Family Legacy Institute
Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

What We Bring To A Marriage
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"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Jeremiah 31:29 ~ NLT).

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (Prov. 22:6 ~ NIV).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths (Prov. 3:5-6).

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14).

"...The more dysfunctional and unsatisfying a child's family of origin has been, the harder it is for the child to leave it. More than 80% of our decisions are made below the conscious level, in the deep recesses of thought and sub-thought where logic never goes," (p. 24, Passages of Marriage, by Minirth, Newman, Hemfelt).

In this chapter we'll explore how complex we are as human beings, and how our personal complexity plus that of our spouse, makes every marriage completely unique. In **Section I** we'll look at the impact of our parents and our siblings. In **Section II** we'll look at the impact of peers, previous marriages, cultural issues, and personal strengths and weaknesses. In **Section III** we'll review the impact of faith, career orientation, the effect of growing up in a painful childhood home, and we'll ponder thoughts about how to "center" your personal life GPS in a manner that your marriage may be strengthened.

Section One

Every marriage is different. No two are alike. There may be similarities, but no two marriages are exactly alike. Each person brings to their marriage a wide variety of strengths, weaknesses, experiences, memories, hopes, dreams, expectations, hidden agendas, values, desires, fears, beliefs, and needs.

In this chapter the reader will gain in understanding about how complex marriage is, based upon what each partner brings to a marriage. Each component in this chapter will be the approximate equivalent of spray-painting various shades of indelible ink onto a piece of tapestry. The tapestry is your life; the ink is the influence of the components in this chapter. No two tapestries will be the same.

Part of the complexity of marriage is found in the initial selection process. *As we select our spouse*, *our selection says at least as much about us as it does about them*. This is because as we select someone who "fits us," and that person selects a person who "fits them," even the process of "initial fitting" is unique ~ in all couples.

Although there is some wisdom to the expression, "love is blind," there are actually numerous reasons why person A chooses person B to marry. Psychologists are able to identify relational, emotional, psychodynamic, and family systems reasons why one person would select another person to be their spouse. By the time you reach the end of this chapter, a few of these reasons will have become part of your working knowledge. The Bible says *"we are fearfully and wonderfully made"* (Isa. 139:14). That may be an understatement.

I. Parents

The most obvious and usually most influential color affecting the tapestries of our lives is our parents. There is no way to escape our parents' impact upon our lives. If we loved them and had a terrific relationship with them, then we will likely want to be like them in our marriage and child-rearing. In the best of all worlds this is what happens in everyone's life ~ they grow up in a great home with terrific, loving parents who provide them with exceptional emotional support, encouragement, reasonable boundaries, etc. So when they marry, they want to duplicate much of what mom and dad had in their marriage.

Yet not every home is happy. Some children grow up in difficult homes. By the time they reach adulthood, if they disliked their parents, perhaps feared them or grew up with absent parents, they may wish to avoid making the same mistakes their parents made. Generally speaking, the worse one's parents were, the more a person will at least hope to avoid making the same mistakes. But it's not always easy to avoid the same ruts in the road that brought problems to one's parents.

This desire to avoid the both the negative impact and the repetition of poor parenting is likely to drive one toward what they believe are opposite directions ~ away from mom's temper or dad's drinking for example. What we often fail to realize is that in running away from their model of marriage or parenting, *we are still being influenced by them.*

This has obvious impact upon marriage and family, for good or for bad. We wish to emulate the good and avoid the bad. What we often miss is that both the good and bad are part of us ~ not always something we can easily avoid, any more than we can avoid having our hands and ears accompany us when we leave the house. This impact of parenthood is so deep that some therapists have observed that people tend to marry a person who has the greatest number of traits

of the parent with whom they had the most "unfinished business" from childhood. Hmm. Even dysfunction is part of the "fit" we often seek to replicate in marriage.

In some cases that can be scary to think about, and as we'll discover in this course, certain pathologies do tend to run in family systems. If you came from a painful family system, it's especially worth your time thinking about this. If you had an abusive dad, for example, are you abusive? Abuse tends to run in family systems and tends to be multigenerational. If your mother was shrinking violet, what are you like? If your father was emotionally distant and vague, what are you like? If one of your parents is a work-a-holic, how did that affect your work ethic? If your mother was Brunhilda in full armor, what are you like? Was there any sexual abuse in your family? Sexual abuse tends to run in family systems ~ as does alcoholism ~ and certain forms of mental illness.

Another way to understand parental impact is that you may not _be_ like a parent with whom you have substantial difficulties. But you may _marry_ someone who is very much