

BAGGAGE FEES



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SUMMARY

Most cars have trunks where we store luggage, but you can only fit so much. Some of us have far too much baggage. Bags in the trunk can weigh us down and get too big to carry. On flights, bags can cost us. We must discard them so they don't prevent us from moving forward.

College works the same way. You're in a season of transition. New environment. New expectations. New relationships. New pressure. And whether you realize it or not, you are bringing baggage with you.

Some baggage is practical — schedules, finances, responsibilities. But some baggage is emotional: unresolved conflict, anger, insecurity, jealousy, addictions, family tension, a breakup you never fully processed, or a relationship back home that is still blurry.

This lesson challenges students to identify what they're carrying, understand the "fee" it's costing them, and practice the habits that help them unpack so they can move forward with clarity and freedom.

"You can't move forward freely while carrying what you were never meant to keep carrying."

— Dr. Tim Elmore.

Most of us already know this principle—but we forget it in real life. Once, a family drove to Florida for vacation. Relaxing trip. Great memories. As you can imagine, their trunk was jam-packed with suitcases and cosmetic bags. Video games and equipment. Books and magazines. Beach gear—you name it. They crammed it all into the trunk and the back seat.

Everything technically fit—but they faced two measurable consequences:

1. **It wasn't comfortable.** There was not much room to move.
2. **Their gas mileage was terrible.** With all that weight, the car got fewer miles per gallon.

In short, their volume of luggage:

- Made the drive crowded and chaotic
- Made their travels slower and more difficult
- Made their trip more expensive

You've probably noticed this: the more baggage you have, the more bogged down you become.

If you've flown anywhere, you know airlines now charge you for checking luggage. The more bags you have, the more money you pay. It's something we now expect. If you've got bags, you'll pay more. This isn't only true for travel. It's a fact of life.

When you carry emotional baggage into a season of transition, you invite problems. The baggage makes your trip cluttered and costly.

WHY TRANSITIONS CREATE STRESS — AND BAGGAGE

Psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe studied the medical histories of thousands of people to explore whether stress is linked to illness. In 1967, they published the **Social Readjustment Rating Scale**, showing that life changes create stress—and that stress can impact health.

They pointed to shifts like:

- Leaving home
- Change in finances
- Transition in schools or relationships
- Adjustments in routine
- Shifts in sleeping habits

Their conclusion was simple: adjustments create stress, and stress levels depend on both the size of the change and a person's ability to adapt.

College is full of adjustments—which means baggage is primed to surface.

WHAT'S THE PRICE OF OUR BAGGAGE?

Tim O'Brien wrote a well-known book about the Vietnam War called *The Things They Carried*. He described how soldiers carried government-issued items—helmets, canteens, weapons—then returned them when they came home.

But the emotional bags? Those stayed with them. It's not uncommon for veterans to confess they still feel unsafe without a weapon, even years later, constantly on edge. Some even experience physical pain they can't explain.

Modern research helps explain why. In functional MRI studies, researchers found that the same brain networks can activate for both physical pain (like getting burned) and emotional pain (like being rejected or left). In other words, heartbreak is not "just in your head."

BREAKING FREE FROM EMOTIONAL BONDS

One important step of progress is to identify and free yourself from "excess baggage." No distractions. No denial. Face reality and move forward.

Below are four basic needs we all have. When these needs go unmet, we tend to do strange things to fill them.

Inward Need	If missing we feel:	Symptoms
Belonging	Insecure	Overcompensation; emotional highs and lows
Worth	Inferior	Competition; self-doubt; need for recognition
Competence	Incompetent	Comparison with specific people; defensive attitude
Purpose	Insignificant	Compulsive, driven spirit; defeat; depression

So ask yourself:

- Is there anything weighing me down?
- Am I distracted from my current goals by a past issue that lingers?
- Do I feel stuck?

If so, you're not alone. You just need to unpack and decide what to leave behind.

