REDUCING THE DIVORCE RATE AMONG CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA:
PREMARITAL COUNSELING A PREREQUISITE FOR MARRIAGE.

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ABSTRACT

REDUCING THE DIVORCE RATE AMONG CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA: MAKING PREMARITAL COUNSELING A PREREQUISITE FOR MARRIAGE.

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God instituted the covenant of marriage to provide the means by which two individuals become one for life. This covenant between a man and a woman is intended to satisfy the God-given longing each person has to love and be loved for a lifetime. The reality is, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008, the divorce rate in America is nearly fifty percent. To remedy this, the church must require a formal premarital program as a prerequisite for marriage. The result would be fewer divorces and an increase in marital satisfaction. Resources formerly consumed by counseling and ministering to troubled marriages and families would be available to minister in other areas. Surveys will be sent to couples having participated in a formal premarital counseling program confirming their divorce rate is lower, and their satisfaction higher, than those who did not participate in a premarital program.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS vii
INTRODUCTION 1
  Statement of the Problem 4
  Statement of the Limitations 6
  Theoretical Basis for the Project 6
  A Statement of Methodology 13
  A Review of the Literature 15
CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF PREMARITAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS 22
  History of Premarital Education 23
  Rationale for Premarital Education 24
  Derived Benefits of Premarital Education Programs 25
  Role of Clergy in the Premarital Education Process 30
  Overview of Selected Premarital Education Programs 35
  Effectiveness of Premarital Education Programs 55
CHAPTER 2: SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS 65
  Survey Rationale 65
  Survey Process 65
  Survey Question Overview 67
  Survey Data 70
  Survey Analysis 72
    Effect of Marital Longevity 72
List of abbreviations

CMP – Community Marriage Policy

FOCCUS - Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study

IRB - Institutional Review Board

PAP – Premarital Assessment Program

PAQ – Premarital Assessment Questionnaire

PCI – Premarital Communication Inventory

PREP - Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program

PREPARE – PREmarital Personal And Relationship Evaluation

SYMBIS – Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts
INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage was created by God to be a lifelong covenant relationship between a man and woman (Gn 2:24) for the purpose of fulfilling an innate need for community (Gn 2:18) and procreation. Although divorce is permitted in the Bible, it was never God’s will for it to occur (Mal 3:16; Mt 19:8). The majority of the early colonial settlers in America were Bible-believing Christians who held strict moralistic views toward marriage, therefore, divorce was infrequent. Although divorce statistics throughout early American history are often unreliable, in the late eighteen-hundreds, it is estimated the divorce rate would have been around five percent.¹ While the rate of divorce did increase in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, due to changes in divorce law, it was not until the advent of no-fault divorce that divorce became culturally acceptable. Individual states began passing no-fault divorce laws beginning with Oklahoma in 1957, followed by forty-seven of the remaining forty-nine states passing similar laws by 1983. Since then, the rate of divorce in America has risen to forty percent for first marriages, sixty percent of second marriages and seventy-three percent of third marriages, according to the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau. Not only is the rate of divorce troubling, it is how early in their marriages couples are filing for divorce. Research indicates one-fifth of couples getting married for the first time will end up divorced within the first five years, growing to one-third within ten years.²

The detrimental effect of divorce on individuals, families, especially children, as well as our economy is well documented. Married people tend to live longer than unmarried or divorced people. “Compared to married people, the unmarried have higher rates of mortality than the


married: about fifty percent higher among women and two hundred fifty percent higher among men.”³ Married individuals are significantly less likely to be problem drinkers than those who are divorced, separated or single.⁴ Married people are more successful in their careers, earn more, and have more wealth than single, divorced, or cohabiting individuals.⁵ Married people are happier than single, widowed, or cohabiting people. About forty percent of married people report being very happy with their lives, whereas only eighteen percent of divorced people, fifteen percent of separated people, only twenty-two percent of widowed, and twenty-two percent of cohabiting people report being very happy.⁶

The number of children affected by divorce is astounding. Every year more than one million children are affected by divorce.⁷ The effect on these children is often detrimental to their well-being. Children being raised in homes of divorce have a significantly higher risk of growing up in poverty.⁸ In the 1990s, Amato and Keith conducted a significant study on the effects divorce has on children. In 2001, Amato published an update to the study stating, “Compared with children with continuously married parents, children with divorced parents continued to score significantly lower on measures of academic achievement, conduct, psychological


adjustment, self-concept, and social relations.”

9 Teens in intact families are less likely to become pregnant compared to peers in other family structures. 

10 Adolescents living with both biological parents exhibit lower levels of problem behavior than peers from any other family type.

Regarding the effect marriage and divorce has on the economy, Patrick F. Fagan, Senior Fellow and Director of the Marriage Research Institute at the Family Research Council writes, “Economic well-being is tied to family structure, especially to intact married family life…Married couples also create the best economic environment for children.”

In addition, divorce has been shown to increase a household’s dependence on the government. Seventeen to twenty-five percent of wives who divorce after having been married two to eight years receive AFDC benefits (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). A reporter for the Washington Times reports, “A new single-parent family with children can cost the government $20,000 to $30,000 a year. That is $33 billion to $112 billion a year total in divorce-related social-service subsidies and lost revenue.”

None of these statistics are a surprise because they are the result of a society having total disregard for the sanctity of marriage and God’s design for the family. God’s design provided for the welfare of each individual in the family unit as well as society as a whole. To disregard it is to undermine the very institution intended to provide the stability and security people long for.


would, therefore, make sense if there is anything that can be done to reverse this trend, it ought to be done. There is a solution, and it is premarital education. When couples participate in formal premarital preparation programs, they learn skills that will help them make decisions and work through difficulties inevitable in any marriage. They also gain a better understanding of the expectations they have for each other and their marriage. They learn areas of compatibility and areas where they have a difference of opinion. They also learn how to appreciate their differences as strengths to the marriage. They should also understand marriage is a life-long commitment to an imperfect person.

Since the vast majority of marriages are administered by clergy in a church, and because marriage was instituted by the God of Christianity, it is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ to take the lead in requiring participation in a premarital preparation program.\textsuperscript{14} The objective of this project is to assess the extent of the benefit of premarital preparation programs as evidenced in a measurable reduction in the rate of divorce as opposed to the national average. If the effectiveness of these programs can be demonstrated, then churches who worship the Lord our God need to assimilate one of the excellent premarital preparation programs into their marriage preparation and approval process.

\textbf{Statement of the Problem}

The ultimate purpose of any premarital preparation program should be to help prepare couples to remain happily married. The vast majority of couples vow to remain married until death separates them. The disappointing reality is approximately one out of two married couples

will break their vow and dissolve their marriage before either one of them dies.\textsuperscript{15} This project will provide convincing evidence the investment made by couples to participate in a formal premarital preparation program correlates to a measurable reduction in the divorce rate.

It is estimated the majority of first weddings, approximately seventy-five percent, occur in a church setting.\textsuperscript{16} While some churches require premarital preparation, many do not. Of those that do, not all of them have a formal program designed to train and equip couples how to effectively deal with the issues that can become catalysts for disharmony, disunity and eventual dissolution of their marriage. Many couples enter marriage ill-equipped and overly idealistic with regard to how difficult it can be for two imperfect people to live in harmony with each other. The benefit of taking couples through a formal premarital preparation program is couples can become aware of potential areas of incompatibility regarding goals, values, and ways of dealing with conflict. It often exposes one’s true personality and character flaws easily overlooked or intentionally ignored during the dating period.

It is imperative churches require the completion of a formal premarital preparation program. A “formal” program consists of a documented process whereby a couple is led through a systematic evaluation of each person’s perspective in a number of critical areas. A trained facilitator can be helpful in the process to discern potential problem areas and how to work through them. Many couples enter into marriage ignorant of the beliefs, values, plans, and priorities of the other, thinking as long as they love each other, they can weather any storm.


\textsuperscript{16} Knutson and Olson, “Effectiveness of PREPARE Program,” 529.
Statement of the Limitations

The purpose of this project is to examine and report on the success of premarital preparation programs as defined by a measurable reduction in the divorce rate as contrasted to the national rate of divorce. The survey will target couples who participated in a formal premarital preparation program. For those who indicated they were not married in a church (question 3), there is no way to know if they were married by a member of the clergy or if it was a Christian wedding. In order to stay within the timeframe for the scope of the project, the amount of surveys sent out will be limited. In addition, this project will focus solely on the effects of premarital preparation for first-time marriages between a man and woman.

Theoretical Basis for the Project

Theology forms the foundation for this project because the initiation and definition of marriage is contained in the Bible. In Genesis, we find the narrative of creation and with it, the creation of mankind. The first man, Adam, was created out of the dust of the ground and God breathed life into him (Gn 2:7). After an unknown period of time of interacting with all God created, God determined Adam was lonely without another being of like kind and decided to make a companion for him (Gn 2:18). Upon seeing this new creature, which was made in part from his own flesh, Adam was thrilled and called her “woman,” and she became his wife (Gn 2:23). God joined these first two human beings together in the institution of marriage stating they became “one flesh” (Gn 2:24). Genesis chapter two establishes the biblical standard for marriage as a heterosexual monogamous relationship between a male and female who commit to it as a covenant.

Paul, in his epistle to the church at Ephesus, instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19). The theological
implication he was making is the husband is to love his wife with an agape love, which is sacrificial and unconditional; the same love Christ demonstrated for the church by giving His life for her. This type of love describes the incredible depth of commitment to the marriage relationship. Peter instructs husbands to honor his wife by treating her in the same way he would anything else of extreme value. The key, according to Ed Wheat, is to “remember love must grow or die,” therefore, he recommends couples use their imagination to keep love alive.\textsuperscript{17}

The marriage bond is to be one of permanence. In the Authorized Version, the word “cleave” is used to convey this bond (Gn 2:24). Moses provided a legal process for dissolving a marriage under certain conditions for the protection of the wife (Dt 24). When the Pharisees questioned Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, Jesus answered them with the question, “What did Moses command you?” (Mk 10:2). Their reply was that Moses permitted divorce (emphasis mine). His response conveys to us the mind and heart of God regarding the dissolution of marriage that it is never the preferred or desired path. Worthington asserts the mystery of marriage (Eph 5:31-32) mirrors God’s faithfulness to people “because God made marriage important to understanding spiritual truths, He joins people together spiritually when they marry. This joining is permanent, intimate and more powerful than we realize.”\textsuperscript{18} Just as the relationship between God and Abraham was sealed by a covenant (Gn 15:9-11, 17-18), as well as the relationship between Jesus and the church (Lk 22:20), so is the relationship between a husband and a wife (Mal 2:14). “Covenants are designed to bring about permanent union between God and Israel, God and the believer, believer and believer and husband and wife.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Ed Wheat and Gloria O. Perkins, \textit{Love Life for Every Married Couple: How to Fall in Love, Stay in Love, Rekindle Your Love} (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1980), 89.

\textsuperscript{18} Everett L. Worthington, Jr., \textit{Marriage Counseling: A Christian Approach to Counseling Couples} (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 36.

\textsuperscript{19} Worthington, \textit{Marriage Counseling}, 36.
The New Testament is not silent on the subject of the permanence of marriage. Paul forbids divorce (Rom 7:2; 1Cor 7:10-11, 13, 39) as does Jesus (Mt 5:31, Mk 10:2-12, Lk 16:18). Only in Matthew 19:9 does Jesus affirm the provision for divorce due to sexual immorality as given by Moses (Dt 24:1-4). After confirming marriage is a covenant indicating permanence (Mal 2:14), the prophet speaks on behalf of God that He hates divorce (Mal 2:16).

In addition to the theological basis for the permanence of marriage, there is the element of one’s personal wellness. Divorce often causes psychological distress on the individuals and their families. This can consist of anger, anxiety, depression, and even mental illness. Randolph Charlton, a clinical psychiatrist, writes, “These people have entered therapy with a variety of symptoms. Most commonly they have depression in its various forms, but anxiety, sexual dysfunction, psychosomatic illness, paranoid syndromes, psychotic breaks, manic crisis, and just plain confusion are also in evidence.”20 Researchers Waite and Gallagher were skeptical whether divorce can cause long-term harm. In their attempt to find alternate explanations, they encountered a study conducted by Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, and McRae which took into account the pre-divorce characteristics of the family including emotional problems and economic status.

"The researchers found that ‘part of the negative effect of parental divorce on adults is a result of the factors that were present before the parent’s marriage dissolved. The results also suggest, however, a negative effect of divorce and its aftermath on adult mental health.’"22 This study also concluded when the parents of children or adolescents divorce, the negative effect on these children can continue through their twenties and even into their thirties. Psychiatrist Arthur


21. Waite and Gallagher, Case for Marriage, 125.

Sorosky reports that experiencing parental divorce can be seen to create certain psychological vulnerabilities, including a fear of abandonment, rejection or loss of love, an interference with the resolution of the typical adolescent conflicts and an intense fear of personal marital failure. Even in the best of cases, it still leaves these teens with considerable confusion and disillusionment.  

Many studies have been performed by various institutions regarding the psychological effects of divorce on both children and the parents. Alison Clarke-Stewart and Cornelia Brentano summarize the results of an extensive study performed by Hetherington and Kelly stating, “Given the downward mobility, loss of old friends, role changes, and task overload of divorced adults, it is not surprising they often have psychological problems. Many experience anger and anxiety, depression and loneliness.”

Noting there is a vast amount of research on the psychological effects of divorce, Clarke-Stewart and Brentano conclude, “This research suggests that divorce does lead to problems beyond those that people had before the marriage ended or that they exhibited in the immediate crisis of separation.”

In contrast to the detrimental psychological and emotional effects of divorce, are the benefits of marriage that manifest themselves in the physical well-being of the persons. “Marriage is associated with physical health, psychological well-being, and low mortality. Compared to people who are divorced, separated, single or widowed, the married have better overall well-being.” In one study conducted by Spanier and Thompson, they were able to provide empirical data concerning the

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process of marital break-up and its aftermath. Their research indicated almost half of the divorced men and women reported health problems.\textsuperscript{27} One study that examined the physical effects during the first eight months of separation found weight loss, upset stomach, body aches, fatigue, appetite loss, headaches, and sleep problems occurred more frequently.\textsuperscript{28}

The socio-economic effect of divorce is widespread. In reporting on the economic risk of children in America, Mark Rank and Thomas Hirschl report:

Family structure has been found to significantly affect the likelihood and duration of poverty among children. Research confirms by age six, sixty-eight percent of children in non-married households have experienced at least one year of poverty versus twelve percent of children in married households; by age twelve, seventy-eight percent versus eighteen percent; and by age seventeen, eighty-one percent versus twenty-two percent.\textsuperscript{29}

Rank and Hirschl add the risk of poverty for one year old children from unmarried households exceeded that of children who live their first seventeen years in married households.\textsuperscript{30} Having one parent often equates to having less financial means because the father does not live with the children nor does he provide sufficient financial assistance. This is not; however, the sole reason children in single-parent homes suffer. The children’s access to a parent’s time, attention, and social resources is lessened when living in a single-parent home.

The negative impact of divorce goes beyond the individuals and families involved. Professor Robert Stahmann of Brigham University wrote, “Reductions in marital breakup would presumably enhance the mental and physical health of those involved, and the political hope is this would lead to a decrease in the amount of government funds currently used for treating

\textsuperscript{27} Graham Spanier and Linda Thompson, \textit{Parting: The aftermath of separation and divorce} (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984), 212-222.


\textsuperscript{29} Rank and Hirschl, “The Economic Risk of Childhood in America,” 1064.

\textsuperscript{30} Rank and Hirschl, “The Economic Risk of Childhood in America,” 1064.
individuals and families and coping with the societal consequences of marital breakdown. Currently, therefore, there is much political interest in marriage preparation and premarital counseling services provided in the community.” For the most part, the United States government has not intervened in regards to marriage permanence apart from passing no-fault divorce laws. However, in recent years, the government has taken an interest in the growing divorce rate due, in part, to the cost it has encountered. In making a case for the United States government to take notice and get involved in supporting programs that can potentially reduce the rate of divorce, Fagan and Rector report the fiscally conservative need to take notice that our federal and state governments spend $150 billion per year to subsidize and sustain single-parent families. At the same time, they only spend $150 million on programs intended to strengthen marriage.32

Divorce also has an effect on the couple’s social lives. Clarke-Stewart and Brentano claim “divorce causes dramatic changes in the adults’ social lives…leading to a decline in couple-related activities…followed by a sharp decrease in the amount of contact with former in-laws.” Many couples find former close friends distance themselves after divorce. Many also sense they are excluded by former friends without their spouse. Oftentimes it is the person who has become divorced who separates themselves from former friends.34


33. Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, Divorce, 68.

34. Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, Divorce, 69.
In addition to all of the other effects, stress is brought on, due to role changes. Divorce often forces many women, who were formerly not responsible for providing for the family’s financial needs, to become breadwinners. With regard to the social and economic profiles of one-parent families, Norton and Glick report, “The likelihood that women are employed more than doubles after a divorce. More than eighty percent of divorced mothers are employed, compared with fewer than forty percent before the divorce.”\textsuperscript{35} Women whose husbands were the sole breadwinner had a great deal of difficulty accepting their new role opposed to the women who held full-time jobs prior to the breakup. Many of these women from traditional marriages report feeling angry about having to accept this new role and many experienced guilt for being away from their children so much.\textsuperscript{36}

The role of the husband as father often is often dramatically changed as well. According to the National Survey of Families and Households, three-quarters of divorced fathers see their children less than once a week, and of those who do, fewer than one-third have extended periods of time with them.\textsuperscript{37} Fathers who live with their children spend time with them, provide for them financially, and participate in daily discipline and decision-making that affects children’s lives to a greater extent than those who do not.

Some of the effects divorce has on children have been presented, yet there are more. Divorce has been shown to affect a child’s education. One-fourth of children living with their mother or remarried families repeat a grade in school. Children who live in a single-parent family are more likely to drop out of high school than those from two-parent families (29% versus 13%) and are less


likely to get a college education (50% versus 63%). Having followed children of divorce for six years after the divorce, Hetherington’s data revealed children of divorce struggled with emotional, social, academic, or behavioral problems to a greater extent (20%-25%) than did children living with married parents (10%). Waite and Gallagher report children of divorce have a significantly higher risk of getting in trouble with the law. In addition, these same children have a greater risk of becoming the victim of a crime, especially abuse in their own home.

A Statement of Methodology

A survey will be sent to one-hundred couples who were married in the two churches this writer has served in. Both required the completion of a formal premarital preparation program. The survey will provide feedback from couples who married between 2001 and 2012. Surveys will also be sent to professional Christian counselors requesting them to solicit data from couples being counseled for marital distress to determine any correlation between marital satisfaction and participation in a premarital counseling program.

The survey is designed to provide data that can be used to assess whether participation in a formal pre-marital counseling program correlates to fewer divorces than the national average (50%). It will also provide data regarding the program’s value in equipping them to manage difficulties in their marriage, their marital satisfaction, and their commitment to their marriage. They will also be asked if they believe in the value of the premarital program enough to require it. The survey will be anonymous.

Research presented in journals and books that address the premarital preparation programs will be presented in addition to the survey created for this project. Much of published research has been the result of surveys and studies performed at universities by scholars and educators. Additionally, a review of the statistical data compiled by publishers and ministries offering premarital preparation materials will be evaluated.

The first chapter of this thesis will commence with an overview of the history of premarital education in the United States as well as how it has evolved. What follows will be the rationale for premarital counseling, derived benefits, and the importance of clergy’s involvement in the process. Various premarital preparation programs will be introduced along with an overview of each. Perspectives from advocates of premarital preparation programs will be given along with those who question or deny their value.

The second chapter will present the survey question rationale, an overview of the data and an analysis. The data will be evaluated and conclusions drawn in the areas noted in the survey: marital longevity, satisfaction, and the perceived value of premarital programs.

Chapter three will compare conclusions drawn from the project survey to conclusions drawn from the research of others. The results of the project survey and claims by other research studies will support the proposition that premarital preparation programs are effective in reducing the rate of divorce. The resulting benefit to the married couple, their family, the church, and ultimately to society will be expanded upon.

Chapter four will provide a systematic overview of the project from conception through completion. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the potential effect premarital preparation programs could have if made a prerequisite by churches performing marriages.
Recommendations for how premarital programs can be designed and administered will be presented. Areas where additional research could be helpful will also be presented.

