

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

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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 first, 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

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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. Hmmmm. 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 like that parent. Or you may be more like one of your parents, and marry someone who's like the other parent. This is why the Bible makes the observation, "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.*" (*Jeremiah 31:29 ~ NLT*). It's a quaint way of saying, "One way or the other, our parents definitely put their color on the tapestries of our lives."

As one considered the impact of one's parents, it's important to understand both family systems *and* genetic information, must be incorporated in one's understanding of the impact of parent. There's something very true about apples not falling far from trees. You simply cannot avoid your parents' impact upon your marriage and family. However, the good news is that you can become aware of it, and then allow this awareness, plus active faith in God, to guide you toward a different, perhaps better way of doing life.

Throughout this course the Bible will be used as a reference. Scripture teaches a principle of family systems. *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (Prov. 22:6 ~ NIV)*. The good news is that we human beings are not genetically predetermined. Contrary to the opinion of some in the psychological community, we do not come out of the womb programmed to be one and only one sort of person, or spouse, or parent. We have the ability to decide and change ~ grow and heal. Throughout this course there will be times for reflection. Here's the first one. If you are taking this course in a group, then take ten minutes as a group and discuss the question below.

Ten Minute Small Group Discussion:

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First Assignment: In **10 seconds** describe your father ~ keep it short ~ no stories or gory details. Then in **10 seconds** describe your mother ~ again, keep it short ~ no stories or gory details.

Second Assignment: In answering the following questions put an **“X”** where it best fits.

	Husband	Wife	Both
In your house today, who:			
1. Cooks	_____	_____	_____
2. Takes out garbage	_____	_____	_____
3. Mows grass	_____	_____	_____
4. Washes dishes	_____	_____	_____
5. Washes cars	_____	_____	_____
6. Balances checkbook	_____	_____	_____
7. Handles investments	_____	_____	_____
8. Disciplines kids	_____	_____	_____
9. Is household leader	_____	_____	_____
10. Apologizes first	_____	_____	_____
11. Deals best with	_____	_____	_____
family’s emotions			

Third Assignment: Go again through questions 1 – 10 (above) and use a **“Y”** to represent who in your childhood family (probably which parent) did each of these things.

Then spend a few minutes sharing your answers with one another in your group. Again, keep your personal answers short ~ no extended stories please.

Your parents were the primary shapers of your expectations. They were the first role models in your life. It was your relationship with them, and your interaction with their value system, that initially defined what you assumed to be “normal” and “healthy.” Even if your family system was terribly abnormal and unhealthy, you learned it to be normal and healthy. It became your interpretive grid for life. Even if dad hung from the ceiling and ate chicken heads, even if mom daily flushed her shoes down the toilet ~ that was “normal” for you.

Do not under-estimate the impact of this thought. *Whatever* your childhood family system was like, it defined “normal” during your early years, and that internal definition will likely remain with you in many ways until you actively decide to redefine “normal” in your life, and then change your behaviors to fit your new definitions.

In most children’s lives, between the child’s ages birth to approximately five, their parents are their primary role models. Assuming you grew up with at least one parent, it was likely they more than anyone else, who had their hands upon your life as the twig was bent. Your family system may have changed as you went through adolescence, and those changes may have been important, but the early years of one-through-five are extremely important years in creating the values and personality of a child.

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Indeed, these years are so pivotal that it can be a good exercise in learning about yourself, to ponder what your life was like when you were between ages birth through first grade. What memories do you have? Where did you live? What did your parent(s) do with their lives? What was the emotional climate of the home? Were the children's needs met by the adults in the home? How was conflict handled? Who was closest to mom? To dad? Were you a happy kid growing up in that home? Was everyone basically happy?

As you ponder your parents' impact, think also of genetics. Your dad and mom had some very specific DNA that they passed on to you. They not only taught you their "system" of marriage; they branded you with their genetics. Research is now beginning to show that much more than hair color is transmitted genetically. There appear to be many emotional and relational factors transmitted from parent to child. This in no way means you are genetically predisposed to be what your mother or father were, but it does have something to do with the initial hand you have been dealt.

Ten Minute Small Group Discussion:

Go around your group and discuss the following questions, with each person adding his or her input. (You need not go any deeper than you're comfortable.)

Question 1:

What is your earliest memory involving either of your parents? Is there any way that this earliest memory might provide any kind of a metaphor (story line) for how you conduct your marriage or your parenting? Is it possible that your earliest memory may still shape your self-esteem in any way today? If so, how?

Question 2:

What did your parents do that most nurtured and supported you? What did they do that wounded or angered you? Can you think of any ways in which these two stories of their parenting play themselves out in your marriage and your parenting today?