Pause here. Take a few minutes for each person to share one part of the lesson that stood out. Why that part?

REFLECT AND RESPOND

“BAGGAGE FEES”

Take some time individually to write your answers to these questions. Afterward, the group should spend 5-10 minutes sharing and discussing their answers.

- 1. Do you think most students deal with their past "baggage" well? Why or why not?**
- 2. Our culture often distracts us from handling baggage healthily. What is it about our world today that makes emotional health difficult?**
- 3. True or False: Many "baggage fees" have to do with relationships. Why or why not?**
- 4. Can you name a time when you identified an emotional need in your life and handled it well?**

SELF ASSESSMENT

CASE STUDY: THE GROUP CHAT NOBODY WANTS TO OPEN

We commonly fall into "performance traps" when we have emotional baggage. We cope with pain by reacting in predictable ways.

COPING MECHANISMS

Circle the two most common ways you react to insecurities you face, then talk about them with your group.

- **Comparison** – You compare yourself to others, keeping score in key areas.
- **Condemnation** – You judge others or yourself constantly, resulting in conceit or self-pity.
- **Control** – To validate your worth, you feel you must take charge and protect your interests.
- **Compulsion** – You're a people-pleaser, driven to perform to gain approval.
- **Compensation** – You feel like a victim and must compensate for losses or inferiority.
- **Competition** – You become self-centered, determined to outdo others for attention or rewards.

A first-year student named Devin carried two bags into college. The first bag was visible: a backpack full of books and a calendar packed with work shifts.

The second bag was invisible: a belief that people eventually leave—and that asking for help is a weakness. In high school, Devin learned to stay independent. His family life was unpredictable. Friendships came and went. So he built a strategy: he doesn't need anyone.

During the first month of college, Devin's roommate and hall mates were friendly, but Devin stayed guarded. When conflict came—noise late at night, passive-aggressive comments, a group chat that started to feel tense—Devin withdrew.

Instead of addressing the issue, he avoided the common spaces and stopped responding. He told himself he didn't care.

But the fee showed up anyway:

- He felt lonely.
- He felt behind.
- He felt irritated all the time.
- He began to assume everyone was against him.

Pause here. Share what you circled and why. What "fee" does that coping mechanism charge you?

A resident assistant noticed and asked one question: "What are you carrying that makes this feel bigger than it is?"

That question didn't solve everything, but it opened a door. Devin began to see that what felt like "strength" (withdrawal) was actually baggage (self-protection). He practiced one new move: he named the tension early, asked for clarity, and stayed in the relationship.

The situation didn't become perfect overnight.

But Devin stopped paying the baggage fee every day.

REFLECT AND RESPOND:

In what ways do you relate to Devin?

What emotional pattern do you tend to default to under stress?

TAKE ACTION

If emotional baggage is making you feel stuck, consider talking with a counselor or trusted mentor.

Also, here are healthy, practical steps that can help you deal with day-to-day baggage:

- 1. Review** – Reflect on past issues and why you may feel stuck or discouraged.
- 2. Recall** – When an issue arises, notice how it made you feel and what you did.
- 3. Release** – Surrender control of the issue or person; let go of the past hurt.
- 4. Reconcile** – If you need to talk to someone to make it right, do so.
- 5. Request** – Ask for direction or support from a friend, counselor, mentor, or God.
- 6. Refuse** – Choose not to allow wrong motives or past anger to rule you.
- 7. Respond** – Return to service and healthy connections. Serve from gratitude, not guilt.

**"Leadership is not about avoiding differences.
It's about navigating them well."**

— John C. Maxwell

TAKE ACTION

This week:

- Identify one piece of "excess baggage" you suspect is costing you right now.
- Name the fee: How is it making your life more crowded, slower, or more expensive?
- Choose one step from the list on the previous page and practice it within the next 7 days.

"To move forward today, you must learn to say goodbye to yesterday's hurts, tragedies, and baggage. You can't build a monument to past problems and fail forward."

- John C Maxwell