**A Review of the Literature**

This review will focus on the literature relevant to the topic of premarital preparation programs as well as works comparing and contrasting the benefits of being married with being divorced. H. Norman Wright has been a pioneer in the field of premarital counseling. His first work in this field, *Premarital Counseling: A Guidebook for the Counselor* was first published in 1977 and has been used by thousands of churches in the U.S. It has since been updated to address more current issues including subsequent marriages, interracial marriages, and marriages by persons from dysfunctional families. He also created the video/workbook series, *So You’re Getting Married*, comprised of thirteen sessions couples can go through with a facilitator, as a marriage seminar, or as a singles group. This writer has facilitated Wright’s program for approximately fifteen couples and found it to be very beneficial in helping them to understand and clarify roles and expectations in marriage.

Based on the results of several research projects, David Olson from the University of Minnesota developed a set of inventories for couples which is referred to as PREPARE/ENRICH. Since this assessment was created in 1980, over three million couples have completed one of the couple inventories and over 100,000 facilitators have been trained in the U.S. alone. The effectiveness of this assessment has been the subject of several articles in journals such as the *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* and *Marriage and Family*. Knutson and Olson performed a study suggesting the PREPARE program significantly increases marital satisfaction.\(^{42}\) The PREPARE/ENRICH people have also published the results of a

\(^{42}\) Knutson and Olson, “Effectiveness of PREPARE Program,” 529-546.
longitudinal study on twenty-five married couples one to five years after marriage who
completed their program.43 This writer became certified to administer this program in 2009 and
has used it for a half-dozen couples. This is an excellent tool to determine a couple’s
compatibility in areas critical over the long haul.

Paul Amato, a sociologist from Pennsylvania State University and Scott Stanley, a
psychologist from the University of Denver, authored several articles together. One of the
projects they combined efforts on was a large random survey which resulted in their concluding
that premarital preparation can reduce divorce by as much as thirty-one percent.44 This particular
article was helpful because of the extent of the survey (over 3,300 from four states). The
limitations of this researcher’s work prohibited this level of survey and analysis.

Robert Stahmann, a professor of family sciences at BYU and Director of Marriage
Preparation Research Project, along with William Hiebert authored what is considered by some
to be one of the best premarital counseling guides, *Premarital & Remarital Counseling: The
Professional’s Handbook*. Stahmann has also written other books on marriage and published
many articles on family and marriage in various journals.

Jason Carroll and William Doherty have written an article titled, “Evaluating the
Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs: A Meta-Analytic Review of Outcome
Research.” They performed a comprehensive, meta-analytic review and critical evaluation of
research pertaining to the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs. Their detailed study

43. David H. Olson and Sherod Miller, “Integrating PREPARE/ENRICH & Couple Communication

provided insights into an array of programs and formats used to educate couples considering marriage.

Linda Waite, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, along with journalist, Maggie Gallagher, authored *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. The result of their research has been cited in numerous other works due to their findings, many of which contradict anti-marriage myths common among many Americans. Their work is somewhat of an apologetic in support of marriage. They present the views of those who oppose marriage or who don’t agree marriage is beneficial to the individuals or society. Some of these opposing views will be challenged in this thesis.

Gail Risch, Lisa Riley, and Michael Lawler from the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University evaluated the problematic issues from a national study of couples married five years or less. The results of their work were published in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. Based on their evaluation, they advocate premarital education and define what the goals for it should be. The six goals they determined were based on problematic areas identified in their study. Their contention is by identifying issues consistently problematic in the early years of marriage where most break ups occur, ways to identify early warning signs and remedies can and should be incorporated into premarital education programs.

Howard Markman and Scott Stanley teamed up with Mari Clements to follow one hundred couples for a thirteen year period beginning from the time they participated in a premarital program. This period extends beyond the ten year time frame whereby most


divorces occur, the “risk period.” Their research and evaluation is useful for correlating marital dissatisfaction and distress with premarital data. The extended period of time this study followed couples provides a basis upon which conclusions can be drawn that could not otherwise have been possible due to the limitations of this research project.

Psychologist John Gottman spent twenty years studying what makes marriages last. The results of his work were published in a book, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail and How You Can Make Yours Last*. He determined the predictability a couple will stay together with an accuracy rate of over ninety percent. He relates a couple’s ability to work out conflict to marital longevity. The extent to which the problem solving skills he regards as imperative are incorporated into many of the premarital education programs will be evaluated.

Jeffry Larson has written numerous articles on premarital education. One of these evaluates the benefits of four different programs and the effect of the duration of the premarital program.47 One of the criteria to be evaluated in this thesis is the importance of the duration of premarital preparation programs.

Les and Leslie Parrott are co-directors of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University. They developed a premarital program entitled “Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts” (SYMBIS). Their psycho-educational approach focuses on personal insight in addition to skill development. Their program is beneficial because of its longevity in the marketplace and its widespread use. Former Liberty student James Marks wrote his dissertation on the effectiveness of the SYMBIS model in reducing divorce and producing a satisfying marital

relationship. His research was based on the history of couples who had taken it through his church, Hyland Heights Baptist Church, over a four-year timeframe.\(^{48}\)

The book, *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*, by Alison Clarke-Stewart and Cornelia Brentano provided considerable information on the effects of divorce in America.\(^{49}\) The results of their findings confirm how devastating divorce is to individuals, families and our society. Their finding provides motivation for promoting the widespread use of premarital programs to reduce these effects.

The Bible is replete with admonitions and instructions regarding the sacred union of marriage, how people should treat each other and how to live in a harmonious community. God created the institution of marriage as a means for procreation and to fulfill the innate longing each person has for relationship (Gn 2:24).

God designed marriage to be a lifelong relationship between a man and woman. Marriage is a covenant only to be dissolved by the death of either individual who vowed to enter in the sacred covenant relationship (Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39).

Divorce was not God’s idea nor does He condone it. In responding to the Pharisees, Jesus confirmed it was due to the hardness of man’s hearts Moses permitted divorce, adding, “but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:3-9; Mk 10:5-9).

The apostle Paul provides many instructions concerning marriage and divorce. He stated even if one spouse should leave, the couple should remain unmarried or reconcile the relationship and not divorce (1 Cor 7:10-11). Inasmuch as God condemns marriage between a


\(^{49}\) Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, *Divorce*, 67-130.
believer and an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:14), Paul instructs a woman who has an unbelieving husband to stay married to him as long as he is willing and not divorce (1 Cor 7:13).

Leaders in the New Testament were required to be the husbands of one wife (1 Tm 3:2; Ti 1:6). While there is much dispute whether this means a bishop or elder cannot be divorced or if it was an admonition against polygamy, the principle remains that marriage is to be highly regarded among all people, especially church leaders.

For any relationship to flourish, effective communication is essential. This requires the individuals involved to listen well. James states we should be “swift to hear” (Jas 1:19). Proverbs condemns answering before listening (Pro 18:13). Many verses encourage listening while refraining from saying whatever comes to mind (Pro 10:19; 12:18; 13:3; 17:27; 18:13; 21:23; Jas 4:11). Neil Clark Warren writes, "I believe that virtually every marriage in North America would be several times better if the two people were simply to improve their listening skills."50

Peter addresses some of the character qualities expected in a marriage relationship (1 Pt 3). Women are to concern themselves with their inner beauty above external appearance. She is to model humility, keeping herself in subjection to her husband as unto the Lord. Husbands are given a stern admonition to honor their wife. The importance of this cannot be understated seeing a husband’s prayer can be hindered if he does not honor his wife.

The Bible also speaks to how couples must relate to each other. We are instructed to speak only what is edifying. In addition, we are to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another (Eph 4:29, 32). James instructs us to confess our faults to one another to maintain honesty and trust within the relationship (Jas 5:16).

Humility is one of the greatest of all character traits for maintaining and building relationships. Paul expresses the need for humility and selflessness demonstrating it by esteeming others above oneself while putting others’ interests above one’s own (Phil 2:3-4). This characteristic is a critical element in building an intimate, abiding relationship with one’s spouse.

God demonstrated unconditional love for His people, Israel, despite her continual unfaithfulness (Hos 1:2). Although He had every right, He did not completely sever the relationship. Understanding this, Paul calls on the husbands to love their wife unconditionally in the same way (Eph 5:25, 33). To provide practical instruction as to what this love looks like lived out, Paul wrote of it (1 Cor 13). When considering the three most important Christian qualities, love stands above all. Love is the foundation upon which all of the other godly characteristics that nurture an intimate and fulfilling marriage relationship rely on.
CHAPTER 1:
OVERVIEW OF PREMARITAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS

In our society, there hardly remains the expectation a marriage will last a lifetime. The emerging norm now includes the expectation of getting married more than once. With one-third of marriages ending in divorce within the first ten years, it has become a rarity for couples to reach their silver anniversary, not to mention their golden wedding anniversary.\(^1\) At the same time, Waite and Gallagher found “ninety-three percent of Americans rate ‘having a happy marriage’ as either one of the most important or very important objectives.”\(^2\) They also found “more than seventy percent of adult Americans believe marriage that ‘marriage is a lifelong commitment that should not be ended except under extreme circumstances.’”\(^3\) Bruhn and Hill contend it is incumbent on counselors to teach couples the skills they will need to sustain a successful marriage. Since most premarital counseling is performed by clergy or members of the religious community, they need to “focus more on helping marriages get off to a good start rather than providing the service of helping individuals and couples pick up the pieces of a failing/failed relationship.”\(^4\) In an effort to reduce the rates of divorce and even marital distress, Carroll and Doherty report that scholars and educators have become advocates for the development and implementation of premarital prevention programs.\(^5\)

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History of Premarital Education

Marriage preparation programs, sometimes referred to as “premarital prevention” or “premarital education” are not new. Marriage preparation educational programs have been around for decades dating back as far as the 1930s. The first program was developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932. Nine years later, the Philadelphia Marriage Council established a standardized program for the purpose of helping couples gain “a better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties.” The use of premarital education remained relatively rare until the 1970s, even though clergy would often meet with couples prior to getting married. Since the 1970s, the focus of meeting with couples has shifted from educating them about marriage to preparing them for marriage. In the past three decades, clergy, as well as counseling professionals, have taken an increased interest in preparing couples through formal educational programs. The timing of this coincides with the advent of no-fault divorce and the corresponding increase in divorce. H. Norman Wright developed a premarital program in 1977, Before You Say I Do, which became a catalyst for formal educational programs focused on educating and training couples with skills benefiting them in their marriage relationship. Premarital education programs have since evolved to be available in a number of various formats, including retreats, individual couple counseling, group sessions, workshops, classes offered through colleges and universities, self-directed curriculum, books, internet sites, online courses, and inventories.


Rationale for Premarital Education

Many couples spend significant time, effort, and money preparing for their wedding, while little time, if any, is invested in preparing for their marriage. In fact, less than one-fifth of all marriages in America are preceded by participation in a premarital preparation program.8 Les and Leslie Parrott write, “Planning the perfect wedding too often takes precedence over planning a successful marriage. And a lack of planning is the ultimate saboteur of marriage.”9 Valiente and his colleagues determined, “Premarital programs for couples provide an alternative, preventative approach for anticipating and addressing the risk factors associated with couples’ distress and divorce.”10 Their concern is not enough couples take advantage of premarital education programs. One team of researchers who advocate premarital counseling wrote the following:

Couples that are in the developmental stage prior to marriage are, in most cases, still enchanted with their partner and find it impossible to think they are fallible and prone to making poor decisions and hurting their partner either intentionally or without malice. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals in this state to seek a counselor’s help when there is nothing they can perceive as wrong with the relationship. Nearly wed/newlywed couples may not seek a professional counselor’s help until they reach the disenchantment stage and they suddenly find that there is much more to marriage than the fairytales we all grew up with might suggest. Unfortunately, no one lives happily ever after without great interpersonal and intrapsychic skills and help from others along the way.11

Derived Benefits of Premarital Education Programs

A simplistic definition of premarital education is “knowledge and skills based training that provides couples with information on ways to sustain and improve their relationship once they are married.”12 The implication of this definition requires the constituents of an effective premarital education program must include educating and equipping the couple with skills and tools that are practical in resolving issues as they arise before and after the marriage ceremony. Many couples dismiss this believing they have the necessary skills to navigate successfully through the marriage. If this were true, the divorce rate should be considerably lower.

After having evaluated the effectiveness of premarital programs, Carroll and Doherty have come to the conclusion “the research to date seems to suggest that varied educational formats and types of educators (e.g. professionals vs. lay leaders) may be equally effective in achieving positive results.”13 Regarding educational programs, they caution that most reviews of the effectiveness of marriage preparation consider premarital counseling and premarital education as one. Although they have many similarities, they are not the same and should not be lumped together. Premarital counseling often involves deeper exploration into the self and the couple, including dysfunctional couple dynamics, psychopathology, and contextual problems not usually a component of premarital education programs.

Many of the premarital preparation programs are consistent, including sections on communication, conflict resolution, financial management, sexuality, parenting expectations,


religion and family origins. Bruhn and Hill consider communication to be the cornerstone for any relationship and teaching couples skills for communicating is “of paramount importance.”¹⁴ When asked what they consider typical causes of marital problems, Oliver and Miller write, “Our experience has shown us that most failures in marriage are not caused by blowouts, but ‘slow leaks.’ One of the main contributors to slow leaks in a relationship is difficulty in communicating, or even the inability to communicate. As goes a couple’s ability to communicate, so goes everything else in their relationship.”¹⁵ Bienvenu performed a study with college-age premarital couples to determine the effect of using the Premarital Communication Inventory (PCI). He found having participants use the PCI “activated many facts and facets of inter-partner communication, thereby promoting freer and more open discussion.”¹⁶ In his research, he emphasized the importance of building communication skills during the premarital engagement period with the expectation it would lead to greater freedom and comfort in discussing problems and challenges that arise during marriage. Valiente and his colleagues’ surveyed individuals enrolled in an upper-division family studies course at a large Southwestern university. Participants were asked to identify three aspects of an intervention that would help their relationship and three they would consider to be detrimental. The highest rated areas considered the most helpful included: learning how to improve communication skills, problem-solving skills, and identification and modification of behavioral patterns.¹⁷ These are consistent with what has been identified by most other researchers as essential to any premarital program.


The aspects the respondents identified having the greatest potential to be harmful include: disclosing secrets or past information about issues or relationships, the potential the relationship may be terminated as a result of information disclosed that can threaten the stability of the couple’s relationship, and inappropriate application of techniques. What this small-scale study illuminates is couples who lack confidence in the program, or who fear it could be detrimental to their relationship, often do not participate. These may very well be the couples needing the help a premarital preparation course could offer. Markman determined approximately fifty percent of couples who were offered to take their PREP program declined to participate. It is possible the success of premarital education programs may be skewed in part due to the lack of participation by couples in distress or by those who fear it may be detrimental. Valiente and Markman could conclude the majority of couples who complete the program approached it with a heightened sense of optimism, resulting in their willingness to assimilate the tools and techniques yielding an increase in marital satisfaction and a reduction in marital dissolution.

Several premarital preparation programs include comprehensive premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs). Their purpose is primarily to make the individuals more aware of each other’s views and perspectives in addition to clarifying and understanding their own. They have also been advocated for their value in assisting educators and counselors how to best tailor their premarital counsel to meet the couple’s specific needs. One of the most valuable attributes of PAQs, is their ability to provide individualized and systematic feedback to premarital couples regarding how their relationship functions. Three widely used comprehensive questionnaires


include the Premarital Preparation and Relationship Questionnaire (PREPARE); the Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study questionnaire (FOCCUS); and the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE).

Researchers at the School of Family Life at BYU evaluated four different formats premarital education/intervention can take (counseling, community workshop, self-directed, and class). Regarding the perceived helpfulness, each format was rated as helpful to very helpful; however, class and self-directed formats were considered by the respondents as significantly more helpful than community/church sponsored workshops or counseling. Overall, the research team found it difficult to recommend one type of format over another, seeing they all produced positive change. They considered this to be beneficial, seeing it gives those facilitating the premarital education process as a choice of several effective formats. They did note the perceived helpfulness corresponded to the length of the intervention. In their comparison, workshops were the shortest and rated the lowest.\textsuperscript{20} This is consistent with the conclusions other researchers have found. Bruhn and Hill determined eight to nine sessions proved to be the most helpful.\textsuperscript{21} “Another study found longer programs (over twelve hours) tended to yield somewhat better results than shorter programs.”\textsuperscript{22}

In a large four-state study, Stanley and his team found the number of hours spent in premarital education was associated with positive marital satisfaction to a significant extent. At the same time, the lack of time spent together was negatively associated with marital conflict to a significant extent. They also determined the correlation was not strictly linear, seeing that marital

\begin{itemize}
\item[20.] Duncan, Childs, and Larson, “Perceived Helpfulness,” 632.
\item[21.] Bruhn and Hill, “Designing a Premarital Counseling Program,” 390.
\end{itemize}
conflict declined as premarital education increased between the first and tenth hours but declined at a much lesser rate with additional hours. On the other scale, marital satisfaction increased consistently but gradually as premarital education increased between one and twenty hours and did not change much after that. 23

After having performed a comprehensive, meta-analytic review and critical analysis on the effectiveness of premarital programs, Carroll and Doherty determined, in general, participation in marriage preparation programs often results in “significant and immediate gains in interpersonal skills such as communication, conflict management skills, and overall relationship quality, and these gains appear to hold for at least six months to three years.” 24 They also determined it is difficult to conclude what the longer term effects (beyond three years) are due to the lack of extended follow-up research, especially regarding marital dissolution. Markman and his team studied the effect of communication during the premarital period and compared it with marital distress within the first five years of marriage. They found premarital programs that help couples learn skills to handle the inevitable negatives in marriage while protecting positives can promote a reduction in distress, a major cause of divorce. 25

A team of researchers set out to consider the effects of premarital counseling in military families. The results of their study found couples who received premarital counseling sought marriage counseling more often and had lower levels of distress than those who did not receive premarital counseling. They also determined soldiers who had premarital counseling and sought


marriage counseling later in the marriage benefited more than those who did not receive premarital counseling.\textsuperscript{26} Duncan, Childs and Larson uphold the premise that based on recent studies, marriage preparation interventions bring measured benefits. They refer to the study performed by Carroll and Doherty that found participants in marriage preparation were better off than seventy-nine percent of nonparticipants.\textsuperscript{27} They also refer to other studies confirming the benefits of marriage preparation especially in the areas of communication, conflict management skills, and commitment to each other.\textsuperscript{28}

Among other benefits of premarital education, is couples who have gone through such a program are more likely to seek counsel themselves should they encounter difficulty in their marriage later on. At the least, they can contact their premarital counselor/facilitator who may be able to assist them, or if not, that person can refer them to someone else who can assist them.

**Role of Clergy in the Premarital Education Process**

“Religious organizations comprise the single largest array of institutions in our culture that have both a great interest in preventing marital breakdown and the capability to deliver premarital interventions.”\textsuperscript{29} Although the church has been the main provider of premarital education for couples planning to marry, many churches do not require it (only twenty-five


\textsuperscript{27} Carroll and Doherty, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs,” 105-118.

\textsuperscript{28} Amato, Johnson, Markman, and Stanley, “Premarital Education,” 117-126.

percent in a 1972 survey).\(^{30}\) Glenn reported ninety percent of couples in the United States who receive premarital counseling do so from a church or other religious organization. He also found just over one-third (37\%) of married couples had any marriage preparation.\(^{31}\) Wright believes no couple should marry without receiving thorough premarital counseling. His belief is the role of the church is to prepare couples for a lifetime of marriage, not just one day at the marriage altar.\(^{32}\) Stanley and his team conclude “Clergy have several advantages in providing premarital education, including their access to and influence with couples, a belief in the value of marriage, a strong educational tradition, and an institutional base of operations.”\(^{33}\) They also determined clergy and lay religious leaders were at least as effective as those trained by their staff in presenting the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), a curriculum designed to prevent marital distress and divorce. They did not; however, evaluate the effectiveness of clergy who did not receive formal training as part of their study.\(^{34}\) Markman and his team found the use of clergy to be very effective, provided they are adequately trained in the program they are administering. Their study was also based on using the empirically-based PREP premarital education program.\(^{35}\)

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A major concern noted by several of the authors cited in this thesis, is many clergy who counsel couples prior to marriage have no formal training in premarital counseling. Jones and Stahmann found almost half of clergy had no academic preparation in premarital counseling. Larson and Hickman performed an evaluation of ten college marriage textbooks to determine their efficacy in teaching the twenty-two premarital predictors of marital quality as determined by the research of Larson and Holman. What they found is none of the ten textbooks contained all of the twenty-two predictors of marital quality. They suggest when the authors of these textbooks revise their works; they should pay special attention to improving the breadth and depth of the content as it relates to the individual predictors. Larson and Hickman hope by doing so, not only would students who read these revised works personally benefit in preparation for their own marriages, but it would greatly enhance their ability to counsel others preparing for marriage.

