or uncomfortable?
- to let you know he/she wants to be close to you?
- to let you know he/she wants to explore?

What do you do...

- to help your child feel safe when he/she is frightened or uncomfortable?
- to comfort your child when he/she wants to be close?
- to encourage your child when he/she wants to explore?

Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, and Kind



This promotional video for Circle of Security Parenting describes the importance of connection in influencing our child(ren)'s behavior.



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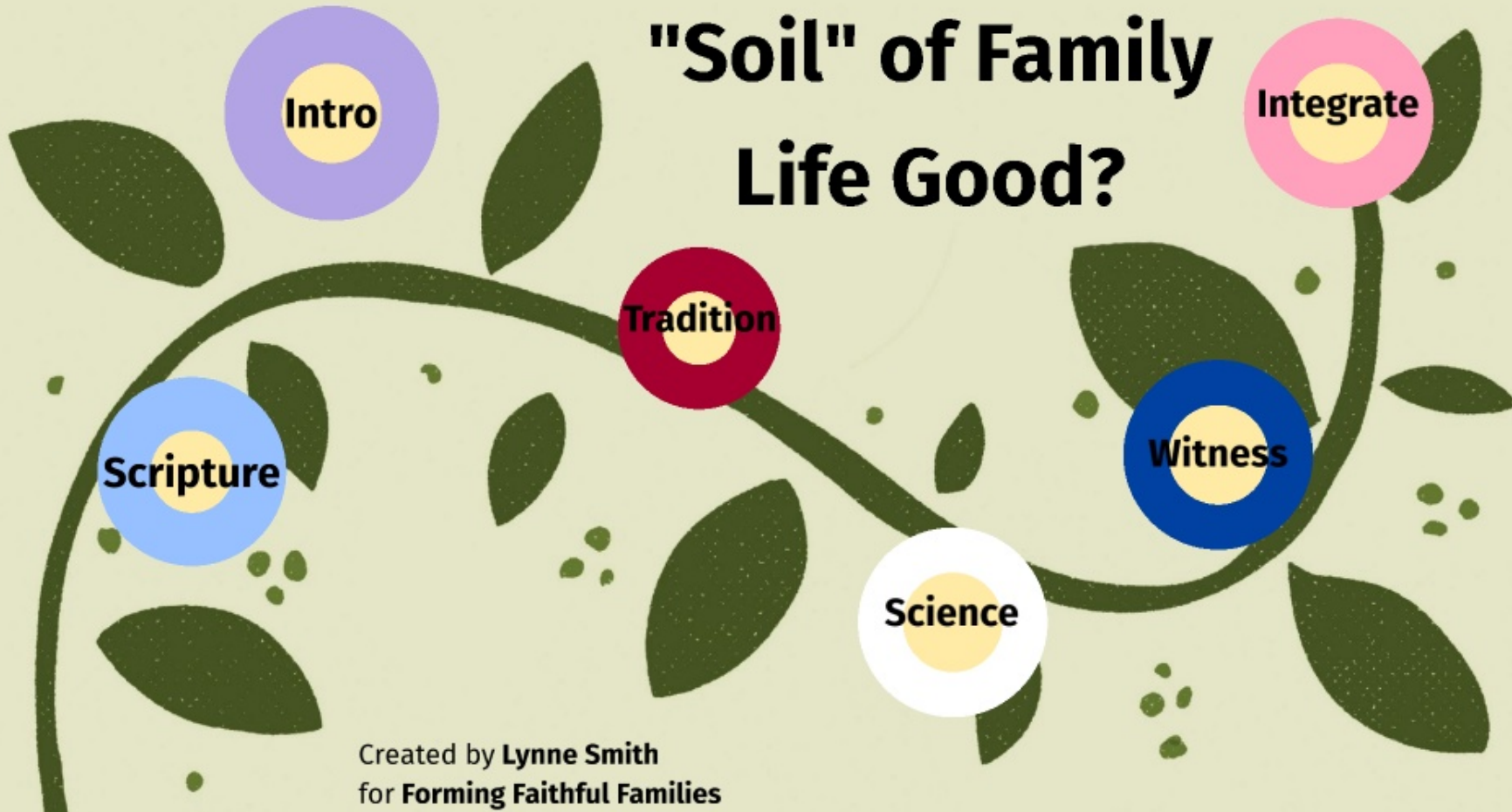
Rituals of Connection

"Connection rituals offer everyday opportunities for family bonding, such as family meals, morning and bedtime routines, and the comings and goings of family members to and from work and school. They also involve family outings from small trips to the ice cream store to major family vacations. The goal is a sense of family bonding."