Question 3:

Can you identify any genetic factors that you inherited from your parents or grand-parents? If you have children, what genetic factors from your parents, or from yourself, do you recognize in them?

II. Other Significant Relationships

A. Siblings

Our sibling relationships are usually the longest lasting relationships of our lives. They usually existed long before we married, and they usually exist long after our parents die. They are responsible for much of the shaping of our early lives. Although there are not as many text books written on the subject of sibling impact, our sibs do bend our lives.

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So here's something to consider. A child's quality of relationships with their siblings, is often quite shaped by the quality of their parents' relationships. If mom and dad knew how to articulate their feelings and work through them ~ if they knew how to resolve conflict between themselves ~ if they were mature in their handling of difficult issues ~ then they more or less automatically taught these skills to their children.

By contrast, if mom and dad didn't know how to do these kinds of things, they would not have been as able to teach their children. So the prime movers in any family system are mom and dad. This means that mom's and dad's quality of relationships were generally "lived out" within the relationships between siblings. Stop for a moment and think about mom's and dad's relationships with each other. Can you see ways in which that set the stage for your relationships with your siblings?

In considering the impact of siblings, birth order is worth noting. Here are a few very generalized observations involving birth order. Oldest and only children frequently share many similarities. Many are dominant, self-centered, aggressive, driven people. They are often over-achievers ~ e.g., of all U.S. presidents, and all astronauts who've been to the moon, all but one or two were firstborn.

It may be possible to have two "first born" children types in a single home. For example, when the first two kids in a family are of different genders, some researchers find that both children may function with "oldest child" symptoms. It's not always so, but apparently sometimes is true. And when there are several years separating them, sometimes two children can become successive "first children."

By contrast, middle children often tend to be peace-makers in family systems. Certainly there are exceptions, but middlers are more prone to negotiating between those older and those younger. Middlers often feel they are the most ignored children in a family.

And although nothing is true all the time, the last children in a family system are often somewhat similar to the oldest children – i.e., competitive and aggressive – but in less conspicuous ways, at least according to some researchers.

These are just a couple of insights ~ there are many books on the subject of birth order and not all researchers reach the same conclusions. However, it is worth noting that birth-order has an impact upon siblings, their relationships with one another, with peers, *and often their future marital relationships as well.*

We'll learn later in this course that with each new child in a family system, the entire family system changes. No two children grow up in "the same family." Each new addition of a child changes the family system's balance. So a child doesn't just grow up with a couple of brothers and/or sisters. We grow up in a molten cauldron of pecking order and unique relational issues with our siblings. That tapestry of our lives is heavily colored by the various colors our siblings bring to the process.

Ten Minute Small Group Discussion:

Where do you fall in your sibling birth-order?

As you recall your childhood, how did your siblings impact you?

Big time impact					No impact at all				
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Which of your siblings had the greatest impact upon you, and why?

To which of your siblings were you closest, and why?

If there's one way that you might be transferring the impact of one of your siblings, into your marriage or parenting, what might that be?

Did your parents favor one of the siblings? If so, who was favored? How did that impact you when you were a child? How does it impact you now?

Was any sibling elevated to quasi-parental status? If so, how did that affect you then? Does it still play out in your marriage, or parenting? If so, how?

Section Two

In Section I we have reviewed two extremely formative elements that make us who we are prior to marrying. Now we're going to make the tapestry a bit more complex by adding a few other ingredients.

B. Peers

Peer relationships often have tremendous power to influence us. Whether the experience is that of a young white child experiencing the different aromas in the kitchen of an Asian or African-American friend, or a young child playing in the home of a friend whose parents are alcoholics, our peer relationships affect our adult lives and relationships.

This is especially true as we progress through adolescence. Adolescence is a time of pulling away from our parents and their culture, to form our own lives and values. Indeed, there is a time when peer relationships take a pre-eminent position in our lives, exerting more influence upon us than our family systems. Although we may never be truly free from the influence of our family, a point comes when peers lure us out into the new waters of non-familial relationships, values and experiences. After sailing in these new waters, we're often never quite content to remain tied up solely in the harbor of our childhood family system again.

Through our peer relationships, we re-evaluate what we learned at home. We measure our parents against other adults. We consider differing value systems. This process of

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re-evaluation generally begins late grade school years, accelerating as we progress through adolescence. The evaluation continues until we form our own family systems.

Peer relationships affect us in adulthood too. As adults we see people with great marriages, and wish to be like them. Or we see people with gambling or drug addiction, and wish to avoid making similar mistakes.

Peer relationships help us understand character. As we mature, we come to understand that *our characters actually are the basis of our marriage and parenting*. We begin to identify character strengths and flaws. Scripture says, *As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the person (Prov. 27:19 ~ NLT)*. Since it's usually easier to see the character of someone else than it is to see our own, we frequently use peer relationships to measure our own characters.