In his doctoral dissertation on the involvement of Oklahoma clergy in providing marriage preparation, Wilmoth found the majority of clergy never took a college-level course on marriage preparation and almost half never attended any kind of continuing education related to premarital education. Similarly, Sullivan, in his thesis work, found twenty-one percent of clergy had not taken any classes or seminars on premarital counseling; thirty-one percent did take at least one


class or seminary; and forty-eight percent took two or more classes.\textsuperscript{39} These studies, as well as others, have concluded if the clergy has a high level of self-efficacy beliefs, they have a greater propensity to be effective in facilitating premarital preparation; the result of which is an increase in their effectiveness in preventing marital dissatisfaction and dissolution.\textsuperscript{40}

There are many excellent premarital education programs available that provide training either online or at training workshops at various locations. It would be helpful if seminaries would aid in preparing students in this discipline. Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, for many years, has offered, and continues to offer, classes in premarital counseling. It is the opinion of this writer that anyone pursuing a seminary degree in a pastoral track be required to take a minimum of one class in premarital counseling. If for no other reason, the pastoral student should be knowledgeable regarding the value of premarital education in enhancing marital satisfaction and reducing the rate of divorce. They should also be knowledgeable regarding the various programs available and the basic facets of each.

The results of the nationwide survey performed by Wilmoth and Smyser revealed 29.1% of clergy used PAQs or other inventories, 20.9% used some other type of instrument, and 49.9% used no premarital inventory at all. They felt by recruiting and training additional clergy to use PAQs and other proven premarital preparation methods, the likelihood of the effectiveness of premarital education would be greatly enhanced.\textsuperscript{41} In general, structured training is required for most PAQs whereas for many other programs, no training is required. This may explain why PAQs have been widely adopted and the corresponding confidence clergy report them as being

\textsuperscript{39} Paul Oliver Sullivan, “Clergy’s Training in and use of Premarital Counseling” (Doctoral dissertation, Biola University, 2000), 32.

\textsuperscript{40} Wilmoth, “Involvement of Oklahoma Clergy,” 174-175.

effective. In order to expand the awareness of these assessments and promote greater use, it would be helpful if denominations would educate their churches on the benefits and how to assimilate them into their church. More training seminars promoted through the church community could also grow the use of these tools. Denominational support for marriage preparation was confirmed by resolutions passed by the United Methodist Church in 2008 and the Southern Baptist Convention in 2003. At this convention, they passed a resolution stating, “We encourage every Southern Baptist church to be intentionally involved in strengthening marriages and families through such activities as faithful preaching and teaching, biblical premarital and family counseling.” It was disappointing to learn one study revealed less than seventy percent (69.2%) of Southern Baptist churches do not use a premarital education program. The Roman Catholic Church had the highest participation: only seventeen percent did not use any premarital preparation program. In fact, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops established a website stating any couple desiring to get married in the Catholic Church must complete a premarital program approved by the church over the course of at least six months of preparation amongst other requirements (www.foryourmarriage.org/steps-for-getting-married-catholic/).

Marriage Savers has come alongside of clergy and others who perform wedding ceremonies to adopt a Community Marriage Policy® (Community Marriage Covenant®) with the intentions to “radically reduce the divorce rate in area churches.” As of October 2009, they had helped clergy in 227 cities and towns in forty-three states to adopt this policy which sets minimum standards for marriage preparation. This policy typically requires an agreement to


provide premarital education including the administration of a PAQ. To quantify the results of their program, Marriage Savers has posted the promising results they are experiencing on their website (www. Marriagesavers.org); “The divorce rates in cities or counties without a CMP fell by just under ten percent (9.4%) over seven years, while those with a Community Marriage Policy fell by almost eighteen percent (17.5%) on average.”

Overview of Selected Premarital Education Programs

PREPARE/ENRICH was developed in 1978 as a result of extensive research of Dr. David Olson performed while serving as a professor at the University of Minnesota. He was asked to help create a more effective enrichment program for marriage. The result was the development of a set of inventories which became the premarital assessment questionnaire, PREPARE/ENRICH. The customized version is the fifth version. The customized couple assessment consists of up to a 195-item inventory each person completes online independent of each other. Currently, the fee to take the online assessment is $35 per couple. The inventory is designed to identify and measure the relationships agreement (strength areas) and those where there is disparity between the couple’s responses (growth areas). It contains twelve relationship scales including communication, conflict resolution, roles, sexuality, finances, spiritual beliefs plus others. It also includes five SCOPE personality scales, four couple and family scales based on Olson’s Circumplex Model of Family Maps, four relationship dynamic scales and thirty customized scales. A trained facilitator provides feedback over the course of four to eight sessions, helping the couple to discuss and understand the results while teaching the couple


proven relationship skills. To become certified to administer this assessment, the individual can attend a one-day facilitator training workshop or complete the self-training course.

A study was initiated to determine the format if the delivery format had any significant effect on the beneficial results. What this study found is the benefits are evident regardless if the couple participated in multiple conjoint sessions (six sessions, nine – twelve hours total) or a one-day group workshop. Both formats showed similar gains in the participant’s understanding about strategies to enhance their relationship as well as how to apply the skills learned.

For over thirty years this assessment tool has been administered by over 100,000 trained clergy, professional counselors, mentors and marriage educators throughout the U.S. to over three-million couples. The overall goal is to help couples improve in their relationship skills. Specific goals of the program include exploring strength and growth areas; improving communication skills; identifying and discussing how to manage major stressors; resolving conflict; discussing financial planning; establishing goals; and understanding and appreciating the personality differences of each other. Upon completion of the online assessment, the facilitator receives a twenty to twenty-five page facilitator’s report via web link which analyzes and summarizes the couple’s responses. The couple receives a ten page couple’s workbook which is an abbreviated version of the facilitator’s summary. The customized version was launched in 2009, which creates a variety of scales relevant for different couples. The marked difference in level of relationship quality, social network activities, and in length and trajectory of the dating period, equate to important differences among engaged couples. Because of this, Flower and Olson contend that premarital interventions can be more effective and efficient if they are designed to align with the particular needs of the couples as opposed to a canned one-

size-fits-all assessment. Customized versions include assessments for couples dating or engaged, as well as couples already married with or without children.

Fowers and Olson developed a typology based on using PREPARE with engaged couples. They found four types of premarital couples which they categorized as Vitalized, Harmonious, Conventional, and Conflicted. Olson, Fowers and Montel performed a study with couples who completed PREPARE married between two and three years, to examine the correlation of these typologies to marital satisfaction and whether they were still married. Couples that had separated or divorced were four times as likely to be Conflicted as Traditional, two times as likely to be Conflicted as Harmonious couples, and nearly three times as likely to be Conflicted as Vitalized couples. The means couples typified as Traditional were the least likely to divorce or separate and Conflicted were the most likely. The study also determined Vitalized couples had the highest percentage of satisfied couples and Conflicted had the lowest. The benefit of these results is by identifying couples at risk for divorce prior to marriage (Conflicted), intervention can ensue. The PREPARE inventory identifies problematic areas needing attention. With the help of a trained clergy or professional counselor, the couple can work through the problematic areas or determine they are incompatible and cancel the wedding potentially averting significant pain and distress often accompanying separation and divorce.

Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study (FOCCUS) is another PAQ widely used. It was developed in 1986 by three marriage therapists: Barbara Markey, Marie Micheletto, and Ann Becker. Since its conception, over 500,000 couples have taken this PAQ. FOCCUS is used by over five hundred Protestant churches of various


48. Fowers, Montel, and Olson, “Predicting Marital Success for Premarital Couples,” 103-119.
denominations as well as being the primary premarital inventory used by the Catholic Church. The Catholic version has specific questions reflecting the ideals of a sacramental marriage as defined by the Roman Catholic Church. The nondenominational edition contains the same items except the specific references to the Catholic Church are omitted. The current version consists of a 156-item questionnaire to be completed by engaged couples via the internet. In addition to the base questionnaire, it offers optional items for interfaith couples, cohabiting couples, and where one or both partners have been previously married. The results of the inventory are compiled into a FOCCUS© Couple Report provided to a trained facilitator who helps couples celebrate the strengths in their relationship while focusing attention on areas that need it. A preferred response is the ideal or optimum response the authors consider to be most advantageous for the couple. The results summary also depicts where the couple’s responses oppose each other and when an uncertain response is given. The assessment scores the extent of the couple’s agreement in the areas of communication, problem-solving, religion, dual careers, cohabitation, parenting, sexuality, and finances, plus more. The current cost for the assessment is $15 per couple.49 Upon completion of the questionnaire, the couple can elect to purchase an additional 14-item form called FOCCUS for the future for $1.25. This instrument helps the couple to consolidate what they learned about their relationship as a result of having completed FOCCUS. It also assists the couple in planning how to use the information for improving their future relationship. It does not require scoring or a facilitator. Topics on this form include planning how to improve communication, resolve conflict, and manage finances.

Facilitators can be pastors, lay people, mentor couples, or health care professionals. The requirement to become a facilitator is to attend the one-day facilitator worship. The current cost is $100 for the workshop. The facilitator is equipped with a facilitator’s manual that offers

supplemental questions to promote positive interaction between the couple. Much like PREPARE, variations for different religious faiths are available to aid in discussions regarding spiritual beliefs and practices. They also offer REFOCCUS© for married couples.

Much like PREPARE, FOCCUS provides specific, individualized feedback for the couple to assess their relationship along with the aid of a trained facilitator. Similarly, FOCCUS also alerts couples to strengths in their relationship, as well as areas for growth. It has some unique features including its use with a wide variety of couples including teen marriages, two-career couples, older marriages, second marriages, and interfaith marriages. With the predictive nature of this assessment and PREPARE, any couple considered an “at risk” couple could be encouraged to extend their engagement to get additional counseling, or reevaluate their decision to marry.

In 1995, the team of Williams and Jurich set out to provide research, a follow-up study, to evaluate the predictive validity of FOCCUS.50 They received responses from two hundred seven couples who had taken the FOCCUS assessment who had been married for a period of four to five years. They admit the results may not be indicative of the general population since the sample was comprised primarily of Roman Catholic individuals from the Midwest and may not correlate to non-Catholics. Most of the couples contacted that had divorced did not respond. They claim the results of their research are roughly comparable to PREPARE in terms of their ability to predict marital success; high quality versus poor quality marriages. Their results also indicated FOCCUS scores could be used to identify seventy-five percent of couples who developed marital distress within the first five years of marriage. They caution, “The fact that

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FOCCUS is not error free in its predictions is an important reminder that the FOCCUS instrument should not be used as a single, infallible predictor of future marital success.”51 One review team documented their concern with this PAQ because it does not measure three factors that predict marital quality: parental mental illness, similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status.52 Another study considers the assessment inadequate in measuring six factors that predict marital quality.53 Both of these studies report objective evidence for validity of preferred responses is missing.

A third well-known PAQ is the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE). It was developed by the Marriage Study Consortium at Brigham Young University which consists of scholars, educators, researchers, and counselors from varied religious backgrounds who are dedicated to strengthening marital and premarital relationships. The first version of the assessment was developed by Wesley Burr in 1980, and was referred to as “Marital Inventories.” In 1990, it was replaced by the PREParation for Marriage (PREP-M) which was later succeeded by RELATE in 1997. This questionnaire was designed for couples who are engaged, dating, married, cohabiting and those considering being married again. RELATE’s website claims tens of thousands of couples and individuals have benefited from their assessment over the past twenty years.54

RELATE is an online comprehensive premarital assessment questionnaire which produces a detailed printout couples can review on their own to learn about potential relationship

51. Williams and Jurich, “Predicting Marital Success after Five Years,” 151.


strengths and challenges or they can seek the assistance of a trained relationship educator or therapist. The assessment contains over two hundred seventy-six questions and takes about thirty-five minutes to complete. The couple receives a personalized twenty-plus page detailed report with colorful graphs intended to help them identify differences and guidelines to assist in resolving these differences. It basically measures factors in five areas: (1) couple unity in values; attitude and beliefs; (2) personal readiness for marriage; (3) partner readiness for marriage; (4) couple readiness for marriage; (5) background and home environmental factors (e.g. quality of parent-child relationship, family functioning, and sociocultural factors). Where it differs from PREPARE and FOCCUS is it does not require a counselor/facilitator to interpret the results. It can be taken by engaged couples as well as those already married who seek to improve their relationship. The assessment costs $40 per couple. If after having taken the assessment the couple determines they would like additional help interpreting the results, the website provides a link to trained facilitators they can contact by email. This assessment can also be administered in a group setting by therapists or clergy.

In one evaluation of RELATE, the reviewers recommend this PAQ for couples who prefer not to go to a therapist seeing it is easier to interpret than PREPARE or FOCCUS. For couples wanting more intense premarital counseling, they suggest PREPARE or FOCCUS. For therapists preferring structured exercises to use with the results, they recommend PREPARE because they felt it had the best supporting materials.

The team of Larson, Vatter, Galbraith, Holman, and Stahmann determined that engaged or seriously dating couples who completed the RELATionship Evaluation and received therapist assistance in its interpretation showed significant improvement on measures of perceived


Stahmann and Hiebert favor the use of PAQs due to their effectiveness in promoting couple involvement and the efficiency upon which they elicit information.\footnote{57}{R. F. Stahmann and W. J. Hiebert, \textit{Premarital and Remarital Counseling: The Professional’s Handbook} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 114.} The team of Larson, Newell, Topham, and Nichols reviewed the three leading PAQs in the following areas: number of items, time to administer, cost-per-couple scoring, supporting materials, validity, reliability, and necessary training required for the instructor to complete the assessment. Their analysis determined that PREPARE, FOCCUS, and RELATE “may all be confidently used in premarital assessment and counseling.” Regarding the particular benefits of PREPARE they concluded, “PREPARE’s strengths includes its relatively shorter length, comprehensiveness, and ease of administration and interpretation.”\footnote{58}{Jeffry H. Larson, Kenneth Newell, Glade Topham, and Sheldon Nichols, “A Review of Three Comprehensive Premarital Assessment Questionnaires,” \textit{Journal of Marital and Family Therapy} 28, no. 2 (April 2002): 236.}

The researchers at the Marriage Study Consortium evaluated five PAQ’s based on theoretical and psychometric criteria pertaining to their usefulness in educational and counseling settings. They evaluated each PAQ for the inclusion of premarital items found to predict future marital success. PREPARE assesses most (85\%) of the premarital factors defined in their research as good predictors of marital satisfaction and stability. They found PREPARE to be “most psychometrically sound,” and rated it as “the best instrument for premarital counseling.”
They consider some of the strengths of the program to include its short length, comprehensiveness, ease of administration and interpretation. Calvary Church of Charlotte has used this program for several years and the consensus of the pastors trained to facilitate couples going through PREPARE agree. All went through the one-day training locally and found it to be informative and very helpful. The cost to take the online assessment is $35, which is the second highest among the three PAQs.

Halford states several important strengths in the inventory–based approach to relationship education. First, FOCCUS, PREPARE, and RELATE are effective in predicting marital satisfaction in the early years of marriage. Second, these inventories provide a forum whereby couples can assess their personal risk and resilience profiles. However, while giving credence to the strengths of PAQs, Halford contends there is no empirical evidence of long-term benefits on relationship outcomes and that revealing differences or weaknesses, this tool may actually create problems for the couple unless they have the skills to work through them. Based on these and other concerns, he recommends using an inventory in conjunction with the development of cognitive skills. Wilmoth concedes the evaluation of PAQs has been limited to short-term outcomes; however, he refers to studies performed by Knutson and Olson that have shown moderate effectiveness at a minimum. Referencing two different studies performed in 2007, Wilmoth and Smyser recount couples given the RELATE inventory and report achieved significantly better scores in satisfaction and communication compared to other methods.


Larson et al. consider RELATE to be the easiest to interpret and found it particularly beneficial for couples who want to know how prepared they are for marriage without having to see a professional therapist. They also preferred RELATE for premarital education and group interaction. For more intense counseling, they concluded PREPARE or FOCCUS were the most helpful. Overall, they agreed all three assessments could be administered with confidence for premarital assessment and counseling. However, the counselor should only consider the use of one of these assessment tools if he/she plans to meet with the couple a minimum or three to four times.62 The use of PAQs is not without controversy. There are some authors who have concerns some couples may have difficulty in receiving the feedback regarding their differences. This feedback has the potential to be counterproductive if the couple does not have the skills to deal with the conflict.63 The greater concern would be for couples who complete the inventory and then perform the review of the results apart from a trained facilitator or counselor. Even when led by a trained facilitator, a potential liability exists if the counselor relies too heavily on the computer results while not being as active in questioning and observing the couple dynamics.64 Since most PAQ’s do not provide skills training, a solution to the concern mentioned is to combine the assessment with some skill-based training. Working with a counselor or facilitator who can first observe and assess the extent of the problem then offer training in the particular skill-set lacking can remedy this concern whether it is with communication, conflict resolution or something else.


There is another type of premarital preparation program that does not depend on questionnaires but relies more on relationship education and building skills. Four of the leading premarital education programs used extensively include *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS)*, by Les and Leslie Parrott; *Before You Say I Do* and *So You’re Getting Married*, both by H. Norman Wright, and the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan Blumberg.

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott are co-directors for the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University and outspoken advocates for premarital education stating, “Of course, we would also like to see significant funding given to the area of premarital education once couples decide to get married and faith-based initiatives in this area are a natural…a premarital education program is crucial.”65 They authored the book *Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts* based on their theory “living happily ever after is less a mystery than it is the mastery of certain skills.”66 They wrote this book to prepare couples for marriage primarily by teaching the skills in the areas of communication, gender issues, and spiritual health necessary to have a lasting and happy life together. Based on research over the past thirty years, the Parrotts believe the indicators of a happy marriage form the basis for seven questions comprising the seven chapters of their book. They also contend that taking the time to understand the issues surrounding these seven critical issues equates to an insurance policy against divorce.

The book was first published in 1995 and an updated and revised edition was released in 2006. They report the first edition has been used by hundreds of thousands of couples. The book has a series of discussion questions at the end of each chapter a couple can work through on their

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own. The authors also published two gender specific workbooks that are companions to the book. These workbooks contain twenty-four self-tests to help the couple put into action what is taught in the book. They also offer a DVD curriculum that can be used by the couple, or in small groups.

The question that is the basis for the first chapter is entitled, “Have you faced the myths of marriage with honesty?” The content in this chapter deals with debasing the myths couples often bring into a marriage. This includes unrealistic expectations and misguided assumptions, such as the expectation that each partner wants exactly the same thing from their marriage, and that marriage will make everything even better. Once married, this hope often gives way to mutual disillusionment once the couple realizes their partner is not the perfect person they thought they married.

The second chapter, “Can you identify your love style?” deals with the delicate balance between commitment, passion, and intimacy. The Parrotts define consummate love as the result of the full combination of love’s three components: passion, intimacy, and commitment. They discuss the repercussions of an imbalance between these three. The marriage that will succeed requires both partners understand the necessity to work diligently and skillfully to cultivate their love. Insights into how to develop one’s skills to cultivate passion, intimacy, and commitment comprise the bulk of the chapter. Personally, having counseled many couples, the concept of having to “work” on their relationship is foreign to most of them. Many couples feel all they need is love and with that, everything will fall into place.

The third chapter, “Have you developed the habit of happiness?” is based on the authors’ theory that happy couples decide to be happy. While this may sound elementary and perhaps

67. Les and Leslie Parrott, Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, 43.
even a bit ridiculous, the authors describe what they mean by this and consider it perhaps the most important facet of a life-long satisfying marriage. This decision requires that couples determine to be happy, no matter what, by not allowing circumstances to determine their mood or their marriage. Much of the problem rests on how a person thinks. The positive person puts things in the best light, allows their spouse to be human, and does not judge their partner by a perfectionist standard. The negative person has a propensity to see everything in a negative light, allowing circumstances to determine his/her attitude. The Parrots claim negative interpretations will sap the happiness out of the relationship, and that the answer lies in taking responsibility for our own feelings. They share how couples can learn how to adjust to things beyond their control and provide an exercise in the workbook for developing skills in this area. The ultimate key is to understand marriages can never be perfect because people are not perfect.68

Chapter four, “Can you say what you mean and understand what you hear?,” helps couples understand the breakdown in communication and how critical communication is in marriage. They cite a poll, the results of which revealed ninety-seven percent of couples who rated their communication with their partner as excellent also claimed to be happily married, compared to fifty-six percent who rated their communication as poor.69 An exercise is provided in the corresponding workbook to help couples understand how well they communicate and potential barriers that must be overcome. Developing skills in communication is a common thread woven through every premarital education/prevention program reviewed for this project.