["The Intentional Family" by William J. Doherty. p12]

- What rituals of connection do you enjoy with your child...
 - when you wake up?
 - when you leave/return to the house?
 - at bed time?
 - on vacation?
 - during holidays?
 - around illness?

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Sharing our Stories



Ideal

Reality

**Plan for
Success**



What is "Good Soil" in which to raise children?

Describe the environment in which your child is his/her authentic and best self. Think in terms of sleep, activity level, food, alone/with others, level of structure, energy...

Describe the environment in which you are your authentic and best self.

Similarities? Differences?



The soil in which we are planted...

Describe an authentic and best self moment
that you and your child(ren) shared recently.

Could you engineer more?

Why, or why not?

Amending our soil...

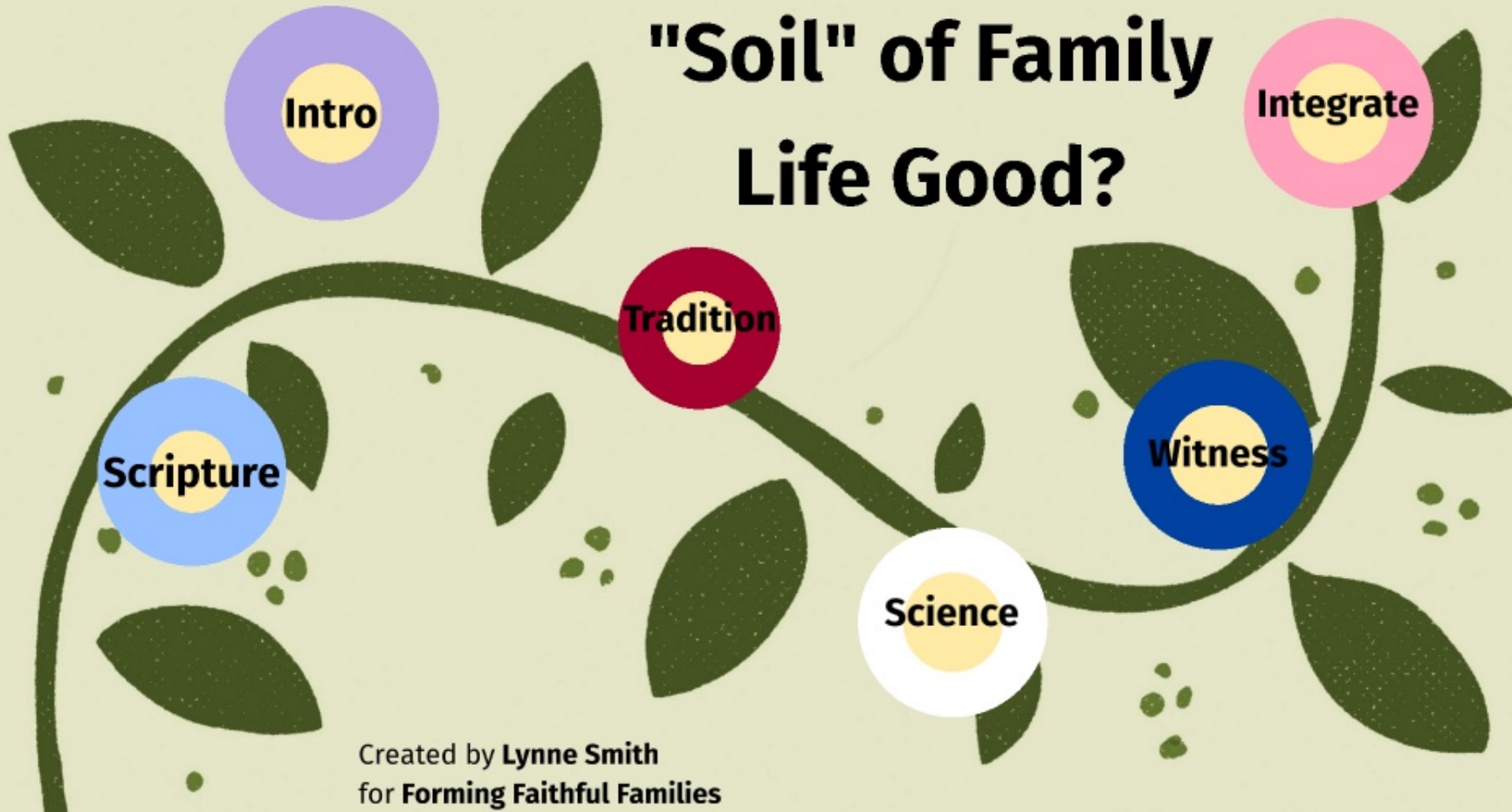
How do you contribute to the making of the good soil?