Peer relationships are also about personal self-esteem ~ getting through junior high with our skin on ~ being pretty enough to be invited to prom ~ being a good enough athlete to earn a high school letter ~ or rising high enough on the corporate or academic ladder to feel good about oneself.

Peer relationships extend throughout life. As a friend's career soars while yours tumbles, the ripples may affect your marriage. As a friend's marriage goes through divorce, your marriage may feel the ripples. Just as we teach our children, those peers with whom we associate have an impact upon us. Birds of a feather do indeed flock together.

Yet as adults we learn that we can swap peer flocks ~ we are able to choose and join other peer groups. That's part of what happens when someone changes churches – or joins a different golf club – or moves to a new neighborhood. New peer relationships form, and the decision of our chosen flock will likely have an impact upon several aspects of our adult lives.

We're all aware that self-esteem is a byproduct of relationships. Here's a self-esteem stepping stone analogy: **First step:** A child's initial self-esteem comes through the *child's perception* of his/her parent's assessment. Did mom and dad encourage and support the child, or did they point out each time the child failed? **Second step:** Self-esteem is also shaped by sibling relationships. There may have been sibling conflict or competition, but was there also sibling love? Did the sibs function as a loving family, or were they just a collection of individuals who lived under the same roof? **Third step:** Self-esteem is then re-tested and re-confirmed within peer relationships. In adolescence, who were we cool enough to hang out with? At what activity were we good enough to earn our peer's admiration? In adulthood, our peers continue to influence us.

Ten Minute Small Group Discussion:

1. When you were in grade school, did you have close peer relationships? Did you have a "best friend?" If so, why did you like them?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. What impact did peers have on you during junior high and high school? | | | | | | | | | |
| Huge impact | No impact at all | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. How did your peer relationships in adolescence, set you up for relationships in adulthood? | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. How do your adult peer relationships today, affect your self-esteem, and also your marriage? | | | | | | | | | |

C. Previous marriages

Contrary to public opinion, second and subsequent marriages are often more difficult than first marriages. This fact is born out in the higher divorce rate among second and third marriages, than among first marriages. When we first marry we bring along our own personal set of baggage in the form of parental, sibling and peer experiences. If that marriage deteriorates and we divorce, our baggage grows exponentially. When we remarry we bring along all that extra baggage. It can't help but influence our subsequent marriage and parenting.

If second marriages can be more challenging, step-parenting can be extremely difficult. Some researchers argue that the most frequent reason for second and third marriage failure, has to do with step-parenting issues. *The "Brady Bunch" generally does not exist in reality.* Step-relationships are often difficult. This being generally so, the most difficult step-relationship is often between the oldest step-daughter and the step-mother.

There is no way to completely avoid the impact of second or third marriages upon one's spousal relationship and parenting. One can only become aware of the issues, and then through active faith in God plus a lot of hard work, work through them. Faith can be a tremendous asset. For example, in their book, Family Foundations (1981), authors Meier and Meier indicate that the success stats for seriously dedicated Christian marriages are very favorable. Meier writes, "Only one out of forty marriages of those who regularly attend churches ends in divorce when the couple reads the Bible and prays together."¹ That's a 2.5% divorce rate, in an era in which the divorce rate hovers near the 50% mark.

It's important to note that Meier and Meier didn't say that people who go to church basically divorce-proof their marriages. Such is not the case. In fact, recent research has found that "religious" people have the same divorce rate as non-religious people. Being religious isn't a key to anything. But being regularly involved in the life of a church, plus regularly ingesting scripture, plus praying together as a couple ~ are apparently terrific prophylactics against divorce.

Five Minute Small Group Discussion

1. Identify some of the baggage that goes along with divorce and second marriage.

2. How far out into the extended family would you expect the ripples of divorce and second marriage to extend? Do you know of any examples?

III. Cultural Issues

Our world is getting smaller each year. If we wish, today we can click on the internet and learn about marriage and parenting styles in Toronto, Baghdad, Berlin or Singapore. Through watching movies and TV we see an endless variety of values and marital styles ~ *most of them not healthy*. Today one can buy books on marriage. Pastors often preach on marriage. Churches offer courses on marriage. All of these venues add to the mix as we form our own personal understanding of how good marriages should function.

Differing religious cultures, value different things in marriage. For example, the Bible teaches, ***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25, NASV)***. This is a picture of sacrificial servanthood on the part of the husband, as he copies Christ's love for the church within his family. By contrast, the Koran teaches, ***Men are the managers of the affairs of women.... Those (women) you fear may be rebellious, admonish; banish them to their couches and beat them.... (Koran, Women, sura 38)***.