Chapter five is entitled, “Have you bridged the gender gap?” God made men and women unique and different in many ways and until couples understand this, they may very well struggle

68. Les and Leslie Parrott, Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, 74.
in their marriage relationship. From a biological perspective, men and women are physically wired differently, which is evidenced in the way we behave and respond to the same stimuli. The key is to understand and embrace the difference as a benefit and not try to change one’s partner in a way opposing who God made them to be. The typical issue with couples is that men often try to meet the needs they, as men, value and women try to meet the needs they value, not realizing their needs are not the same as their spouse. The authors provide a helpful explanation of the basic difference in perspective between a man and a woman, and a corresponding exercise to help the couple gain understanding.

The sixth chapter deals with conflict resolution; “Do you know how to fight a good fight?” Most couples lack the skills for dealing with conflict in ways that do not cause damage to the relationship. The authors are emphatic that knowing how to fight fair is critical if the couple is to have any hope of being happy. Exercise eighteen in the workbook helps couples identify where their hot buttons are and how to work through potential trouble spots. It is in this chapter the problem of being critical and defensive is examined. The authors’ reference the work of Markman and Stanley who predicted with eighty percent accuracy which couples would divorce within seven years of marriage based on how a couple argues. The Parrots created a “conflict card” which ranks the intensity of how a person feels. They encourage couples to download from their website (www.realrelationships.com) and suggest couples pull this card out any time a heated exchange occurs.

The final chapter, “Are you and your partner soul mates?,” reveals the critical importance of the spiritual dimension of marriage. Spiritual intimacy requires that both individuals pursue God. The authors report when researchers conducted an evaluation of the characteristics of

70. Les and Leslie Parrott, Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, 126.
happy couples married for twenty years or more, one of the most important qualities they found was faith in God and spiritual commitment. To have this spiritual commitment requires a couple understand the essence of faithfulness as God demonstrates towards humanity and mimic it in their marriage relationship. It also requires the couple embrace and understand the importance of forgiveness in marriage. Lastly, the Parrots encourage couples to practice the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, and service, as a means to nurture marriages at the core. Not only have they personally found this to be true in their marriage, their experience is supported by studies which confirm couples who practice these spiritual disciplines have greater marital longevity and happiness than those who do not practice them.

There are various ways the SYMBIS program has been used, which is one of its strengths. Hyland Heights Baptist Church began using the program in 2002. Their program consisted of meeting with couples in both group and conjoint formats. In the group sessions, a couple facilitates the discussion. They felt having a couple lead the group gave a broader perspective than if always led by one gender. Having a couple lead also provided a forum for sharing their experiences as a seasoned married couple. The conjoint sessions were led by a group leader. The group leaders were trained in the SYMBIS and ENRICH inventory methods. The program consisted of eight sessions, each one scheduled for an hour and a half. Couples could request to be paired with a mentor couple for one year if they desired; approximately twenty percent of the couples elected to take advantage of this opportunity. They performed a study consisting of following ninety couples who participated in the SYMBIS premarital program through their church from 2002 until 2006. Eighty of the ninety couples were contacted

for survey purposes. Regarding marital satisfaction, their research revealed that over eighty-two percent (82.5%) of these couples indicated they are “very happy,” while the remainder rated their satisfaction level as “happy.” None of the couples indicated “unhappy.” Regarding communication, over seventy-two percent (72.5%) rated their communication as above average or excellent. In the area of conflict resolution, over eighty-two percent (82.5%) rated themselves as good or very good. None of the couples surveyed had separated or divorced, whereas for the four year period prior to implementing SYMBIS, they determined divorces occurred in less than eighteen percent (17.9%) of marriages with an additional seven percent indicating they had separated. Of the ten couples who did not return the survey, they learned at least two of them had divorced, which may be the reason they did not participate in the survey. Had they participated, it would have resulted in a divorce rate of just over two percent (2.2%), which is still significantly lower than the national average.

H. Norman Wright, a well-known Christian counselor and author, along with Wes Roberts, also a Christian counselor, created and launched the premarital education program series, Before You Say I Do in 1977 followed by an updated version in 1997. The kit consists of six thirty-minute sessions recorded on DVDs and a corresponding marriage preparation manual (workbook). It can be used by couples by themselves, with a counselor, in small groups, or as a conference or retreat. There is no training program for the counselor/facilitator, though the series includes a guide for leaders, counselors, as well as couples. Significant emphasis is placed on fulfilling the role Christ has in the relationship and how to align oneself to fulfill the role each is called to as husband and wife. Among the thirteen chapters, topics include: a definition of marriage, accepting each person’s uniqueness, love as a basis for marriage, what to expect,
vision statements, fulfilling needs, roles, responsibilities and decision making, dealing with in-laws, communication, conflict resolution, finances, sex in marriage, and spiritual implications.

Wright also created the premarital series, *So You’re Getting Married* in 1985 and updated it in 2006. It is comprised of a set of DVDs and gender specific workbooks. On the DVDs, Wright interacts with a small group, highlighting key components of each of the fourteen chapters/sessions. This program can be used one-on-one with a facilitator, in singles groups, or as a marriage seminar. No specific training is required for someone acting as the facilitator, although the workbook provides suggestions for the person serving in this role. It is a biblically-based counseling series intended to educate couples to think about issues critical to marital longevity and satisfaction in their impending marriage, and challenges them to make the necessary adjustments to enhance their potential for marital longevity. The entire series is based on commitment. Chapters include commitment to marriage, being free from the past, love, change, understanding oneself, evaluating expectations and developing goals, making wise decisions, communication guidelines, conflict resolution, controlling anger, building positive in-law relationships, forgiving one another, and praying together.

Both premarital series are still available through Wright’s website (www.hnormanwright.com) although they are currently being phased out. In place of these, Wright is endorsing a replacement program; *Marriage 101-Back to the Basics* led by Gary and Barb Rosenberg. *Before You Say I Do* sold over one million copies and was one of the prominent premarital tools used in the 1980s. *So You’re Getting Married* was very popular in the 1990s and 2000s.

The team of Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan Blumberg created The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) based on thirty years of research at
the University of Denver, as well as research performed at various other universities around the world. The PREP approach is based on the belief “God has provided guidelines for marriage in Scripture. Furthermore, God allows us to learn more about the workings of relationships through sound research.”74 They offer workshops across the U.S., and internationally, as well as webinars to teach couples the necessary skills and attitudes necessary for building good relationships.

PREP is used by professionals in marital counseling, marriage educators, and social policymakers at federal, state and local levels. They estimate over 14,500 professionals have been trained and over 500,000 couples counseled around the world and in all branches of the U.S. military.75 To become a trained PREP facilitator requires attending a training workshop. These workshops require eighteen hours of training over two to four days, depending on the format and usually cost $600-$650/person.

Their belief is that most divorce and marital unhappiness can be prevented. Their research suggests couples can learn skills, such as conflict resolution skills, complete exercises, and enhance ways of thinking that increase their chances of having a long-lasting satisfying marriage. Although originally developed primarily for couples in transition to marriage, now the program has been expanded to include married couples in a variety of life stages.

Participants in this program attend six sessions, each one approximately two hours long although other formats can be used. Couples are assigned homework outside of the class and reading assignments from the book, Fighting for Your Marriage. The core interventions of this program cross both behavioral and cognitive lines. What differentiates this program is it does not


focus on personality assessment or compatibility testing.\textsuperscript{76} It is the only relationship and marriage education program in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. According to the authors, “PREP is considered the worldwide leader in relationship and marriage education, and PREP is the most evaluated and tested program in the field.”\textsuperscript{77} Understanding the beneficial effects of any program of this type are limited and are prone to weaken over time, they claim the beneficial effect of their program appear to be clear as long as four to five years after the training.

The PREP program focuses on five keys: decide don’t slide; do your part; make it safe to connect; open the doors to positive connections; nurture your commitment. Key 1, “Decide don’t slide,” is a caution to discern when just letting things happen is okay and when individuals need to be more decisive about whom they are and where they intend to go. Key 2, “Do your part,” is based on the premise that marital teams (PREP is all about teamwork) will only succeed when each member does their part and takes personal responsibility for it. Each person must contribute to the marriage and focus on what they put into it rather than what they get out of it. Key 3, “Make it safe to connect,” is based on the importance of safety in healthy relationships. In order for positive connections and intimacy to thrive, the couple must cultivate an environment where each partner feels free to express concerns without fear of being put down or the environment becoming hostile. Key 4 is “Open the doors to positive communication,” which has to do with keeping the positive interactions foremost in the relationship. While this would appear elementary, over time, many couples tend to focus on the negatives often resulting in a loss of fun, friendship and romance. Key 5 is to “Nurture your commitment.” Commitment is a major

\textsuperscript{76} Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, and Leber, “Strengthening Marriages and Preventing Divorce,” 393.

\textsuperscript{77} Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, \textit{Fighting for Your Marriage}, 13.
theme with the PREP approach and to maintain it requires an understanding and a willingness to
sacrifice, extend and receive forgiveness, while protecting priorities and developing teamwork.

In addition to these approaches, several other approaches have been used for premarital
counseling that will simply be mentioned here. Christine and Thomas Murray describe the
“Solution-focused approach to conducting premarital counseling that is a strength-based
approach that aims to help couples build solutions that will lead to more stable, satisfying
marriages.”

78 Stahmann and Hiebert outlined an approach including the use of genograms in
addition to premarital inventories. Their approach emphasizes the importance of exploring the
couple’s family of origin and the potential effect it can have on the couple considering marriage.

Dennis Rainey, President and CEO of FamilyLife, is the editor of the book Preparing for
Marriage.

80 It consists of two main components; six main sessions where couples learn how to
make a marriage work through reading and interaction, and five special projects that are
scattered throughout the book. Although the book is designed so a couple considering marriage
can work through it on their own, the editor strongly suggests working with a mentor. The
mentor could be a pastor, counselor, or even a lay person or couple. There is a companion
leader’s guide to assist the mentor/counselor in helping the couple to get the most out of the
workbook. This book has been used at Calvary Church of Charlotte as a companion to the
PREPARE/ENRICH PAQ. In addition to all of the premarital programs listed, other approaches
include Marriage Encounter weekends, meeting with a mentor couple, various workshops, and
web-based applications.

78. Christine E. Murray and Thomas L. Murray, Jr. “Solution-Focused Premarital Counseling: Helping
Couples Build a Vision for their Marriage,” Journal of Marital and Family Therapy 30, no. 3 (July 2004): 349.


Effectiveness of Premarital Education Programs

A considerable amount of research has been performed on the effectiveness of various premarital preparation programs, the optimum format, and whether facilitated or self-directed provides the best results. With so many variables in the program content and methodology, some pastors, counselors, and researchers are hesitant to state emphatically that premarital education programs are highly effective for all who participate. Even staunch advocates for premarital education would concede not every program is effective for every couple. At the fundamental level, to ascertain whether a premarital education program is effective depends on one’s definition of “effective.” In making a case for premarital education, Scott Stanley equates the effectiveness of premarital education with a reduction in marital distress and divorce. “Because of the complexity of design issues and difficulties inherent in outcome studies, researchers will reasonably continue to debate the effectiveness of premarital education regiments.”81 He goes on to say it will take decades of additional research to answer the question of effectiveness. Based on rational argument and empirical findings, he presents four arguments for plausible benefits for engaging in premarital education.82 “The first three are based more on rational argument than existing empirical knowledge,” although they embody empirically testable hypotheses.83 The fourth is based on existing empirical knowledge.

The first argument relates to fostering deliberation by slowing couples down. He suggests that couples who plan on getting married should be required to have a specified time period set aside to engage in a premarital education program. This period would be used to allow couples

more time to deliberate about their relationship and to receive education and training in how to prepare them for a lifetime together as husband and wife. Stanley believes there are many couples who rush into marriage, not allowing sufficient time to really get to know each other and whose perspective on their relationship is characterized by the influence of idealization and romanticism. He considers these couples to be at risk for marital distress and dissolution. Requiring a delay before the wedding would provide the time to participate in a premarital program that could result in equipping and preparing the couple for the challenges of marriage. After engaging in a premarital program, some couples will re-evaluate their decision to get married, thus avoiding the likelihood of divorce. Calvary Church’s official policy on weddings (See Appendix C), states, “The couple agrees to complete the premarital counseling sessions overseen by the pastor(s), which are to commence no later than six months prior to the wedding.” We have two primary reasons for the initiation and implementation of this policy. First, we want the couple to have adequate time to prepare for their marriage by meeting with a pastor for a minimum of six sessions. Included in these sessions, is a review of the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory. The second reason is to allow the pastor sufficient time to get to know the couple to determine if he believes there are serious issues that may jeopardize the health of the marriage. At the pastor’s discretion, he may refuse to marry the couple or postpone it to allow time for additional preparation or professional counseling. Many Catholic churches also require couples to provide six months advanced notice to provide adequate time for premarital training.

Stanley’s second argument regards the expectation that, within the premarital training, the couple will be made aware that the decision to marry is an important one and should not be taken lightly. Stanley feels too many couples give too little weight to the decision to marry.84 Our

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84. Stanley, “Making a Case,” 274.
society has trivialized marriage as evidence in shows like “Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire,” or ABC’s popular shows “The Bachelor” and “The Bachelorette.” Couples considering marriage need to understand the seriousness of the commitment they will make as part of their vows and how their marriage turns out depends largely on their attitudes and actions.

The third argument that speaks to the effectiveness of premarital education, is couples should be made aware there are people who can help should they experience difficulties in their marriage later on. Couples having had a positive premarital education experience may be more likely to ask for assistance from the person who led them through their premarital preparation. Many couples who experience marital distress wait too long before asking for help. The longer the disharmony and distress, the more difficult it often is to help the couple to remedy and rebuild the relationship. If their premarital counselor/facilitator demonstrated an authentic caring attitude and encouraged them to contact him should they experience difficulty, the couple is more likely to reach out for help before it is too late.

Stanley’s fourth and final defense of premarital education is based more on empirical knowledge. He references the research performed by Sullivan and Bradbury regarding the question of effectiveness of premarital training. Based on the feedback of newlyweds who participated in a formal premarital program, they found approximately ninety percent of couples who participated in a premarital education program would choose to do so again. At the same time, there appeared to be no differences in outcome between those engaged in a premarital program and those who did not. The research on PREP, which was designed to decrease marital distress and divorce based on empirical analysis of risk factors, suggests it does have a

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measurable effect on marital dissolution. Research has found that couples who took PREP increased their positive communication and reduced negative communication for up to five years or longer. These couples were also less likely to break up or divorce up to five years after taking the training. Stanley concludes, “In the absence of data we might wish to have now, there are many reasons to believe in the value of engaging in broadly applied, premarital education efforts with couples. We know enough to act and we should take action now to know more.”

Representatives from the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University endorse premarital education as a means to educate premarital couples specifically in the areas they found to be consistently problematic early on in marriage. Their belief is by identifying and discussing critical issues that have a propensity to be problematic, the couple can be taught skills to deal with these issues or realize they are unable to resolve them and not go through with the marriage, potentially averting a divorce. If the couple is able to work through the issue(s) before marriage, then they are better equipped to deal with them and the potential for longevity in marriage increases. The thirteen-year study performed by the team at the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver determined “the seeds of marital distress and divorce are sown for many couples before they say ‘I do.’” They claim the results of their discriminate analysis was able to indicate couples that can be classified as satisfied, distressed, and divorced based on premarital data. Knowing which couples will fall into the latter two of the three categories, allows for prevention to take place.

The team of Williams, Riley, Risch, and VanDyke took a different approach. They surveyed couples married between one and eight years to solicit the value of premarital education programs from their perspective as consumers. The research team posed questions regarding the number of sessions, component topics, providers, and formats along with several others. They found two-thirds of the couples surveyed considered the experience as valuable. Those couples married the fewest years found it to be more valuable than those who had been married for a longer time.\textsuperscript{90} This is consistent among several teams having researched the value of premarital education. Williams’ team also found clergy were rated above all other providers as the most effective facilitators followed by mentor, or established couples. Regarding which components the couples valued most was the discussion time associated with reviewing the results of PAQs. The topics considered most valuable were: communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children and church.\textsuperscript{91} Communication and conflict resolution appear to be among the top areas of concern needing to be addressed. Teaching techniques such as reflective listening skills will equip couples how to deal with troubles they otherwise might feel are impossible to overcome. The key benefit of premarital is the forum it presents to teach, train, and work through difficult issues before they become insurmountable.

Many couples go into marriage thinking they are equipped with the skills necessary to have a lasting and satisfying marriage. Premarital education programs are designed to provide the essential training couples need. In their evaluation of premarital prevention programs, Carroll and Doherty came to the following conclusion regarding their general effectiveness:


\textsuperscript{91} Bruhn and Hill, “Designing a Premarital Counseling Program,” 390.
The average person who participated in a premarital prevention program was significantly better off afterwards than seventy-nine percent of people who did not participate . . . Our findings suggest that premarital prevention programs are generally effective in producing immediate and short-term gains in interpersonal skills and overall relationship quality and that these improvements are significantly better than nonintervention couples in these areas. However, because of a lack of extended follow-up research, conclusions about long-term effectiveness remain elusive.92

In their analysis, they point out despite widespread support for marriage preparation programs, there is a lack of certainty regarding their effectiveness in strengthening marriages and preventing divorce especially as it relates to being generally effective for all couples and which forms are more effective than others.93 Even though the initial indications are favorable regarding the effectiveness of premarital programs, additional time and more extensive studies will be required, but funding from government agencies and private foundations has been lacking. The question remains whether the effectiveness of premarital education corresponds to long-term marital satisfaction and a reduction in marital dissolution. Carroll and Doherty write:

It is unrealistic to believe that premarital programs can single-handedly prevent marital problems across the lifespan and to hold that up as the standard by which they are judged effective. We propose that positive outcomes sustained during the first five years of marriage represent a more realistic standard for determining the effectiveness of such programs. Sizable portions of divorce occur in these early years of marriage and demonstrated effectiveness in decreasing marital distress and dissolution during this period justifies the widespread utilization of premarital programs. Further research results alone typically do not guide policy decisions. Public support for premarital prevention sends a message that marriage matters and is worthy of deliberate preparation and intentional maintenance.94

In their multi-state random household survey, Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman reported that premarital education corresponds to increased marital quality, lower levels of

conflict, and a reduction in divorce rates by as much as thirty-one percent.95 The team of Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, and Johnson found couples with higher risk profiles for divorce often do not participate in premarital education. They suggest their lack of participation may be why the apparent encouraging results obtained by the household survey are skewed.96 Their theory assumes greater participation by high risk couples would potentially reduce the positive results realized in the household survey. To validate this assumption, studies would need to be performed with high risk couples. That is precisely what Nock, Sanchez, and Wright did. They performed a study with married couples in Louisiana and found formal premarital education or counseling corresponded to a reduction in the chances of divorce, “especially for those with riskier profiles for divorce.”97 In looking back at twenty-eight codable premarital education studies between 1975 and 2008, including nine unpublished doctoral dissertations, one meta-analytic study found these programs appear to be moderately effective in improving couple communication, but they are careful to note studies employing self-report measures opposed to observational measures found the effects to be less.98

Understanding that some churches mandate premarital counseling and an increasing number of states are providing incentives for couples who participate in premarital programs, one research team set out to examine how an individual’s willingness to participate in mandated


premarital therapy influenced their marital adjustment as well as their overall satisfaction with the premarital education experience. Their research was targeted at answering the question, “Is marital adjustment in the first years of marriage and overall satisfaction with premarital therapy affected by the initial willingness of the individual to participate in mandated premarital therapy, how long the couple has been married, and the total number of premarital therapy sessions?”

They concluded the perceived value was influenced by the willingness of the participants. Upon completing the program, those who participated willingly considered the program to be effective while those who did not want to participate did not consider the program to be effective (subjective opinions). Regarding marital adjustment, length of time the couple had been married and the total number of sessions, they report:

> Because marital adjustment in the first years of marriage was not significantly affected by the initial willingness or reluctance of the couple to participate in mandated premarital therapy, the length of time the couple had been married, nor the total number of premarital therapy sessions, other variables must be influencing marital adjustment that were predictive of a satisfying marriage.