How does your child influence/impact the "soil" in your home?

When things aren't going well, what do you do to get back on track?



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Conversation

Reflect on your experience during this study.

Recall the voices that entered the conversation in response to the question: "What Makes the Soil of Family Life Good?"

- Scripture
- Tradition
- Science
- Vital Witness

Use the diagram as needed to be attentive to the conversation.

Affirmation

Challenge

Plan

Celebrate

Share as you are willing

What have you learned that affirms the goodness of the soil you are cultivating in your home?



Share as you are willing

What have you learned that reveals soil that may need a little extra love and care?



Share as you are willing

How do you plan to amend the soil?
What skills/strategies will you use?

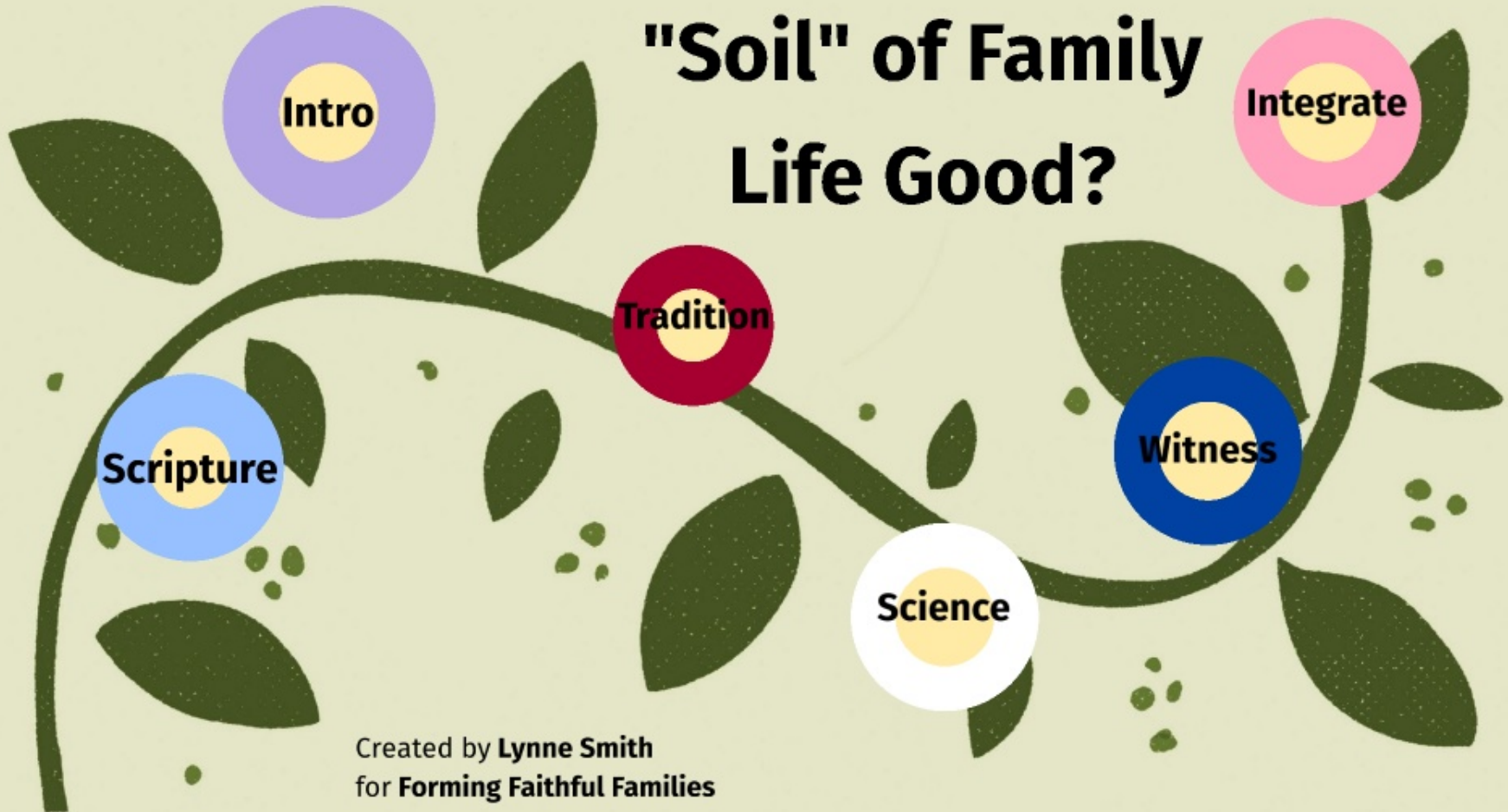


Share as you are willing

How do you plan to pay attention to and celebrate moments of connection in your family?



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