While most religions and cultures value the one-man-one-woman rule, some religious cultures promote polygamy. In some cultures people pick their own marriage partners. In other cultures, mom and dad pick their children's future mate.

Some cultures express emotions by raising their voices and waving their hands. Others express emotions hardly at all. There's a story told in Wisconsin of a Norwegian. In Wisconsin, Norwegians are often portrayed as being reserved, taciturn, sometimes slightly dour folks. So in this story, there was a Norwegian husband who loved his wife so much that on three separate occasions, he almost told her. Each sub-culture has its way of expressing things like family, love, connection, values, and so forth.

Cross-cultural marriages, therefore, can be like trying to untie two Gordian Knots while wearing hand-cuffs and boxing gloves. In one such marriage, a Russian bride asked her American groom to get her a Coke. He returned with a glass of Coke, with ice cubes. The Russian bride burst into tears and ran upstairs (the wedding was in her home). When the groom finally calmed her down, she explained that in her culture people *never* drank Coke with ice, because one can get pneumonia that way. One can only imagine what other cross-cultural issues these two love-birds faced in the years ahead.

Five Minute Small Group Discussion:

1. What did the word "family" mean within the culture in which you grew up?
2. Based upon your personal experience, what would you guess were the top two values regarding families in the culture of your youth? (E.g., being wealthy; talking things through; being religious; being Italian; never saying harsh things;

being honest; being hard-working; serving others; etc.)

IV. Personal Strengths and Weaknesses

This chapter is a short study of things we each bring to a marriage. Just when we thought we were normal, we learn that we all come with our own sets of “baggage” including a long list of personal strengths and weaknesses. One person is more extraverting, the other more introverting. One is a “detail monger” while the other is a “big picture thinker.” One uses a logical and sequential means of making decisions, while the other looks for how decisions may affect friends or loves ones. One prefers order and structure while the other prefers spontaneity. Each of us is “wired” differently. Each brings his/her strengths, and weaknesses to marriage and parenting.

And as we mature, we learn that what we initially thought were strengths, are actually weaknesses disguised as strengths. A very common hurdle many marriages have to overcome is that *the very things* which drew the couple together at first, become problems to overcome. She begins to recognize that the “strength” she saw in him at first, is actually tied to his controlling nature. He begins to see that her “fun curiosity” and “spontaneity” are sometimes so off the cuff that they become a problem to marital stability. She begins to see that his “clarity of thought” can also function like a blowtorch and can scorch her emotions. He begins to see that her “intelligent mind” can also be used to out-manuever him in an argument, making him feel stupid or incompetent. She thought of him as a “rock” when they first married, but later found out he has little contact with his emotions. He thought of her as being “fresh” and “open,” but later determined she was really just an emotional roller coaster.

As we mature, we discover that our personal strengths are often very closely tied to our personal weaknesses. And the thought begins to form in our minds, that both our strengths and weaknesses are governed by our character. Scripture begins to make more sense when we read, ***A hothead starts fights; a cool-tempered person tries to stop them (Prov. 31:10 ~ NLT)***. It’s almost as if to say, “Whoever keeps a fight going is just as dumb as the one who started it.” In the end we begin to recognize that the success of our marriage, and the effectiveness of our parenting, is most accurately reflected within our personal characters ~ as we look in the mirror of our own lives. We begin to understand that our strengths and weaknesses can become means of joining together to enhance the strength of our marriage ~ and we see that this joining, too, is a byproduct of our characters.

Five Minute Small Group Discussion:

1. What strengths did you bring to the marriage, and how have your strengths impacted the course of your marriage? Your parenting?
2. What weaknesses did you bring, and how have these influenced the course of your marriage? Your parenting?

Incidentally, having weaknesses in one's character is normal. We all have them. *The challenge of maturity is not to have no weaknesses, but to learn how to strengthen the ones we have*, while functioning within intimate relationships. Learning to manage our own weaknesses eventually becomes part of the legacy we leave with our kids, as they learn to manage their weaknesses through their study of our managing ours. As you ponder areas in your character that may be causing difficulties in your marriage or parenting, ponder what St. Paul wrote about his own personal struggle with some problem he had.

“Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:8-10 ~ NLT). If this biblical giant had weaknesses, then you can too. But his struggle leads to the next thought regarding what we bring to marriage.

Section Three

If you thought getting married was complex before now, then buckle your seat belt because we're now entering a realm of impact that most pre-marrying couples could never envision even if they discussed these issues. The roots of these following issues run very deep and the longer we're married to each other, the more these following items tend to play their hand in our marriage.