It needs to be noted that the number of sessions for this study was approximately four, whereas past research has determined the preferred number of sessions is eight or nine. Calvert and Bridges found people who attended two to three sessions had a significantly lower perceived value of the experience than those who attended eight to nine sessions. They concluded, “premarital therapy facilitators need to be flexible and structure their interventions with the client in mind…not what they deem important.” They believe appealing to the participant’s interests while motivating them to attend would be more valuable than mandating participation. They

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100. Calvert and Bridges, “Mandated Premarital Therapy,” 34.

advocate the use of PAQs early on in the process and the use of other supplemental materials as couples often enjoy materials pertaining to their specific concerns. By being intentional about considering and addressing the couple’s specific concerns and interests, the potential for increasing their ownership and perceived value increases. In their final assessment, they did not consider mandating premarital intervention as valuable unless the counselor is adequately trained and qualified, that he/she assesses and addresses the specific needs of each couple, and the program meets specific guidelines as designated by researchers such as Barlow, Silliman and Schumm, or Williams, Risch, and VanDyke.

In reviewing the effectiveness of marriage preparation, Stahmann concludes most studies reported positive effects, while others showed minimal or no effect. He does report, “No studies have demonstrated negative effects for couples or individuals who participated in various marriage preparation programs.”102 Considering the value of preventive oriented activity, he recommends that family and marital therapists should consider offering premarital counseling as an area of service to offer.

A description of a Premarital Assessment Program (PAP) for use with marital and family therapy centers was the subject of an article published by Buckner and Salts.103 In it, they convey two main goals of the PAP. First, is to enable the couple to examine themselves, their partner, and their relationship in order to assess whether their current partner is really the person they want to marry. The second goal of the program is to examine some of common problem areas most couples encounter in marriage. Their belief is by following their program, the therapist can effectively help the couple navigate through areas previously not discussed or adequately dealt


with and to help them have a more realistic view of marriage considering many premarital couples are in the “infatuation” stage.

One of the most compelling studies supporting the effectiveness of premarital education was the large-scale study performed by Amato and Stanley in 2001. After interviewing 3,344 adults in four states, they concluded premarital education was “positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction and commitment and negatively and significantly associated with marital conflict.” 104 They also reported that couples having received premarital education, had a thirty-one percent lower chance of divorce. The mean duration of marriage of those participating was twenty-one years. The wide variation in years married allowed the researchers to assess the benefits of premarital education over time. They found the benefits are strongest during the first year of marriage and decline with time based on the reduction of the coefficient for premarital education and marital conflict from the first year of marriage to the twentieth year of marriage. Overall, the reported benefits were the same regardless of the person’s race, income, or education.

104. Amato, Johnson, Markman, and Stanley, “Premarital Education,” 120.
CHAPTER 2:  
SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The first section of this chapter will describe the rationale for the survey and the expected results. The second section describes the process by which the survey was implemented. The third section presents an overview of the ten questions comprising the survey. The fourth section presents data from the survey sorted by various fields to consider potential correlations and trends. The last section provides an analysis of the data obtained from the survey.

Survey Rationale

A survey was created to validate the hypothesis that when a couple participates in a formal premarital preparation/education program, the end result is an increase in marital satisfaction and a corresponding reduction in the rate of divorce. The data will be used to support the hypothesis that premarital preparation education equips couples to be more aware of the marriage goals, roles, and expectations of themselves. Premarital counseling also provides instruction on improving communication and conflict resolution. The results are expected to show a higher level of marital satisfaction among couples who participated in a formal premarital program compared to couples who did not. The results are also expected to show a measurable reduction in the rate of divorce, defined as greater than ten percent when compared to the national rate of divorce (~50%).

Survey Process

Data was collected from couples married since 2000 through the databases of Peace Church in Wilson, North Carolina, and Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina where this researcher has served in an associate pastor capacity. Permission from the senior pastors of these
two churches was obtained to extract the information on potential participants. The sample sizes from the two churches combined will not exceed one hundred participants (fifty couples). In addition, couples married since 2000 currently being counseled, or who have an association at a local Christian counseling center, were asked by their counselors if they were willing to participate. Those who were willing provided their email address so the link to the survey could be sent to them. One of the partners from the counseling center was gracious in granting permission to solicit participants for the study. The sample size from the counseling center will not exceed one hundred participants (fifty couples) for a maximum combined total of two hundred participants (one hundred couples). Participation was completely voluntary in all cases.

Prior to being sent the link to the survey, participants were sent an email with a consent form attached. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) required the consent form be sent to all potential participants, but did not require it to be signed and returned. The consent form provided the contact information of this researcher should they have any questions. The initial email stated this student is conducting a survey for his doctoral dissertation at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary regarding the effectiveness of premarital counseling. Participants were informed they would receive a subsequent email providing the link by which they could access the survey via Survey Monkey’s website. They were informed the survey should take no more than two minutes to complete, their information would be submitted anonymously, and that this researcher could not associate their answers with them. They were asked to submit one response per person within two weeks of receipt.

The first group of participants contacted was from the names of couples provided by Calvary Church. They were sent the first of two emails notifying them they were being invited to participate in the survey on the morning of August 3, 2012. It contained the consent form and a
notice that a subsequent email would be sent containing a link to the actual survey. The subsequent email was sent later the same day. The second group of participants was from the couples provided by Peace Church and Carolina Christian Counseling Center, in Charlotte. The initial and subsequent emails were sent out the same day on August 9, 2012. Based on emails that were undeliverable, subsequent emails were sent out as the email address discrepancies were resolved. The total number of participants contacted was 148; 108 from the databases of the two churches and forty sourced from the counseling center. The number of emails rejected from the church-based contact list was thirteen resulting in ninety-five people who should have received the email invitation to participate (the maximum number of participants from the churches was one hundred). A total of sixty-nine people participated by completing the survey.

**Survey Question Overview**

The first question asks whether the respondent had been married previously or not. The response options were “yes” or “no.” This question was designed to make it possible to filter out the responses of those previously married since this project specifically examined the effects of premarital education programs for couples being married for the first time. This exclusion was determined during the project initiation and was disclosed in the section depicting the project limitations.

The second question asks the respondents the duration of his/her current marriage in ranges of age. The first range option choice was for couples married less than two years. The second range option choice was for couples married three to five years. The third range option choice was for couples married six to nine years. The last range option choice was for couples married ten to twelve years. Since both churches that provided access to their membership databases to identify participants required premarital counseling by 2000, this boundary was
established in an attempt to solicit feedback primarily from couples who participated in a formal premarital education program. Participating couples who have been married ten to twelve years represent the longest marital duration for this study. The last two choice options were for couples who had separated or divorced having been married since 2000.

The third question asks where the couple got married. The first selection option was Peace Church in Wilson, North Carolina. Their pastors facilitated the use of Norman Wright’s *So You’re Getting Married* series during the period from which the respondents were married. The second selection option was Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The pastors at this church utilize the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory as the primary resource for their premarital education program. These are the two churches targeted since this researcher served at both churches and had firsthand experience facilitating the use of both premarital educational programs. Since the third source of potential participants were from couples associated with or currently receiving counseling at a local Christian counseling center, the third selection option allowed couples to indicate if they were married in a church other than Peace or Calvary. The fourth selection option allowed participants to indicate they were not married in a church.

The fourth question asks whether the couple participated in a premarital counseling/preparation program. Two options were provided; “yes” and “no.” Couples who did not participate in a premarital education program were instructed to skip to question nine since questions five to eight required participation in a premarital program. For couples who did not participate in a premarital education program, they were still requested to respond to question nine, “Would you recommend pre-marital counseling to couples considering getting married?” This was to inquire whether those who did not receive premarital counseling wished they had.
Question five asks which premarital program the couple participated in. Seven selections were given, six of which are widely used programs. PREPARE/ENRICH was listed first since this is the program used by Calvary Church. Norman Wright’s *So You’re Getting Married?* was the second option since it was the program used by Peace Church. SYMBIS, PREP and FOCCUS were listed as options three, four, and five respectively since they all are popular programs used in churches and counseling centers. For couples who participated in a different program or for couples who met with a pastor or counselor, but who did not use an established premarital program, a field was provided for them to type in what they used.

Question six requests participants to indicate the number of sessions the couple had with their pastor or counselor. The first selection option was to indicate the couple met one or two times with their counselor. The second selection option was for couples who met three to six times with their counselor. The third and final selection option was to couples who met with their counselor more than six times. The rationale for asking this question is to determine if the number of sessions correlates to any benefit based on the couple’s response to questions seven through ten.

Question seven is one of the key questions. Although completely subjective, couples were asked to indicate the value of participating in premarital program as it relates to being better equipped to deal with challenges in their marriage. The first selection option was to indicate their premarital program was of minimal benefit. The second selection option was to indicate the participants considered their program of some benefit. The third selection option was to indicate the couples considered the value of their program very beneficial.

Question eight seeks to determine what attribute of the premarital program was the most helpful in preparing the couple for married life. They were given five options: conflict
resolutions skills and tools; communication skills and tools; finances and financial information; roles and responsibilities; spiritual beliefs. These five were selected based on these being a common component of each of the premarital programs listed in the survey which are also considered by most researchers as the most important facets of a premarital program.

Question nine asks all couples, those who participated in a premarital program as well as those who did not, to give their opinion whether they would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage. They could choose between “yes” and “no.”

Question ten asks couples to rate their current marital satisfaction. The first selection option allowed couples who are “very happy” to indicate such. The second selection option allowed couples to indicate their marital satisfaction as “happy.” The third selection option, “neutral,” was an indication the individual’s marital satisfaction was neither happy nor unhappy. The fourth selection option allowed individuals to indicate they are unhappy with their marital satisfaction. The fifth selection option allowed individuals to indicate they are very unhappy with their marital satisfaction. This question is critical to the research for if couples who participated in premarital counseling indicate a higher level of marital happiness than those who did not, the logical conclusion is they would be less likely to divorce.

**Survey Data**

Couples choosing to participate in the survey were able to access the survey by clicking on the link contained in the email. This link connected them to the customized survey on the Survey Monkey website. All of the responses were collected by Survey Monkey, which compiled the results which are presented in table one.
### Table 1. Survey responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Possible Answers</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you been married previously?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>56 (81.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long have you been married?</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>9 (13.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>21 (30.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-9 years</td>
<td>19 (27.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-12 years</td>
<td>19 (27.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We’ve separated</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We’ve divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Where were you married?</td>
<td>Peace Church</td>
<td>7 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calvary Church</td>
<td>11 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Another church</td>
<td>31 (44.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not in a church</td>
<td>20 (29.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Were you required to participate in a premarital counseling program?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56 (82.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>12 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If yes, what program?</td>
<td>PREPARE/ENRICH</td>
<td>8 (36.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So You’re Getting Married</td>
<td>9 (40.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYMBIS</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PREP</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOCCUS</td>
<td>2 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RELATE</td>
<td>1 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How many sessions did you have with the pastor/counselor?</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>9 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>39 (68.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 6</td>
<td>9 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To what extent has your participation in a premarital program prepared you to work through challenges in your marriage?</td>
<td>Minimal benefit</td>
<td>10 (17.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit</td>
<td>30 (51.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very beneficial</td>
<td>18 (31.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. From the following choices, what part of the premarital program was the most helpful in preparing you for the challenges of marriage?</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>6 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>13 (22.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>6 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roles and expectations</td>
<td>23 (40.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual beliefs</td>
<td>9 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Would you recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66 (95.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rate your current marital satisfaction.</td>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>51 (73.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>13 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very unhappy</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Analysis

Since the focus of this project was to consider the effects of participation in a formal premarital education program for couples being married for the first time, the responses from those previously married were filtered out for all of the analysis unless specifically noted otherwise. This accounted for thirteen of the sixty-nine responses, so the net number of respondents is fifty-six.

Effect of Marital Longevity

The first in the series of filtering the data was to sort respondents based on how long they have been married. The shortest duration from which respondents could choose was for those married less than two years. Six participants indicated they have been married less than two years. Of these six participants, four were married in a church and two were not married in a church. Four of the six participants were required to participate in a premarital preparation program. All four who went through a premarital program indicated they met with their pastor/counselor between three to six times. Half considered the counseling “very beneficial” and the other half considered it to have had “some benefit.” What they felt was the most beneficial aspect of the counseling was conflict resolution, communication skills, and spiritual beliefs. No one indicated roles and expectations or anything related to finances. All six indicated they would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering getting married. What is interesting in this first series is the two individuals who did not participate in a premarital program still recommended it for couples considering getting married. For all couples married less than two years, those who participated in a premarital program, as well as those who did not, there was no difference in marital satisfaction regardless of having gone through a premarital education program; everyone rated their satisfaction level as “very happy.”
The next filter kept only the responses from respondents married between three and five years. This group consists of twenty participants, the single largest group in this category. The majority, twelve of the twenty, were married in a church. Seventeen of these individuals, or eighty-five percent, participated in a premarital program. Only eight of the twenty participated in one of the six programs provided on the questionnaire. Of the remaining nine who indicated having participated in a premarital program, seven of these responded they met with a pastor, one could not recall the title of the series and the other stated the church had its own program. The majority attended between three and six sessions with their pastor/counselor, three indicated they met either once or twice, and one person indicated they met more than six times with their pastor/counselor. The majority, over eighty-three percent, indicated the program equipped them to work through the challenges of marriage. Unlike the group married less than two years, this group had someone to indicate each of the five areas as being the most beneficial. The most common benefit selected was communication, which also was the most popular response from those married less than two years. Only one person who participated in a premarital program indicated they would not recommend premarital counseling to couples getting married. This means of the three respondents who did not participate in a premarital program, two still recommend it. Regarding marital happiness, thirteen (76.5%) of these couples rated their marriage as “very happy,” three (17.6%) rated their marriage as “happy,” and one (5.9%) indicated they are “very unhappy” in their marriage. This individual was not married in a church, and his/her premarital counseling consisted of meeting one-on-one more than six times with a pastor who did not use a published premarital program. This person also indicated they felt the premarital program was “very beneficial” and selected “roles and responsibilities” as the area they considered to be the most helpful. Even rating his/her marriage as “very unhappy,” this
individual still recommended premarital counseling. Of the three respondents who did not participate in a premarital program, two rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy” while the other person rated their marriage as “happy.” Among couples married three to five years, a higher percentage of those who participated in a premarital program rated their marriages “very happy” (76.5%) than those who did not participate in a premarital program of any kind (66.7%). It must be kept in mind the sample size was very limited.

The survey results were then sorted to only show the responses from those married six to nine years. This group consisted of thirteen individuals. Nine of these were married in a church and four were not. Nine of the thirteen participated in a premarital preparation program. From the list of popular premarital programs, four indicated they went through one of them while the other nine did not. Of these nine, three met with a pastor, one with a mentor couple, one in a group setting, one could not recall what program they participated in, and the remaining three did not provide a response. Once again, the majority of respondents indicated they met with their pastor/counselor between three and six times (77.8%). One participant indicated having met one or two times and the other person indicated having met more than six times with someone. Within this group, 78% indicated their premarital preparation program was either beneficial or very beneficial in preparing them to work through the challenges of marriage. Only two couples (22%) indicated “minimal benefit” and three did not respond. Regarding what area of their counseling they felt was the most beneficial, “roles and expectations” had the highest response at sixty percent whereas the other four areas each had one respondent choose it, and three did not respond. Everyone participating in a premarital program indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering getting married. Two of the four respondents who did not participate in a premarital program indicated they would not recommend participating in
one. Unlike the previous group, no one rated their marital satisfaction as “unhappy” or “very unhappy.” Those who rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy” or “happy,” constituted eighty-nine percent of the total responses. Only one person rated their satisfaction level as neutral. Of the four individuals who did not participate in a premarital program, two rated their marital satisfaction as “happy” and the other two as “very happy.” Although the sample size is small, once again, a higher percentage of those who participated in a premarital program rated their marriages “very happy” (66.7%) when compared to respondents who did not participate in any premarital counseling (50%).

The next group consisted of individuals married ten to twelve years and there were seventeen in this group. The majority in this group were married in a church other than the two churches supplying the data. Only two individuals indicated they were not married in a church. Of the seventeen respondents married ten to twelve years, sixteen participated in a premarital counseling program. Only two of these sixteen selected one of the published programs listed on the survey, another fourteen chose “other.” Among these fourteen, five of these could not recall what was used, five met with a pastor who did his own program, one went through a program designed by an elder, and the other three named a different program/curriculum (Pre-Cana, Five Love Languages, Preparing for Marriage). Consistent with the other groups, the most popular number of meetings is from three to six (62.5%). Two individuals in this group married ten to twelve years indicated they met once or twice with their pastor/counselor and four indicated they met more than six times. Thirteen of the sixteen indicated that participation in a premarital program was of “some benefit” or “very beneficial.” Three individuals indicated their premarital education was of minimal benefit. Two of these three could not recall what premarital program they participated in and one thought it could have been PREPARE/ENRICH. These three met
with their pastor/counselor three times and they all chose the response indicating they would recommend premarital to couples considering getting married. Two of these same three individuals rated their marriage as “neutral.” The most popular aspect of counseling in the view of this group was “roles and expectations” followed by “communication skills.” All seventeen, including the one respondent who did not participate in a premarital program, indicated they would recommend premarital education for couples considering getting married. Regarding marital satisfaction, over eighty-one percent said they are “very happy,” one person (6.2%) rated “happy,” and two people (12.5%) rated their satisfaction as “neutral.” Consistent with those who have been married three to five years and six to nine years, those who participated in a premarital program of those married ten to twelve years rated their marriages “very happy” more often than those who did not participate in a premarital education program (81.3% versus 0%).

Among all respondents, none indicated they had divorced but one person did indicate they are currently separated. This person was previously married, got married the second time at Calvary Church, participated in PREPARE/ENRICH, but only met with a pastor/counselor once or twice. The current policy at Calvary Church requires couples to meet at least six times with a pastor. Only meeting once or twice is inconsistent with the current policy, but it is possible this person’s premarital counseling could have occurred before the current policy went into effect. Even though this person indicated being very unhappy in his/her marriage, this person still recommend premarital counseling and considered the section on finances to be the most beneficial. Since this individual has been married previously, his/her responses will not be considered in the overall analysis of the data.

Table two provides a summary of the responses of those respondents who participated in a premarital program by the number of years they have been married.
Table 2. Effect of marital longevity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of marriage (question 2)</th>
<th>Number in group who participated in premarital counseling</th>
<th>Benefit of premarital in preparing for marriage (question 7)</th>
<th>Recommend premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
<th>Marital satisfaction rating (question 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 2 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 2 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 4 (22%)</td>
<td>16 (94.1%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 13 (76.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 11 (61.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 3 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal = 3 (16.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Very unhappy = 1 (5.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 6 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 6 (66.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 2 (22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal = 2 (22.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 1 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 5 (31.3%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 13 (81.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 8 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 1 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal = 3 (18.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 2 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effectiveness of Published Curriculum

The next series of data sorting was based on the premarital education program the person indicated they participated in. The first program to be considered is PREPARE/ENRICH, a premarital assessment questionnaire (PAQ). Seven individuals indicated this was the program they participated in and all completed from three to six sessions. One person considered it very beneficial, four indicated they derived some benefit from it, and two indicated minimal benefit. Even so, everyone said they recommended it for couples considering marriage. The aspect of the program they felt was the most beneficial was communication skills/tools. This was followed by spiritual beliefs then roles and responsibilities. Five of the seven rated their marital satisfaction as very happy while two rated their satisfaction as neutral. These two having rated their marital satisfaction as neutral have been married between six and twelve years, considered the
PREPARE/ENRICH program as having minimal benefit and felt the most helpful part of the program related to spiritual beliefs.

The second sorting isolated individuals who participated in Wright’s *So You’re Getting Married?* Eight individuals indicated they participated in this program. Six of these eight were married three to five years, one was married less than two years, and the other has been married six to nine years. Six of the eight attended three to six sessions while the other two attended in one or two sessions. The majority, seventy-one percent considered this program to be of some benefit, one person indicated it was of minimal benefit and one indicated it was very beneficial. This group was split on what they felt was the most beneficial aspect of the program, but communication skills and conflict resolution were the top two (62.5%). Seven of the eight said they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage. Six of the eight indicated they were very happy with their marriage while the other two indicated they were happy.