V. Faith

Faith, or the lack of it, is a variable in all marriages. Not everyone is religious, and research demonstrates that many who are religious have just as many problems in their marriages as those who aren't. For example, research finds that the divorce rate is just as high among folks who call themselves “born again Christians” as it is among those claiming no faith at all. So the secret of faith is not just calling oneself a Christian, or even a “born-again Christian.” The secret to faith is having a genuine, devout personal relationship with Christ, and taking that faith relationship into every facet of one's marriage.

There is actually a world of difference between religion and faith, and their impact can be life-changing and empowering, or hypocritical and disempowering. Here's a chart providing some contrasts between the two.

Religion	Faith
External – something we “do”	Internal – something we “are”
A list of rules	A relationship with Christ

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Doesn't change one's core values	Becomes one's core values
Can be accomplished while maintaining lousy relationships	Reconfigures people toward healthy relationships
Can be turned on or off, depending on the situation	Is central to everything, not situational
Leads people to focus more upon themselves and their performance	Leads people to focus upon God and serving others
Has many varieties or "brands"	Has no "branding" other than a relationship with God through Christ
Is incidental to attitude, perception, behavior	Guides all attitude, perception, and behavior

Chart 1

Each person brings one of three "faith-options" to marriage. 1) No faith; 2) religion; or 3) genuine faith. Numbers one and two are essentially identical.

Taking this thought into another diagram, one can see (below) that core belief system controls character; character controls attitude perception and behavior; and attitude, perception, and behavior controls relationships. That which we truly believe, becomes our character and alters our life-style in a manner that our relationships are either enhanced or diminished.

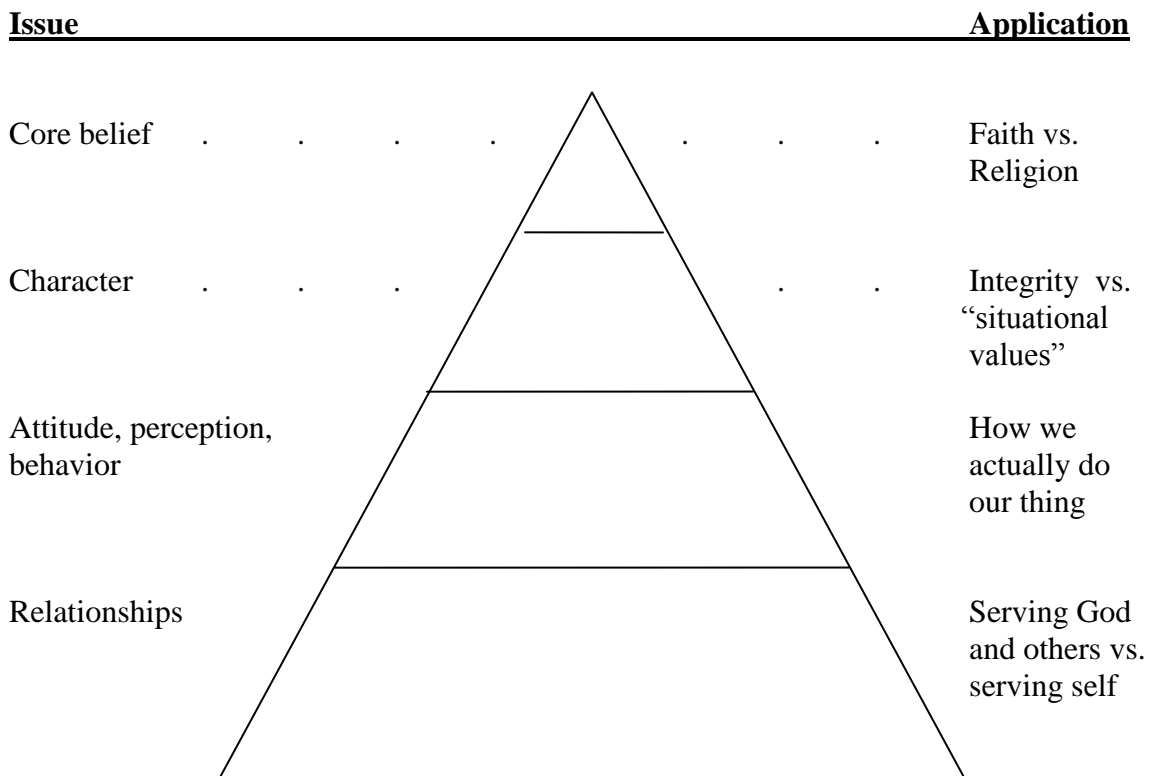


Chart 2

In Chart 2 (above), each piece of the pyramid is governed by that which is immediately above it.

Ten Minute Small Group Discussion:

1. What impact did your religious upbringing have upon your formation as an adult? 1) Very big impact. 2) Some impact. 3) Little impact. 4) No impact.
2. Was religion a positive or negative influence in your formation as an adult?
 - 1 ~ Very positive
 - 2 ~ Mostly positive
 - 3 ~ Neutral
 - 4 ~ Some negative
 - 5 ~ Very negative.
3. How did your religious upbringing impact your choice of a mate?
 - 1) Very much. 2) A little. 3) Not much at all.
4. How does your faith currently affect your values:
 - 1) Very much. 2) A little. 3) Not much at all.
5. How does your faith affect your marriage:
 - 1) Very much. 2) A little. 3) Not at all.
6. How does your faith affect your parenting:
 - 1) Very much. 2) A little. 3) Not at all.

VI. Career Orientation

The impact of career orientation is far greater than we'll cover in the next few paragraphs. In our grandparents' day, most families were "traditional" in that dad worked full-time and mom's job was to stay home with the kids. Today less than 5% of all families reflect that family system. Today, most married women have some sort of job ~ some outside the home, others inside. This decision is partially based upon our culture's value of owning a nice home, two cars, and taking nice vacations. So a couple's career orientation is a family issue. It's something we bring to a marriage.

Not all career choices have the same impact upon families. The unpredictable life of a surgeon may provide good income, but lousy ability to attend a child's sporting events. The stable life of a factory worker may provide steady income, but not the ability to pay for private college tuition. Each career has its impact upon marriage and family.

People tend to bring their careers into the home, whether they want to or not. The company CEO gets used to ordering staff around and brokering power. Those two dynamics do not play well when he or she comes home and starts ordering kids or spouse around. The traveling salesman's wife has to take over family management while he's

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gone each week, but then everyone has to adjust to his presence (and rules) again on Saturday and Sunday when he's home. Because being a pastor is so demanding, pastor's wives and children historically suffer from the understanding that they are somewhere way down the totem pole in their father's time allotment. All careers have play-outs in the family system.

Men, more than women, tend to identify with and become over-involved within their careers. Society still puts more pressure on males than on females to be "primary providers." Men are also basically more oriented toward competition and extrinsic performance than are women, who tend to be more relational. (C.f., Piaget, "The Moral Development of the Child.")

The career orientation of single parents is often hampered more by their children's needs, than the career orientation of two-parent family systems. Being a single parent can be exhausting. There is no "back-up" adult to take over with the kids when you run out of energy, but the needs of the kids don't go away just because there's no adult back-up. In one single-parent system with four elementary school age children, mom got up every day at 5:00 a.m. to shower, make the kids' lunches, and get breakfast ready. The kids got up at 6:00 to get dressed, eat breakfast, and be out the door for the 7:00 a.m. school bus. Mom then finished her makeup, and drove 25 minutes to work where she put in a normal 8+ hour day, returning home two hours after her kids had been dropped off by the school bus. Mom then had to make supper while helping the kids with their homework. After supper was bath-time and homework wrap-up. After the kids were in bed, mom did the laundry and cleaned the house, crashing into bed by 9:00 p.m. so she could get up at 5:00 a.m. and do it all again. How much extra gusto do you think this single mom has for rising up the corporate ladder?

Five Minute Small Group Discussion:

1. How did your father's career affect his connection with your childhood family during your first 10 years of life?
Gave him lots of time for us He was too busy for us
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
2. How did your mother's career affect her connection with the family?
She had lots of time for us She was too busy for us
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
3. How does your career affect your connection with your spouse and children?
I have plenty of time for my kids I have little time for my kids
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

VII. The Effect Upon Marriage, Of Growing Up In A Painful Home

Nobody comes to marriage bringing a completely "clean slate." By the time we reach the altar we all carry at least some "baggage." But some carry more than others. Some grew

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up in alcoholic homes. Others were raised in physically, emotionally or sexually abusive families. Some grew up in homes where there was mental illness, or divorce, or chemical abuse. Others grew up in racially bigoted homes, hyper-competitive homes, or hyper-religious homes. Some had homes in which emotions were suppressed; others were raised in homes where emotions were handled through screaming and throwing things. Some grew up in paranoid family systems that allowed nobody inside; others had completely open and chaotic systems with no boundaries.

Deeply wounded people from damaged homes frequently bring symptoms, many of which are commonly known within the therapeutic community. For example, deeply wounded people often encounter difficulties “attaching” to others. It’s possible to be married and yet not emotionally attached ~ happens all the time, actually. This is a relational trait some people bring to their marriages, without knowing it.

The “coping mechanisms” or “emotional survival techniques” which emotionally wounded people learned as kids, often seem to turn against them when they become adults. Rather than drawing people toward them, these learned behaviors often somehow, mysteriously, seem to repel others ~ sort of like reversing magnets tends to push each one away from the other.