None of the respondents indicated having participated in the premarital program SYMBIS, FOCCUS, or RELATE. Two people did indicate having participated in PREP. One of the two attended three to six sessions while the other person attended more than six sessions. Both felt it was of some benefit in preparing them for the challenges of marriage and that the section on roles and responsibilities was the most helpful. Both also indicated they would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage. One of these two rated their marital satisfaction as very happy while the other person rated their marriage, happy.

When asked which premarital preparation program they participated in, thirty-one people checked “other” and wrote in a response. Out of these thirty-one, fourteen indicated they met with the pastor who counseled them without the aid of any published program. Nine of them
could not recall what program they participated in. Two indicated they were involved in a mentor program and one person indicated each of the following: unofficial program designed by an elder; Preparing for Marriage; The Five Love Languages; Pre-Cana Catholic program; and a group setting without a pastor present. Sorting by the “other” response to the question of which program they participated in, twenty-two were married in a church other than the two churches indicated. All but one person were required to participate in a program. Twenty-one of these respondents attended three to six sessions while five attended more than six sessions and four attended one to two sessions. Almost half (46.7%) indicated the program provided some benefit in preparing them for marriage; over thirty-six percent indicated it was very beneficial leaving nearly seventeen percent who considered their program of minimal benefit. Regarding what they considered the most helpful component of their program, over half indicated roles and responsibilities. Skills and tools related to communication was the second highest rated followed by spiritual beliefs. Even though many indicated their premarital counseling was not a structured program, all thirty indicated they would recommend premarital to couples considering marriage. The vast majority of these individuals (83.9%) rated their marital satisfaction as very happy while ten percent rated theirs as happy. One person rated their satisfaction as neutral and one person rated their marriage as very unhappy.

Among the published curriculum, the number of respondents was too small to draw any relevant conclusions regarding the perceived program benefits or the marital satisfaction of one over another. Each of the programs, including non-published counseling, received an overwhelming favorable response in the area of perceived benefit in preparing couples to work through the challenges in their marriages. They all had similar responses regarding marital satisfaction.
Ten respondents indicated they were not required to participate in premarital counseling. Two of these ten have been married less than two years, three have been married three to five years, four indicated they have been married six to nine years and one indicated they have been married ten to twelve years. Four were married in a church while six were not. Of these ten, eight indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage even though they did not participate in one. Six of these same ten (60%) rated their marital satisfaction as very happy which is lower than the rating of those who participated in any program except PREP (50%), which only had two respondents. Table three provides a summary of the responses of those respondents who participated in a published premarital program.
Table 3. Effectiveness of Premarital Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum (question 5)</th>
<th>Number who participated</th>
<th>Benefit of premarital in preparing for marriage (question 7)</th>
<th>Recommend premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
<th>Marital satisfaction rating (question 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREPARE/ENRICH</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 1 (14.3%) Some benefit = 4 (57.1%) Minimal = 2 (28.6%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 5 (71.4%) Neutral = 2 (28.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So You’re Getting Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 1 (12.5%) Some benefit = 6 (75%) Minimal = 1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 6 (75%) Happy = 2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 0 Some benefit = 2 (100%) Minimal = 0</td>
<td>2 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 1 (50%) Happy = 1 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Programs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 11 (36.7%) Some benefit = 14 (46.7%) Minimal = 5 (16.7%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 25 (83.3%) Happy = 3 (10%) Neutral = 1 (3.3%) Very unhappy = 1 (3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No program</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8 (80%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 6 (60%) Happy = 4 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effect of Number of Premarital Sessions

To determine if the number of sessions had any distinguishable effect regarding the extent to which respondents believed the counseling was beneficial, whether they would recommend premarital counseling and if there is any correlation to their marital satisfaction, the data was sorted by the number of sessions. Six people indicated they participated in either one or two premarital sessions. Four of these same six indicated it was somewhat beneficial, one individual rated it as very beneficial while one person rated it as having minimal benefit. All six indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples getting married and they all indicated their marital satisfaction as “very happy.”
The most common number of sessions reported by the survey respondents was three to six sessions (68.4%). Of the thirty-four people who participated in three to six sessions, approximately seventy-nine percent of them considered the counseling to have been either somewhat beneficial or very beneficial. All but one indicated they would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage. In the area of marital satisfaction, approximately seventy-seven percent rated their current marital satisfaction as “very happy” while just over fourteen percent rated theirs as “happy” and nine percent rated theirs as “neutral.” No one rated their marital satisfaction as unhappy or very unhappy of those respondents who participated in three to six premarital sessions.

The highest number of sessions a participant could choose was “more than six.” Six participants indicated they attended more than six sessions. Four of these six indicated their program was very beneficial while the remaining two indicated it was of some benefit. No one indicated it was of minimal benefit. All six indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage. Four of the six rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy,” one person indicated “happy” and the other person checked “very unhappy.”

The data indicates the greater the number of sessions the person attended, the greater the benefit. The number of sessions had no apparent effect on the opinion of the respondents regarding whether they would recommend premarital counseling considering all but one respondent indicated they would recommend it. Regardless of the number of sessions, each group indicated a higher percentage who rated their marital satisfaction as very happy compared to those who did not participate in any program. Table four summarizes the responses based on the number of premarital sessions they were required to attend.
Table 4. Effect of Number of Premarital Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Sessions (question 6)</th>
<th>Number who participated</th>
<th>Benefit of premarital in preparing for marriage (question 7)</th>
<th>Recommend premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
<th>Marital satisfaction rating (question 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 4 (66.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal benefit = 2 (28.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 7 (20.6%)</td>
<td>33 (97.1%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 26 (76.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 20 (58.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 5 (14.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal benefit = 7 (20.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 3 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Very beneficial = 4 (75%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 4 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some benefit = 2 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very unhappy = 1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No program</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8 (80%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 6 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 4 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effect of Perceived Value of Premarital Counseling

The seventh question in the survey asked participants to indicate to what extent their participation in a premarital program prepared them to work through challenges in their marriage. Forty-six participants indicated they were required to attend premarital counseling. There were eight individuals who felt their premarital counseling experience was of minimal value. Based on their responses to other questions, this length of time these individuals have been married was varied within the range of three to twelve years. All eight who did not feel their premarital education was of much value were married in a church, three participated in a commercially available program while the other five met with a pastor who did not use one of the published premarital counseling programs. Most of the eight attended three to six sessions with their pastor/counselor. Although they considered their premarital education experience as of minimal value, all of them indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples
considering marriage. Four of these respondents (50%) rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy,” one rated it as “happy,” and three of the eight rated theirs as neutral. This means thirty-eight percent of people considered marital counseling to be of minimal benefit also were not happy or very happy in their marriage. This is lower than the marital satisfaction of respondents who did not participate in any premarital program.

Just over half of those who participated in a premarital program (51.7%) considered the program somewhat beneficial. The vast majority (77%) of those who responded this way participated in three to six sessions. What they considered to be the most valuable part of the program was what they learned about roles and expectations followed by communication skills and tools. Of the twenty-six respondents, all but one indicated they would recommend that couples considering marriage participate in a premarital counseling program. Within this group, the vast majority (85%) rated their current marital satisfaction as “very happy” while the remaining four indicated they were happy in their marriage. No one rated their marital satisfaction as neutral, unhappy or very unhappy. Those who indicated their premarital counseling was of some benefit rated their marital satisfaction as very happy to a much greater extent than those who did not participate in a premarital program (85% versus 60%).

Approximately one-third of all participants indicated the premarital program they participated in was very beneficial. One-half of them have been married five years or less while the other half have been married between six and twelve years. Two people indicated they participated in a commercially available premarital program while the other ten met with a pastor or were mentored by someone who did not use one of the available programs. Over half were required to participate in three to six sessions while one-third participated in more than six sessions. Only one person indicated they attended one or two sessions. What this group
determined to be the most beneficial aspect of the counseling was roles and responsibilities (42%) followed by communication skills (33%) then spiritual beliefs (25%). All twelve of these respondents indicated they would recommend premarital counseling for couples getting married. Nearly everyone in this group rated their current marital satisfaction as “very happy” (83%) with only one person rating his/hers as “happy” and one other rated his/her marriage as “very unhappy.” This person has been married three to five years, was not married in a church, and met with their pastor more than six times for counseling who did not include the use of a published premarital curriculum. This person would recommend premarital counseling to others even though they considered their marital satisfaction as very unhappy.

The vast majority of participants required to attend premarital counseling indicated they would recommend it to couples considering marriage (98%). Those considering their premarital program as being very beneficial in preparing them for the challenges of marriage rated their marital satisfaction as very happy to a much greater extent as did those who did not participate in any premarital program (83% versus 60%). Table five summarizes the responses based on their opinion regarding the value of their premarital counseling program.
Table 5. Effect of Value Placed on Premarital Counseling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit of premarital in preparing for challenges of marriage (question 7)</th>
<th>Number indicating this rating</th>
<th>Recommend premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
<th>Marital satisfaction rating (question 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very beneficial</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 10 (83.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 1 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very unhappy = 1 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some benefit</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25 (96.2%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 22 (84.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 4 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal benefit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effect of Various Components of Premarital Programs

Those who completed the survey were given five choices in response to the question, “What part of the premarital program was the most helpful in preparing you for the challenges of marriage?” The choices were: conflict resolution; communication; financial; roles and responsibilities; and spiritual beliefs. The response indicated most often was, “roles and expectations” (40.4%). The length of time this group was married varied between three and twelve years with no distinguishable differentiation between the ranges. Most (74%) were married in a church, were counseled by someone who did not use a published program, and most participated in three to six sessions (68%). Of this group, nearly eighty-five percent considered the counseling to be of some benefit or very beneficial. All of them indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage. Most (89%) indicated their marital satisfaction as “happy” or “very happy.” There was one person who rated their marital satisfaction as “very unhappy” and one rated theirs as “neutral.” The individual who rated their marital satisfaction as “very unhappy” has been married between three and five years, was not
married in a church, and met with a pastor who did not use a published curriculum for premarital counseling. This person met more than six times with their pastor, considered the meetings very beneficial, and recommended premarital counseling for couples considering marriage. Based on this person’s feedback, their lack of marital satisfaction was not the result of a bad premarital counseling experience.

The second highest response to the question of what part of premarital counseling was the most beneficial was related to communication skills and tools. Those considering this the most important part of the premarital program had no correlation in the years they have been married; most were married at a church; about half participated in a published premarital program and nearly all attended three to six sessions. Over ninety percent considered the counseling they received as of some benefit or very beneficial. Only one respondent indicated “minimal benefit.” Every one of these respondents indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage and rated their current marital satisfaction as “happy” or “very happy.”

Spiritual belief was the third highest rated option by the respondents as the most helpful part of the program for preparing them for the challenges of marriage. All but one of these respondents was married in a church and approximately half participated in a published premarital program. Regarding the perceived value of their counseling, over seventy percent considered it somewhat or very beneficial. One of the seven persons in this grouping indicated they would not recommend premarital counseling. Five of the seven participants rated their current marital satisfaction as “very happy” while the other two rated theirs as “neutral.”

Conflict resolution skills and tools was the fourth most chosen response with thirteen percent indicating it as the most important part of the premarital program. One-half of those who
considered conflict resolution as the most important participated in the program, *So You’re Getting Married?* Five of the six indicated the program was beneficial and all of them would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage. All of them rated their marital satisfaction as “happy” or “very happy.”

The choice receiving the lowest number of responses related to finances. What makes this interesting is that it is generally held that the source of most disagreements in marriage has to do with money, yet the participants in this survey considered the financial component of their premarital education to be of the least value. Matt Bell has recently authored a book on money created specifically for the benefit of engaged couples and newlyweds. He writes, “Getting on the same financial page is essential because research has shown that the more frequently a couple fights about finances, the more likely they are to divorce.”¹ This book, or similar resources, could be a valuable additional resource for couples considering marriage. Of those who rated finances as the least helpful, most (75%) considered their counseling program as of some benefit; one person indicated it was of minimal benefit, while no one considered it as very beneficial. Everyone in this grouping would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage and they all rated their marriage as “very happy.” Table six summarizes the responses based on their opinion regarding the most beneficial component of their premarital sessions.

Table 6. Effect of Various Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most helpful part in preparing couple for challenges of marriage (question 8)</th>
<th>Number indicating this rating</th>
<th>Recommend premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
<th>Marital satisfaction rating (question 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Expectations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 13 (72.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 3 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 1 (5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very Unhappy = 1 (5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 9 (81.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 2 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Beliefs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6 (85.7%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 5 (71.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral = 2 (28.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
<td>Very happy = 4 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy = 1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By far, the majority (94.6%) of participants who have not been previously married indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage. The data was sorted by those who did not recommend premarital counseling to see how they responded to the other questions; three people responded this way. All three indicated they did not get married in a church and only one was required to participate in a premarital program. This person participated in the *So You’re Getting Married?* program, indicating it was of some benefit, but apparently not enough to recommend it to others. This person considered the most important part of the program to be what they learned related to spiritual beliefs. The other two indicated their marital satisfaction as “happy” and the one individual who participated in the premarital program rated his/her marital satisfaction as “very happy.” Due to the limited number of respondents in this grouping, it would not be prudent to draw any general conclusions.
The final sorting of the survey responses was based on how respondents who participated in a premarital counseling program rated their marital satisfaction. A traditional five-point scale was given with the response choices: very happy; happy; neutral; unhappy; and very unhappy. The participants rating their marriage as “very happy” were married anywhere within the survey limits of less than twelve years with exactly half having been married five years or less and the other half having been married between six and twelve years. Approximately three-fourths were married in a church and nearly eighty-six percent were required to participate in a premarital program. The program they participated in varied, but nearly three-fourths of them were required to attend three to six sessions. Nearly ninety percent considered participating in a premarital program to be somewhat beneficial or very beneficial. This group considered the most valuable part of the counseling to be roles and expectations followed by communication skills then conflict resolution and spiritual beliefs receiving the same number of responses. Only one person (2.8%) of the forty-two indicated they would not recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage.

There were ten people who rated their marital satisfaction as “happy,” six of them were married in a church. Six of the ten were required to participate in a premarital program while four were not. At least three of the six participating in premarital counseling used a published program. One person considered the counseling to be of minimal benefit while two-thirds considered it beneficial and the other person indicating it was very beneficial. Respondents who rated their marital satisfaction as happy considered the most important aspect of the premarital program to be the parts related to roles and expectations followed by communication and conflict resolution. This was the same order indicated by those who rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy.” All six who rated their marriage as happy and who participated in a premarital
program indicated they would recommend premarital counseling to couples considering marriage. Two of the four who rated their marriage as happy who did not participate in a premarital program also recommended premarital counseling.

Only three people rated their marital satisfaction as neutral and these three were married between six and twelve years. All of them were married in a church and all were required to participate in a premarital program. Two of them participated in PREPARE/ENRICH while the third person could not recall what program they participated in, but they all attended three to six sessions. All three indicated the program was of minimal benefit. This small group chose spiritual beliefs as the most important part followed by roles and expectations. Even though these three indicated their premarital program was of minimal benefit, they still would recommend premarital counseling for couples getting married.

None of the respondents rated their marital satisfaction as unhappy, but one person not married previously did rate their marital satisfaction as very unhappy (as did one person who was previously married). This one respondent has been married three to five years, was not married in a church, was required to participate in a premarital program consisting of meeting with a pastor who did not use a published program, attended more than six sessions, considered the counseling to be very beneficial, especially in the area of roles and responsibilities, and would recommend counseling to couples considering marriage. Since only one individual responded this way, it is not prudent to draw any conclusions based on responses. Table seven summarizes the responses based on the participant’s rating of their marital satisfaction.
Table 7. Effect of Marital Satisfaction Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Satisfaction (question 10)</th>
<th>Of those who did not participate in premarital counseling</th>
<th>Of those who participated in premarital counseling</th>
<th>Benefit of premarital by those who participated in a premarital program (question 7)</th>
<th>Recommend premarital by those who participated in premarital counseling (question 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Happy</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
<td>36 (78.3%)</td>
<td>Very Beneficial = 10 (27.8%)</td>
<td>35 (97.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some Benefit = 22 (61.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal Benefit = 4 (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>6 (13.0%)</td>
<td>Very Beneficial = 1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some Benefit = 4 (66.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal Benefit = 1 (16.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (6.5%)</td>
<td>Minimal Benefit = 3 (100%)</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Very Beneficial = 10 (27.8%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some Benefit = 22 (61.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal Benefit = 4 (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unhappy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.2%)</td>
<td>Very Beneficial = 1 (100%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3:  
DISCUSSION

With the data from the project survey having been presented and analyzed in the previous chapter, it is prudent those results be considered alongside the research and findings drawn by others whose research was often more extensive or exhaustive. Some of the researchers also performed longitudinal studies which were not possible with the limited scope of the research presented in this thesis.

Marital Satisfaction Over Time

Researchers, educators, and counselors have debated the long-term effectiveness of premarital programs, especially as it relates to marital satisfaction and stability. Carroll and Doherty evaluated this aspect of premarital education programs in their research. They concluded, “Premarital prevention programs are generally effective in producing significant immediate gains in communication processes, conflict management skills, and overall relationship quality, and that these gains appear to hold for at least six months to three years.”\(^1\) They claim these gains become noticeably evident when compared to couples who did not receive any premarital counseling. Even though they drew these conclusions, they were careful to note there remains a general lack of follow-up research in this area making it difficult to substantiate any statistically significant conclusions beyond the three-year period, especially regarding marital dissolution. Amato et al. also determined the tangible benefits of premarital education decline with time.\(^2\) Other research teams are uncertain about the long-term effects of

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premarital education stating more research needs to be conducted in this area before more definitive conclusions can be drawn.\(^3\)

The survey conducted for this project revealed of couples married less than two years, whether they participated in a premarital program or not, there was no difference in marital satisfaction; everyone rated their satisfaction level as “very happy.” The variance between those who participated in premarital education and those who did not became apparent beginning with couples married at least three years. Of those married three to five years who participated in a premarital education program, over three-fourths rated their marriages as “very happy” opposed to two-thirds for couples who did not participate in premarital education. The same results were found with couples married six to nine years. The majority of them (67%) rated their marriages as “very happy” compared to exactly one-half for couples who did not participate in premarital education. The most impressive distinction came among those married the longest. Eighty-one percent of couples married ten to twelve years who received premarital education rated their marriages “very happy.” None of the respondents from the group married the longest who did not participate in premarital education rated their marital satisfaction as “very happy.” Based on the results, it appears the effects of premarital counseling may have a prolonged effect in enhancing the satisfaction within marriages up to twelve years. It must be taken into consideration this conclusion is based on the response of a very small number of respondents and may not be typical. The findings from this project align with the more extensive research noted in the area of the effectiveness of premarital education in enhancing marital satisfaction for the first several years of marriage.

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Duration of Premarital Education Program

In one aspect of their research, Amato, Stanley, Markman, and Johnson considered whether the duration of the premarital program (number of hours spent in counseling) has any correlation to marital outcomes. They concluded the number of hours spent in premarital counseling was “positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction and negatively and significantly associated with marital conflict.” After reviewing the research related to the duration of premarital education, a team from Kansas State University concluded, “We expect that the quality of premarital counseling would be improved when it was of longer duration, on the assumption that quality programming would take a certain minimum amount of time.” Upon completing their own research, they surmised, “Overall, our results should reassure providers that their efforts can pay off, not only in the short run, but also in the long run and may have an impact on marital satisfaction many years down the road.” In their assessment of how to improve premarital preparation, one of the concerns shared by Silliman and Schumm relates to the amount of time spent reviewing comprehensive inventories like PREPARE. Their concern is the wealth of information most PAQs provide may lead to a loss of focus, especially if the amount of time delegated to reviewing and discussing the results are too brief (i.e. less than four hours).


6. Schumm et al., “Predicting the Short and Long-Term Helpfulness of Premarital Counseling,” Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy, 12.

Based on the results of the research conducted for this project, the data revealed the greater the number of sessions the participants attended, the greater the benefit. The results presented in table four reveal the percentage of those who indicated the value of premarital counseling as “very beneficial” increased in direct relation to the number of sessions; just over sixteen percent (16.7%) for those who participated in one or two sessions, approximately twenty percent (20.6%) for those who participated in three to six session, and seventy-five percent for those who participated in more than six sessions. Regarding marital satisfaction, the results of the research for this project did not reveal the same correlation between the duration of the premarital program and marital satisfaction as determined by Amato et al. The survey revealed a slight decrease in marital satisfaction with increasing time spent in premarital counseling. One team of researchers concluded that simply having a longer program does not guarantee positive outcomes and the “duration of training probably means little if the quality of the premarital intervention is inadequate.”