People who have been deeply wounded often find it difficult to trust others. This becomes part of the “attachment struggle” that wounded people bring to marriage. By contrast, emotionally whole people usually trust others more easily and completely ~ which is a good thing to bring to marriage. Many people marry, not knowing they have “trust issues” in their personal baggage.

Growing up in painful homes also often creates difficult identities in the lives of the children. Dysfunctional families often tend to create dysfunctional “roles” among their children. A few of these difficult roles or identities include: 1) The Hero ~ the child placed on a pedestal ~ the one who can do no wrong; 2) The Rebel ~ the child whose anger leads him/her to resist parental values ~ the kid who shakes a fist at authority; 3) The Lost Child ~ the wide-eyed child walking through life wondering who he/she is; 4) The Black Sheep or Scapegoat ~ the child onto whose shoulders many (or most) of the family’s problems are laid, as in “But for Chris, this family would be a really great family.” Many people unwittingly bring one of these traits into their marriage in their personal “baggage.”

In homes where someone is seriously out of emotional control, a role often developed is called the “caretaker.” That term doesn’t only apply to alcoholic family systems, and it doesn’t only apply to wives whose husbands are alcoholic. The concept is often built into the lives of one or more children in homes where one or both parent’s pathologies or weaknesses dominate the family system. Because *somebody* has to be responsible, often one of the children steps up to the task and becomes more adult and more responsible, thereby inadvertently creating the nest within which the emotionally-out-of-control parent can comfortably exist. That child then grows up and marries, bringing the

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“baggage” of caretaking along, and so these people often marry others who are in some way emotionally out of control, thereby replicating the child’s family of origin.

Other “baggage” from growing up in a painful childhood home affects communication patterns. For example, people coming from painful backgrounds have often learned dysfunctional survival patterns of communication including: 1) Don’t talk; 2) don’t think; 3) don’t feel; and 4) don’t trust. They then unwittingly take these learned patterns into marriage and child-rearing, and can’t figure out why things go so badly.

People coming from painful backgrounds often marry others who appear to have “the solutions” to some of these personal dilemmas. This belief often lasts between a month and a year into the marriage. Then they begin to recognize they’ve actually married a spouse with the same problems as one of their parents had. The child of an alcoholic ends up marrying an alcoholic. The abuse victim marries an abuser. The child who had an emotionally distant father, marries an emotionally distant spouse.

And the more dysfunctional the family system, generally *the more difficult it is to get out of*. Painful family systems often function like magnets, drawing family members back into them and preventing escape. Just when little sister seems to have broken free from the craziness of her mother’s control, mom ends up doing something even more crazy so that little sister has to come home and rescue her. Just when big brother seems to have gotten out of the crazy family, dad ends up getting drunk, shooting his mouth off, and threatening to harm the women in the family ~ so big brother has to come back into the family system and help protect mom and little sister.

If you come from a dysfunctional family system it’s important to realize that unless you build and maintain some fairly *sturdy boundaries* with your family-of-origin, the pathology of that family is likely to spill over into your marriage as you are drawn again and again into your parents’ dysfunctional system.

And if you want to take this ride a little deeper, imagine the anger that some children from dysfunctional families develop, and then take into adulthood. They often don’t know what to do with the anger. In fact, many times they don’t even know it’s there. It lurks just below the surface, “leaking” out sometimes in self-destructive or irrational behavior, clinical depression, aggression, sarcasm, bullying, passive-aggression, unyielding dominance, or other behaviors.

Taking the thought even deeper still, imagine what these children do with God. Some of them blame God for not being there for them. Others say, “I just don’t believe God exists.” Some get God mixed up with their dads, and then believe that God is just as screwed up as dad was ~ and just as worthy of being avoided as dad was. When a person comes out of a wounded family, it’s not unusual for them to have “issues” with God.

What we’ve been exploring in this section is the impact of growing up in homes that were emotionally painful. The point to ponder is that the greater one’s childhood pain, the more that pain is likely to be played out in **a)** self-identity; **b)** choice of mate; and **c)**

marriage and parenting. We human beings often tend to find and marry people who are emotionally and relationally similar to the parent with whom we had the greatest amount of unfinished business. We then try to “fix” that broken parent, by “fixing” our spouse. Obviously this doesn’t work, but we often don’t make the connection between the tension in our marriage, and the issues of our childhood, until we’ve been married for a few years, or in a worst case scenario, divorced once or twice.

If this description fits you, *don’t get discouraged*. It’s part of how human beings are wired. Fortunately there are terrific solutions available, primarily through faith in God. We’ll get into those solutions more in later chapters.

VIII. Centering One’s GPS

Perhaps *the greatest single item* anyone brings to marriage and parenting, is their method of establishing and maintaining character and values. Everything that is significant and enduring in marriage and parenting is based upon character and values. It’s like centering a GPS. If the GPS is not properly calibrated, then it’s not reliable and you’re likely to end up in a swamp when the GPS says you’re on a highway.

Centering ourselves: Our human tendency is often to ignore our own problems, and to try to fix other people’s problems. But in this course we’re going to focus our energy and attention upon looking in the mirror of ourselves, seeing how *we’re* wired ~ seeing whether *we’re* “centered” or not ~ watching how *we* do our own thing ~ and then working at improving ourselves.

Centering our values: Part of this course will focus on establishing value systems that work. Here’s a list of values we’ll discuss. For right now, imagine the end of a career in which a person has made each of the following his/her highest priority:

- Making as much money as possible
- Rising as high up the corporate ladder as possible
- Rising as high up the academic ladder as possible
- Raising great kids
- Being a seriously committed person of faith
- Having the strongest most wonderful marriage possible
- Seeing as much of the world as possible

Our process of centering will guide our values-formation, and that will affect every aspect of our lives and relationships.

The thoughts developed in this chapter didn’t give much information about *how* to center one’s personal GPS. We’ll deal more with that thought later in the course. Yet there is one biblical text worth noting in this discussion of “centering.” The text says, ***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)***. Here’s the nickel version: *If you center your life on God, then He’ll lead you around the land mines of life that everyone else seems to be stepping on*. That verse has everything to do with the top

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part of the pyramid in Chart 2 ~ i.e., faith. There is nothing more powerful, nothing more centering, nothing more healing, and nothing that works better, than faith in Christ.

Wrap

This chapter may have presented more thoughts than you can process in one reading. We suggest you carry two key thoughts from this chapter. **The first key thought** is that we are all amazingly complex beings, and when we marry we *all* bring our personal “baggage.” The fact that my baggage may be completely different than your baggage only means we probably grew up in two different systems. But we all bring baggage. And the more we tend to look at our spouse and shake our heads ~ that is, the more our internal thoughts lead us to negative conclusions about our spouse ~ the more we need to look in the mirror of our own lives, because for whatever reasons, *we chose our spouse ~ and our choice had meaning beyond our ability to articulate at the time.*

If we could put this concept into a numerical paradigm we might say:

- 105s tend to find and marry 105s
- 84s tend to find and marry 84s
- 193s tend to find and marry 193s
- 15s tend to find and marry 15s ~ etc.

Each of us tends to marry at our approximate level of emotional/spiritual maturity and relational ability. And each of us brings elements of our family-of-origin. So like it or not, our choice of spouse is very much a statement about ourselves. If we discover that our spouse has a lot of baggage, it very likely means that we carry an equal although perhaps different, load of baggage. *We are amazingly complex.* The Bible is right on track when it says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14). *Our selection of a spouse says at least as much about us, as it does about them.*

The second big piece to ponder from this chapter is the thought about faith, character and centering our personal GPS. When you are 85 years old, you will look back at your life and almost certainly the thing you will ponder more than any other component of your life, will have to do with the level of character you developed ~ the kind of person you grew to be, and how you treated people. The closer that the person you become is linked to the person of Christ, the more pleased you will be with what you see in your life’s rear-view mirror. This isn’t a religious statement. Religion is actually more a way of *not* changing one’s life. It is faith that transforms character, and faith that guides us in ways that work best.

This book and this course are going to take the unabashed perspective that one’s personal connection to Jesus Christ is *the core issue* of every aspect and interpersonal skill of human life including character, self-image, relational ability, marriage and parenting.

Homework Assignment

On one large piece of paper, draw something that represents the “path of your life,” from birth until now. As you draw this picture, draw little pictures along the path that

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represent some of the more significant moments in your life. This will give you a visual picture ~ a personal road map that you might refer to now and then as you progress through this course.

Footnotes:

1. As we cite Meier & Meier, we do not intend to substantiate their statistic of 2.5%. We are not aware of their subject selection and other research methodologies that lead to this statistic. Other researchers today find that religious people have basically the same divorce rate as non-religious people. However, it is worth noting that there is a significant difference in divorce rates between merely religious people who may go to church, as compared with Christ-followers who take their faith seriously, pray together, read scripture, and integrate the teaching of Christ into their lives ~ teachings such as forgiving those who wound them, being humble, offering grace when it's not deserved, seeking peace rather than power, etc. This latter kind of person is the one whom, we believe, Meier and Meier were citing with their 2.5% statistic. If our perception is correct, the 2.5% divorce rate is probably worth noting.