The results of the research for this project revealed of those who participated in a premarital program, regardless of the number of sessions, each group had a higher percentage of those who rated their marriage as “very happy” compared to those who did not participate in any premarital program.

**Perceived Value of Premarital Education Programs**

Earlier in chapter two, the results of the survey for this project were sorted by the response to most of the questions posed to the participants. In each table, the response regarding whether that particular group would recommend premarital counseling for couples considering marriage was included whether they participated in a premarital program or not. Almost all of the respondents (97.5%) indicated they would recommend premarital education program for

couples considering marriage. This is a strong indicator of the perceived value of premarital programs. Among those who did not participate in a premarital program, eighty percent indicated they would recommend couples participate in one. The limitations of the research for this project did not allow for interaction from this group to determine why they had such an overwhelming positive perception of the value of premarital education whether it was based on their regret for not having participated in one or the benefit they see based on the success of couples who did participate in a premarital program. Either way, it is notable that the perceived value is so high among all respondents.

Although the results of the survey indicated overwhelming confidence in the value of premarital education, participants were not given the opportunity to comment on what makes the program as valuable as they appear to indicate. They were given the opportunity to indicate to what extent their participation in a premarital program prepared them to work through challenges in their marriage, but that may not correspond to why they value it so much. Researchers often advocate what they believe constitutes value in a premarital program. Upon analyzing the results of their survey, Schumm and his team concluded it is the quality aspect stating, “The short-term and long-term helpfulness of premarital counseling are predicted by the quality of that counseling.”9 They define the quality aspect in part based on who delivers it, what is delivered, and how it is presented. Gingrich writes, “When counseling couples prior to marriage, likely the most significant thing we can provide a couple is the experience of someone who showed caring

for them and their relationship. Most, if not all, counseling theories value a therapeutic relationship characterized by competence, credibility, safety and trust.”

Other studies have indicated the persons delivering the premarital education have admitted to being ill-prepared or not trained. Schumm and his team note that pastors lacking in sufficient training may not be suitable as premarital counselors, especially when dealing with skills-oriented approaches. They suggest the pastor/counselor either obtain the necessary training or share the counseling responsibility with mentor couples or others who have been trained in research-based premarital counseling programs. In consideration of best practices in couple education, one team concludes, “Skill-based relationship education shows considerable promise as an intervention to enhance relationship outcomes.”

Understanding the critical nature of premarital education, Barlow suggests an important aspect of the value of any premarital program is based on the investment made by the counselor/facilitator. He suggests if the pastors who facilitate the premarital education are not able to invest the time and training, they should refer couples to professional counselors in the community who are properly trained and who can invest the time necessary to glean the maximum benefit from the counseling.

Another component that builds value is based on what the program consists of. Building skills in communication and conflict resolution have long been considered vital components of


any premarital program. Based on years of research, Gottman claims by observing a couple for a short period of time (fifteen minutes on video), he can predict the probability of divorce with eighty-five percent accuracy.¹⁴ The PREP program was designed specifically to improve communication skills and decrease marital conflict through education; it is not presented as therapy of counseling. It deals with a couple’s interactive processes. Longitudinal studies suggest communication problems and destructive marital conflict are among the leading risk factors for future divorce and marital distress. PREP specifically addresses teaching communication skills and places significant emphasis on conflict management. Not everyone would agree this philosophy is the best. Gottman believes one of the key techniques of PREP, the “speaker-listener technique,” is not part of what non-distressed couples do. He claims the emphasis must be on the four negative processes he refers to as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” – criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. These are the leading predictors of divorce needing to be addressed.¹⁵ Some, like Groom and College, do not believe such a disparity exists as Gottman indicates. They believe it is more just a matter of how they define various terms.¹⁶

One aspect that can have a significant effect on the value of any premarital education program not within the scope of this thesis but is worthy of being noted is the influence on the participant’s personal and couple characteristics. A study performed to determine the influence of participant characteristics found (from most influential to least): couple interactional processes, family-of-origin influences, individual characteristics, motivation for premarital

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counseling, and social context. The research determined although there was a hierarchy of influence, all five characteristics were “somewhat influential” to the degree to which couples benefit from premarital counseling. The PREPARE/ENCRICh premarital inventory is an excellent tool specifically addressing these couple characteristics. The result of the inventory helps the counselor to explore, along with the couple, growth areas they may not have even been aware of. This may help them avoid potential landmines in their marriage as well as to establish a more realistic set of expectations of each other and the marriage since many couples anticipating marriage have a distorted view of the reality of the challenges of living with another human being. Gingrich stresses how important it is for counselors to assist couples to “see the reality of life as God has given it; to accept themselves and their partners for who they are, not who they hope they will become.”

**Premarital Education and Marital Stability**

In their research on premarital factors associated with later marital quality and stability, Larson and Holman determined there are several. “Communication, conflict resolution, and consensus building also have a significant relationship to marital stability and quality.” They emphasize the importance of several factors counselors need to assess when educating premarital couples including background and contextual factors, individual traits and behaviors, and couple


interactional processes. These must be taken into consideration in the process of helping the
couple hone their skills to deal with the potential challenges they will likely face.

In a study specifically aimed at determining the relationship between marital satisfaction
and divorce rates in the first decade of marriage, researchers found the rates of divorce
corresponded closely with levels of marital satisfaction. They reported, “After four years of
marriage, three to fourteen percent of the spouses in the three most satisfied groups had ended
their marriage, whereas twenty-five to fifty-four percent of spouses in the two least satisfied
groups had done so. After ten years, nine to twenty-six percent of the three most satisfied groups
had ended their marriage, whereas forty to sixty percent of the least satisfied groups had done
so.”21 In their evaluation of premarital programs, Silliman and Schumm came to the conclusion,
“In the past two decades, evaluations of research-based programs have established that high-
quality, well-timed assessment and extended programming can reduce marital distress and
enhance satisfaction and functioning.”22

In summarizing the findings from their longitudinal study, researchers at the University
of Denver determined, “Every marriage faces the virtual certainty of some types of relationship
problems.”23 In addition, they note “one of the most important findings was that couples’
progression through the various stages (premarital, early marriage, early parenting) was marked
by increasing problems with communication and sex, two problem areas strongly correlated with
marital satisfaction.”24 Based on their study, they recommend participation in prevention

21. Justin A. Lavner and Thomas H. Bradbury, “Patterns of Change in Marital Satisfaction Over the
Newlywed Years,” Journal of Marriage and Family 72, no. 5 October 2010): 1182.


23. Ragnar D. Storaasli and Howard J. Markman, “Relationship Problems in the Early Stages of Marriage:

programs aimed at improving the quality of the couples’ premarital communication and how to deal with conflict. Training in communication and conflict resolution are a major focus in most of the premarital education programs addressed in this thesis.

An independent study conducted by two professors in the couple and family therapy program at North Dakota State University to see what effects, if any, couples who participated in eight weeks of premarital counseling using the PREP program would have as compared to a control group that did not participate in any program. They found the counseling using PREP showed a statistically significant difference in improving the participant’s knowledge concerning marital relationships and teaching healthy patterns of interaction would result in improved readiness and preparation for transition into marriage. They write, “Individuals in each of the treatment groups scored significantly higher at the time of the posttest than did those in the comparison group on the PREP composite score” on three of four subscales.\(^{25}\)

Does the evidence support the premise that participation in a premarital education program does indeed correlate to enhanced marital satisfaction and marital stability as defined by a reduction in marital dissolution? Of the forty-six respondents to the survey conducted for this project who have not been previously married, and who participated in a premarital education program, none have divorced. At the same time, none of the ten respondents who were not previously married, and who did not participate in a premarital program, divorced either. There was only one survey participant who indicated having separated, but this individual had been married previously, a variable not within the scope of this project. It is possible that of the people contacted to participate in the survey; those who had divorced may have opted not to avoid having to be reminded of that phase of their lives and the potential to incur heartache and pain.

Another researcher who performed a similar study also had no respondents indicate they were divorced but then learned there were some participants contacted who had divorced and did not respond. These results could also be attributed to the narrow demographic participating in the survey. Most of the couples contacted were from churches that generally attract families who are middle-upper middle class and well educated. Carroll and Doherty suggest this type of result could be because couples who are most at risk for marital difficulties and divorce may not be participating in premarital programs.

Due to the fact that none of the respondents had divorced, regardless of whether they participated in a premarital education program or not, it cannot be stated emphatically that the premarital counseling was solely responsible for no divorces. At the same time, even with the limited nature of the survey, having no divorces among the forty-six respondents who participated in a premarital education program does support the case for their value in reducing the percentage of couples who divorce since statistically, approximately one-half of them would be divorced.

Fortunately, research much more extensive than what was administered through this project has yielded results confirming the effectiveness of premarital education in reducing the rate of divorce. Some studies have produced data strongly suggesting a correlation between participation in premarital education and marital satisfaction and stability. One research team conducted a large random household survey that received over 3,300 responses. This team found participation in premarital education was “associated with higher levels of satisfaction and


commitment in marriage and lower levels of conflict and also reduced odds of divorce.”

Specifically they determined premarital education was associated with a decline of thirty-one percent in the annual odds of divorce. They note their results were consistent with those found in Carroll and Doherty’s meta-analysis from 2003. What is notable about Amato’s team’s research is their sample crossed race, income and education levels. From this they concluded participation in premarital education can be considered to be beneficial for most couples.

One particular study considered the stability of marriage based solely on those who participated in FOCCUS. They found only twenty-four of the three hundred thirty-three couples who participated in FOCCUS reported as having been divorced, separated or annulled. This correlated to a divorce rate less than eight percent (7.2%) which is less than half of the eighteen percent of couples who statistically would be divorced after four years of marriage. While impressive, the authors do note the results could be skewed due to this program’s predominant use as part of church marital preparation programs followed by a church wedding which have traditionally had lower divorce rates. This closely relates to the demographics of those who participated in the survey for this project.

Larimore and McManus conducted a study base on couples who had completed the premarital program of a large Presbyterian church in Maryland over an eight year period. Their premarital program philosophy is, “Marriage preparation needs to be rigorous enough so that it surfaces conflicts in a relationship before the couple marries, so that the weak relationships either improve or break apart while the rest are strengthened to go the distance.”

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29. Williams and Jurich, “Predicting Marital Success after Five Years,” 151.

includes four components: a premarital inventory (PREPARE); mentoring, consisting of five or six sessions to review the results of the inventory with a trained mentor couple; participation in seven to nine lecture classes led by marriage experts and clergy on core relational marriage topics; and a workbook to be completed which includes studies in the Scripture (Before You Say I Do by H. Norman Wright). Of the two hundred twenty-two couples who completed the course, only seven divorced (3.1%). They consider their program to be more than marriage preparation; they call it marriage insurance. “This case study demonstrates that there is a new strategy that can be adopted by America’s 350,000 houses of worship…helping ninety-five percent of couples to build a lifelong marriage.”

In their review of literature related to the evaluation of premarital education, Carroll and Doherty reviewed thirteen studies. Seven of the studies had sufficient data to be included in their meta-analyses. Upon averaging the effect sizes, the result was a mean effect size of 0.80. This means “the average person who participated in a premarital prevention program was better off after the program than seventy-nine percent of the people who did not receive a similar education.” From this they surmise the research performed over the past several decades since premarital education programs gained more wide-spread use, generally supports their effectiveness in enhancing marital satisfaction which often correlates to a reduction in marital dissolution. A similar review of research on premarital counseling was performed by Williams. He reports on two earlier meta-analysis studies that also showed positive results, sufficient enough to be considered significant.

34. Williams, “Premarital Counseling,” 213.
In chapter two, the results of the survey were sorted a number of ways to see any potential effect it might have on marital satisfaction. Regardless of which published premarital program the participants used, their marital satisfaction exceeded those who were not required to participate in any premarital program with one exception; marital satisfaction for those who went through PREP was slightly lower but this was based on the feedback of just two respondents. Knutson and Olson performed a study suggesting the PREPARE program significantly increases marital satisfaction.\textsuperscript{35} When considering the number of premarital sessions, every group had a higher percentage rating their marital satisfaction as very happy as compared to those who did not participate in any program. The data was sorted based on the participant’s response to the perceived value of their premarital education experience. The result was thirty-eight percent of those who considered their premarital program to be of minimal value rated their marital satisfaction lower than those who did not participate in any premarital program. It is possible they simply did not have any interest or motivation to learn and apply what was being communicated. It could be their program or facilitator was poor. It could be the results of the premarital counseling indicated an incompatibility they ignored and pursued the marriage anyway. One of the purposes of premarital education programs should be to identify couples who are at risk for divorce and to help them to concede it may be in their best interest to postpone or cancel the wedding. It is not uncommon for couples to call off their wedding during the premarital counseling process.\textsuperscript{36} It is better they dissolve the relationship prior to marriage then after.

Even those who considered their premarital education process to only have been of some benefit rated their marital satisfaction as very happy to a much greater extent compared to those

\textsuperscript{35} Knutson and Olson, “Effectiveness of PREPARE Program,” 529-546.

\textsuperscript{36} Fowers, Montel, and Olson, “Predicting Marital Success,” 103-119.
who did not participate in any premarital program (85% versus 60%). Those who considered their premarital education experience to be very beneficial in preparing them for the challenges of marriage also rated their marital satisfaction as very happy to a much greater extent compared to those who did not participate in any premarital program (83% versus 60%).

Studies regarding the long-term effects have suggested there is a tendency for marital satisfaction to decrease over time yet the results of the survey for this project do not support this hypothesis. Participants rating their marriage as very happy were married anywhere within the survey limits of less than twelve years with exactly half having been married five years or less and the other half having been married between six and twelve years.

The results of the survey conducted for this project clearly indicate participation in premarital education did correspond to greater marital satisfaction, the only exception having been noted for those who did not consider their premarital program to be beneficial. The correlation between marital satisfaction and marital dissolution has been discussed earlier and the point made that as marital satisfaction increases, the chances of marital dissolution decrease. The reverse of this is also true; as marital satisfaction decreases, the likelihood of marital dissolution increases.\(^{37}\) Even though the limited survey conducted for this project did not show a distinction in the percentage of couples who divorced based on participation in premarital counseling, the logical conclusion is, participation in a formal premarital education program generally does increase one’s satisfaction in marriage which should correspond to a reduced rate of divorce.

**What is Next**

Based on the results of the research and evaluation performed for this thesis, a couple considering marriage would be wise to invest in their marriage prior to the wedding through

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\(^{37}\) Lavner and Bradbury, “Patterns of Change,” 1171-1186.
participation in a formal premarital education program. Since the majority of marriages are officiated by a member of the clergy, it is incumbent on the church to invest in the resources to offer formal well-established premarital counseling using trained personnel who are willing to invest the time and enthusiasm as means to reduce the rate of divorce. In order to accomplish this, several actions must take place.

First and foremost, churches need to provide a complete, formal premarital education program. It is apparent many clergy are not investing the time to become trained in one of the many excellent premarital education programs. Many have resolved to simply meet with the couple without a systematic approach, cheating the couple out of learning communication and conflict resolution skills critical to marital longevity. An option for churches to consider is to train up mentor couples who can facilitate group sessions to take the load of the pastors and who can follow the couple along ever after marriage.

Second, churches need to establish policies or guidelines requiring couples getting married to complete a formal premarital program. Part of the requirement should include the premarital sessions commence a minimum of three to six months prior to the wedding date in order to have sufficient time to complete it at least one month ahead of the wedding date. Another part of this policy should require couples to attend a minimum number of sessions sufficient to adequately cover all of the material to glean the maximum benefit from it.

Third, churches need to promote that they offer premarital programs. One of the reasons many couples do not engage in premarital counseling is because they do not know it exists or have not heard any testimonials regarding its value. Churches should consider creating a premarital education promotional communication describing why it is so important, testimonials
as to its value, flexibility in when it is offered, and that it will be administered by qualified, trained personnel.

Fourth, the church needs to offset the cost for it as much as possible and consider it a ministry. Psychologists from Clark University found the expense and inconvenience play a significant role for many people’s lack of motivation for participation in premarital counseling.38

While the impact of the local church enthusiastically engaging in the promotion and excellence in executing premarital education programs could greatly reduce the rate of divorce and all the devastation related to it, is just a first step. One aspect of premarital education largely not addressed in this thesis relates to giving consideration to follow-up after the wedding. Based on his research, Gingrich stressed the importance of continuing to follow-up with the couple:

Marriage preparation that focuses on realistic, achievable goals, and includes significant, personal interaction during the first years of marriage, may be more meaningful and helpful in the long-term than much of the content-oriented, delusion-bashing teaching that occurs in some types of premarital counseling. The research points to the effectiveness of both premarital and post-wedding interventions, yet post-wedding involvement continues to be primarily remedial in orientation (i.e., therapy).39

With all of the busyness and anxieties normally accompanying the anticipation of a pending wedding, much of what is communicated during the premarital education process can easily get forgotten. Not only that, but there is a limit as to what skills can be practiced and honed prior to marriage (assuming the couple does not live together), compared to the experience of living together as husband and wife. Adjustments are almost certain and to work through some of the challenges early in the marriage with the aid of the pastor/counselor who invested in the couple during premarital counseling could turn out to be a great asset.


The church has the opportunity to take the lead in educating and equipping couples to enhance their marital satisfaction while reducing the number of those who divorce. In addition to all of the benefits to the couple and any children, we of all people should uphold the institution of marriage as created and ordained by God, one man and one woman for one lifetime. If the members of the body of Christ were to divorce at a reduced rate and enjoy greater marital satisfaction, it would give us yet another platform to proclaim the joys of being in the family of God and that God loves them and would have them to be a part of the family as well (2 Pt. 3:9).
CHAPTER 4:
CONCLUSION

The motivation for this project comes from this writer’s disappointment with the state of marriage, especially within the church. It is a bad reflection on the church when the divorce rate of couples within the church is indistinguishable from couples outside the church. There is an expectation that couples within the church will keep the vow they made to God and each other not to dissolve their marriage unless separated by death, regardless of sickness, poverty, adverse circumstances, or anything else. In the New Testament, Jesus reminds us of the seriousness of making an oath, especially one before God (Mt 5:33-37) as does James in his epistle (Jas 5:12). From the initiation of the institution of marriage, Genesis 2:24 makes it very clear the marriage bond is one of permanence and God has made it crystal clear He hates divorce (Mal 2:16), yet Christians are divorcing apart from biblical grounds: sexual immorality or when an unbelieving spouse departs (Mt 5:31-32; 1 Cor 7:15). The testimony of the church should include our ability, with the help of God, to work through the challenges of marriage; to be quick to request and grant forgiveness, and to ask for His help knowing His will is for us is to reconcile and remain married (Mt 19:6). It would be a glowing testimony to the glory of God if those who profess Christ as their Lord and Savior would be obedient in their commitment to remain married.

The first part of the introduction to this thesis presents an overview of the biblical basis for marriage, the disregard for the sanctity of marriage, and the detrimental effect it has had on individuals, couples, families, and society in general. It is on this basis that a call for the church to intercede and take the lead in educating and equipping couples who are considering marriage is made. We are not left uninformed; the Bible is replete with instruction on building and maintaining the marriage relationship. Within the introductory section, the theoretical basis for
the project is given which presents a host of biblical principles and references testifying to the sanctity of marriage as well as physiological, psychological, and socio-economic effects related to marriage and divorce. The remainder of the introductory section describes the basic methodology used to investigate and evaluate evidence related to what effect, if any, participation in a premarital education program may have. A brief overview of scholars and authors who are known for their work in the field of premarital education, marriage, and divorce is given at the end of the introductory section.

The first chapter begins with a review of the history of premarital education. Although some form of premarital education has been around since the 1930s, it was not until the 1970s that there was a shift in focus from learning about marriage to preparing couples for marriage and a corresponding increase in programs and materials related to premarital education. It was at this time a significant increase in the use of premarital programs took place. Following this overview, the basic rationale was given for advocating premarital education followed by the benefits of participation in a premarital education program. Comments made by scholars and researchers in this field were presented based on the value of premarital education as a whole with some referring specifically to aspects of various premarital programs.

The subsequent section of the first chapter considered the role of clergy in the premarital education process. What became apparent is that many churches and clergy do not offer or require premarital education for couples considering marriage despite the fact most people who participate in premarital education programs do so through the church. It became evident there was a lack of agreement whether clergy are qualified to provide sound premarital counseling. Based on an evaluation of the comments by researchers cited in this work, there appears to be a consensus those clergy who offer premarital counseling should be educated and/or trained.
The largest section within the first chapter was comprised of an overview of several of the most well-known and most used premarital education programs. A brief history of the creation and evolution for most of these programs was presented along with a description of the program, how is it administered, areas unique to it, and any cost to participate in it. PREPARE/ENRICH, a premarital assessment questionnaire, was presented first. It is one of the more widely used PAQs having been administered to over three-million couples in the U.S. The strength of this program is that it helps identify and explore strength and growth areas. FOCCUS, another PAQ, came out nearly eight years after PREPARE and was developed by three marriage therapists. They report it has been administered to over 500,000 couples. It is the primary premarital program used by the Catholic Church. This assessment alerts couples as to their strengths and weaknesses much like PREPARE. Both FOCCUS and PREPARE can be used as marital predictors based on the results of the inventory. RELATE, another PAQ, was developed by scholars, educators and researchers at Brigham Young University. They claim tens of thousands of couples have and individuals have benefited from their assessment. It differs from the other two PAQs because it does not require a counselor/facilitator to interpret the results. Based on several evaluations done on PAQs, all three of these generally received high marks and are regarded as being effective for premarital education.

Following the overview of the PAQs, descriptions of several other programs not depending on questionnaires was presented. One of the programs that helped launch the popularity of premarital education programs was developed by H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts. Together they created *Before You Say I Do* in 1977. It was based on participants watching several sessions of Wright speaking to a small group via video tape. Significant emphasis was given to helping the couple fulfill their God-given place in the relationship. A
corresponding workbook was to be used by the couple to interact with the taped session and each other. In 1985, Wright published a subsequent series, *So You’re Getting Married*. It was also based on the couple watching video-taped sessions and completion of a corresponding workbook. The premise of this program was to educate couples to think about issues critical to marital longevity and commitment. The husband and wife team, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott developed the SYMBIS program. Their book and subsequent premarital education program is based on the answers to seven questions. A brief overview of each of these seven questions is presented in chapter one. Some of the researchers who evaluated this program found it to be highly effective based on indicators of marital satisfaction of those who participated in the SYMBIS program. The PREP program, created by Markman, Stanley and Blumberg from the University of Denver is based on the premise that God has provided the necessary guidelines for marriage in the Bible. This is the foundation upon which they perform research and promote applications which comprise the PREP program. They estimate they have trained over 14,500 people and have had over 500,000 couples around the world completed PREP. The developers of PREP believe it is the worldwide leader in relationship and marriage education while also being the most evaluated and tested program in the field. After having provided a more comprehensive overview of these popular programs, a brief overview of several other less popular premarital education programs was presented.

The last subsection of chapter one recounts the ongoing debate over the effectiveness of premarital education programs. For the purpose of this work, the basic qualifier for the effectiveness of premarital counseling is a corresponding increase in marital satisfaction and decrease in marital distress and dissolution by those who participate in a premarital education program. One commonly held belief by advocates of premarital education is by its very nature,
engaging in a premarital education program requires couples to slow down and reflect on how well they know each other, how compatible they really are, to understand what marital commitment is, and to recognize potential challenges and issues needing to be dealt with prior to becoming wed. The most beneficial aspect of premarital education is the training and skills received in communication, conflict resolution, and clarification of roles and expectations. The philosophy of premarital education is not only be aware of potential land mines in their relationship, but to equip couples to learn the skills necessary to successfully deal with challenges throughout their marriage; this is what makes premarital education effective. There are those who challenge the effectiveness of premarital education for all couples as well as how long the benefits last. Even advocates like Carroll and Doherty concede it is unrealistic to believe premarital counseling alone can prevent marital distress and dissolution. They, along with many others, believe the effectiveness may only be sustained over the first five years or so of marriage. Most researchers advocate the need for more studies related to the long-term benefits to be conducted.

Knowing some churches mandate participation in premarital counseling, a brief review of the research regarding the beneficial or detrimental influence a participant’s willingness to participate was presented at the end of chapter one. The result is those less willing to participate did not value premarital training as high as those who participated willingly.

The results of the large-scale study performed by Amato and Stanley in 2001 closed out chapter one. It is considered the largest and most extensive research study performed regarding the effectiveness of premarital education. They reported that couples who participated in a premarital education program had higher marital satisfaction and lower marital conflict, and a
thirty-one percent lower chance of divorce when compared to those couples who did not engage in a premarital education program.

The second chapter describes every aspect of the survey conducted for this project. Included is the rationale for the survey, the process by which it was conducted, contents of the survey itself, and the results. The rationale for conducting a survey was to determine if the results support the theory that participation in a premarital education program correlate to greater marital satisfaction and a reduced rate of marital dissolution when compared to the results of couples who did not participate in any premarital counseling. The expected result would be a minimum of ten percent less divorces by those who were participated in a premarital education program.

The process consisted of contacting couples who were married since 2000 from the two churches where this writer served as a pastor. Both of these churches offered premarital education to couples being married by any of their pastors. In addition, the offer to participate was extended to couples who were receiving professional counseling from a Christian counseling center in Charlotte. The responses were filtered such that this researcher was purposely unable to identify the participants. Of the one hundred forty-eight people contacted, sixty-nine completed the survey. In retrospect, it would have been good to have contacted several other churches to get a larger response.

The questionnaire consisted of ten questions, all of which required the participant to choose from the selections available; there were no questions requiring the participant to provide a written response. Since the evaluation would be based on first marriages, the first question asked if the responder had been married before. Although table one presents all of the responses from all of the participants, the analysis was performed by filtering out all respondents who had
been previously married. The data from the remaining participants was analyzed to assess what factors affected the participant’s rating of their marital satisfaction and their perceived value of premarital counseling. The data from these different ways of sorting the results are presented in tables one through seven.

In chapter three, a discussion of the findings from each of the seven varied ways of sorting the data to determine the effect on marital satisfaction and value of premarital counseling is presented. From the results of the survey, it appears the benefits of premarital counseling may extend through the first twelve years of marriage. This conclusion is based on comparing the marital satisfaction ratings from those who participated in a premarital education program against those who did not. This is contrary to the conclusions of those who are not convinced of the benefits of premarital education as well as most advocates of premarital education who suggest the benefits dissipate during the first five years of marriage.

Some researchers have concluded the number of hours spent in premarital counseling is directly correlated to marital satisfaction (e.g. Amato, et al. 2006). For the most part, there is general agreement among researchers and scholars in the field that in order for couples to fully benefit from their premarital educational experience, they must invest several hours interacting with the material, their facilitator, and each other. The results of the survey conducted for this project showed a slight decrease in marital satisfaction with additional sessions. Because there is a qualitative element to premarital counseling, as well as a quantitative element, longer duration does not guarantee the quality which may explain the slight decrease. Consistent with most of the research documented in this work, the survey indicated the greater the number of premarital sessions, the higher the participants rated their marital satisfaction.
The perceived value of premarital education was confirmed considering an overwhelming percentage (94.6%) of people who participated in a premarital education program indicated they would recommend it to couples considering marriage. This speaks well of the value of premarital education, even though there was a great variety of program used and number of sessions. What is even more impressive is that eighty percent of survey respondents, who did not participate in a premarital program, would recommend that couples participate in one. Despite these results, a greater emphasis must be placed on providing formal premarital education programs, facilitated by trained clergy, counselors or mentors who are genuinely interested in making this critical investment into couples considering marriage. This opinion was shared by several of the researchers referenced in this thesis.

Regardless of the perceptions of the value of premarital counseling, what matters most is whether there is a direct correlation between participation in a premarital education program and an increase in marital satisfaction and a reduction in marital dissolution. The results of the survey revealed that couples who participated in a premarital program rated their marital satisfaction higher than those who did not participate in a program. This was independent of which premarital program was used, with the exception already noted of those who took PREP. It was also independent of the number of premarital sessions. There was a large percentage (38%) of respondents who indicated the value of their premarital program as minimal who also rated their marriage satisfaction below those who did not participate in any premarital program. Not having provided a place for survey participants to share why they did not consider their premarital program, one can only speculate their reasoning. Possible responses could include a lack of desire to participate (this has been shown to reduce the benefits), poor facilitation, or poor materials, just to speculate on a few. There was a significantly different response from those who
considered their premarital experience as either of some benefit or very beneficial. They both rated their marital satisfaction well above the rating given by respondents who did not participate in a premarital program. Sufficient evidence has been presented to support the theory that, in general, participation in a premarital education program does correspond to greater marital satisfaction. In addition, numerous studies have concluded there is a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and marital longevity. The results of this survey were inconclusive regarding this matter since none of the participants separated or divorced; however, it does not in any way contradict the many research studies cited in this thesis that have demonstrated a significant reduction in the divorce rate for those who have participated in a premarital education program, since all forty-six participating in a program have remained married.

**Personal Reflections**

Over the past dozen years, this pastor has offered marital counseling for many couples. It is disheartening to have witnessed the bitterness, anger, and selfishness existing among married couples, who at one time loved each other enough to make a life-long commitment to each other and God. Since being called to vocational ministry, this pastor has provided premarital counseling to any couple interested at no cost outside of the cost to take an online premarital inventory (e.g. PREPARE). The only requirement is they must commence the premarital program at least six months prior to the wedding date and commit to completing all reading and other assignments. In addition, this writer has been an advocate of requiring premarital counseling for all couples being married at both of the churches where this writer has served on staff as a pastor.

While advocating premarital education as a prerequisite to marrying any couple, this writer wanted tangible evidence of the impact premarital training would make especially as it
relates to an enhancement in marital satisfaction and a reduction in marital dissolution for first marriages. This project was intended to demonstrate by the benefits of premarital education through two avenues; first, through conducting a survey and second, by evaluating the research of others whose studies were more extensive and expansive then could be conducted for this project. The result of the project has been confirmation of what was expected and greater empirical support for advocating premarital education.

Three Keys for Premarital Education Success

There are three primary keys for overcoming the challenges hindering the church from taking the lead in preparing couples for a lifelong marriage which provides greater satisfaction while reducing marital distress and dissolution: promoting the value of premarital education, making the premarital experience relevant to each couple, and starting the process as early as possible.

First Key: Promote the Value

First, the church must increase participation in premarital programs through promoting their value to couples. Silliman and Schumm reference several studies indicating only ten to thirty-five percent of couples receive any type of marriage preparation.\(^1\) In response to this issue, they write:

Increased awareness of the purpose and benefits of marriage preparation is necessary for expanded participation and impact. Low-quality premarital counseling is not much better for improving marital satisfaction than no counseling at all. Therefore broader distribution of high-quality programs is needed to yield any meaningful degree of client satisfaction with such training and subsequently enhanced marital interaction.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Silliman and Schumm, “Improving Practice in Marriage Preparation,” 34.

\(^2\) Silliman and Schumm, “Improving Practice in Marriage Preparation,” 34.
If premarital education is to make a significant impact, the church has got to promote it even to the extent of making it mandatory for marriages taking place in the church or by pastors of that church. Ideas concerning how to accomplish this were presented earlier in the later part of chapter three (page 113). To make an even greater impact would require offering premarital counseling for couples in the community not members of the church making the premarital education available.

Second Key: Make the Premarital Experience Relevant

Second, the counselor or facilitator must assure the specific needs and dynamics of each couple are addressed. Although there are many very good premarital programs available considered “comprehensive,” the skilled counselor/facilitator should consider additional tools based on the specific needs of the couples. Without exception, every session should have some element of interaction and the use of reflective questions. Depending on the couple’s background, the use of genograms can be helpful or temperament analysis (i.e. Taylor-Johnson temperament analysis). Sometimes, to help couples gain a better understanding regarding a miscommunication or a perceived deficiency in their relationship, role play and skill practice exercises can be greatly beneficial. The key to making the most of the premarital program is to tailor the application of the skills, tools, and assessments to each individual and couple based on the specific dynamics of their relationship.3

Third Key: Start Early

The third key for making the most of any premarital program is to begin as early in the relationship as possible. Couples who are within weeks of their wedding date will tend to be less open with their interaction during the sessions. They will also be less likely to address potentially serious issues due to fear of embarrassment should they decide to postpone the wedding, and the loss of financial commitments already made. “Adequate lead time (six to twelve months or more) before marriage should be used, if possible, to facilitate openness to discussion and behavioral change. Where such time is not available, clients should be advised of the risks and benefits of ‘last minute’ training.”

Making a Difference

The challenge before this writer now is to progressively educate others regarding the benefit of premarital education and encourage expanded participation. The starting point would be to contact churches in the community. If they are not aware of good premarital education programs, then information can be provided to them. Another option would be for our church to provide premarital counseling for churches that cannot. To make an even greater impact would be to write a summary conducive for submission in religious publications and/or websites regarding the value of quality premarital education. The potential beneficial impact to individuals, families, churches, communities, as well as state and national governments often burdened with the financial burden could be significant. Above all, if we, as the people of God, were to set the example of what a God-ordained marriage looks like lived out; our witness could impact many for the Kingdom of God and would glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

D.Min. Thesis:
“Reducing the Divorce Rate Among Christians in America: Making Premarital Counseling a Prerequisite for Marriage”
By Scott H. Vail
Liberty University
School of Religion

You are invited to be in a research study of the effects of premarital counseling on marital fulfillment and longevity. You were selected as a possible participant because you got married since 2000. It does not matter if you participated in a premarital education program. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Scott H. Vail, D.Min. student at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to survey couples, most of whom participated in a formal premarital counseling program, to determine the level of marital fulfillment, commitment, and opinion regarding the benefits of the premarital program and whether there is a correlation between participating in a formal premarital education program and a reduction in the rate of divorce.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Complete a ten-question survey online that should take you no more than 2 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks. First, there is minimal risk for participating. Your responses will be filtered through the survey tool, which will collect the data from all the participants and then provide a summary that does not allow accessibility to the source. Second, should anyone view your answers as you provide your responses via the online survey, they would have knowledge of your views regarding your marital satisfaction and level of marital commitment, both of which are personal. Should you be experiencing distress in your marriage, completing the brief survey may cause increased anxiety. Should this occur, contact a local Christian counseling center or if you are unable to find one, feel free to contact me and I will provide information on locating assistance for you (vail@liberty.edu).

The benefits to participation are: There is no direct benefit to you for participating other than helping to provide data for my research that will enable me to complete my dissertation. There is always the chance that your participation may benefit those yet to be married by illuminating the benefits of formal premarital training in terms of marital longevity and satisfaction.

Compensation:

You will not receive any compensation of any kind for your participation.
APPENDIX B

Survey

Married Couple Survey

1. Have you been married previously?
   - Yes
   - No

2. How long have you been married to your current spouse?
   - Less than 2 years
   - 3-5 years
   - 6-9 years
   - 10-12 years
   - We’ve separated
   - We’ve divorced

3. Where were you married?
   - Peace Church, Wilson, NC
   - Calvary Church, Charlotte, NC
   - Another church
   - Not in a church

4. Were you required to participate in a pre-marital counseling/preparation program? If no, skip to question 9.
   - Yes
   - No

5. If yes, what program?
   - PREP/ENRICH Inventory (David Olson)
   - So You’re Getting Married (H. Norman Wright)
   - SYMBIS - Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (Les & Leslie Parrott)
   - PREP - Prevention in Relationship Enhancement Program (Scott Stanley)
   - DCCU/S - Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study
   - RELATE - Relationship Evaluation
   - Other (please specify)


6. How many sessions did you have with the pastor or counselor who counseled you?
   ○ 1-2
   ○ 3-6
   ○ More than 6

7. To what extent has your participation in a pre-marital program prepared/equipped you to work through challenges in your marriage?
   ○ Minimal benefit
   ○ Some benefit
   ○ Very beneficial

8. From the following choices, what part of the pre-marital program was the most helpful in preparing you for the challenges of marriage?
   ○ Conflict resolution skills/tools
   ○ Communication skills/tools
   ○ Finances/financial information
   ○ Roles and expectations
   ○ Spiritual beliefs

9. Would you recommend pre-marital counseling to couples considering getting married?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

10. Rate your current marriage satisfaction.
    ○ Very happy
     ○ Happy
     ○ Neutral
     ○ Unhappy
     ○ Very unhappy
APPENDIX C

Calvary Church Wedding Policy

Wedding Policies and Procedures

Calvary

Revised October, 2009
POLICIES

These policies are in effect for anyone desiring to be married at Calvary Church.

The wedding ceremony should be a celebration of the ultimate purpose and character of God at work in the lives of each of the partners as lived out in their covenant together. A church wedding is a sacred occasion, in which two people invoke the blessing of God in the celebration of their marriage. Your wedding is a service of worship as well as a public declaration of love. It reflects your personal faith and love in Jesus Christ, as well as your love for each other.

Your pre-marital counseling with one of our pastors will involve personal discussion about your relationship with Jesus Christ—as two individuals and together as a couple. The Bible teaches that marriage is a holy covenant made between one man and one woman for a lifetime (Genesis 2:21-15; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:21-33). Two become one reflecting the mystery of the intimate relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:32).

The Bible also teaches that the Christian is not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). We desire to reflect the faith and teaching of Jesus Christ as we ask God’s blessing on your marriage.

Marriages that are powerfully successful are those that reflect the character and purpose of God. Since we support the institution of marriage as a covenant relationship with God, we believe that the wedding ceremony should not in any way compromise or ignore the biblical foundations.

The following are prerequisites for anyone seeking to have their wedding ceremony at Calvary Church:

1. OFFICIATING PASTOR: A member of our pastoral staff must officiate at any wedding held at Calvary Church. All weddings being conducted by Calvary’s pastors must follow this policy and be reported to the designated Administrative Assistant/Wedding Coordinator (whether the wedding is at Calvary or not).

2. CHRISTIAN FAITH: It is God’s desire that all people come to know Him and find salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:9). The Bible warns that Christians should not be unequally yoked with those who do not have faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14). Calvary Church will not perform weddings of those who are so unequally yoked, but will persevere in prayer and loving ministry to help both come to faith in Christ.

3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: Since a Christian marriage is a reflection of the relationship Christ has with His Church (Ephesians 5:22-33), each partner must demonstrate an active church membership or sincere intent to do so. One of the partners must be an active member of Calvary Church or immediate relative of an active member of Calvary Church.

4. PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING: The couple agrees to complete the pre-marital counseling sessions overseen by the pastor(s), which are to commence no later than six months prior to the wedding. Any exception to this six month period requires the express approval of the Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor. The couple also agrees to take a pre-marital inventory that is used as a tool for this counseling. Some, but not all, of these sessions may be in class format with other couples. DURING THE COUNSELING, the pastor reserves the right to request that the wedding be postponed if he believes there are serious issues that may
jeopardize the health of the marriage. This is one of the reasons we require a six month period prior to the wedding. The only charge for the pre-marital counseling is for the Prepare/Enrich Profile (currently $35).

5. **SEXUALITY:** The couple seeking marriage at Calvary Church must consist of one male and one female in accordance with God’s design of creation in the divine expectation of a one-flesh union (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:21-25). Sexual intercourse is a wonderful and powerful gift God has given to express the unique oneness of a man and woman in marriage. Therefore, couples need to commit to sexual abstinence and purity in their relationship prior to marriage and must commit not to co-habitate until after marriage.

6. **DIVORCE:** The Bible teaches that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:14-16), which tears apart the intended unity of husband and wife for a lifetime. The Bible teaches that divorce may be a reality in the case of marital unfaithfulness (through adultery—Matthew 5:31-32) or through abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-15). Even in such cases, the first and best course is still to seek reconciliation and to seek counseling.

7. **REMARRIAGE:** Candidates for remarriage must have resolved past marital issues and relationships according to biblical guidelines and spiritual principals as part of a process endorsed and affirmed by the pastors of Calvary Church.

8. **WEDDING DIRECTOR:** The couple will be assigned an official Calvary Church Wedding Director or Directors who will formally preside over all facilities details and the wedding rehearsal. The Director will work with the officiating pastor in securing the best possible experience. The Director may be available for the reception upon request and for an additional fee.

9. **FINAL AUTHORITY:** No wedding date will be honored unless approved by a Calvary Church pastor in keeping with our policies and philosophy. We advise that no financial commitments (announcements, rentals, etc.) be made until after the officiating pastor has approved the wedding and confirmed with the couple.
SCHEDULING

Tentative dates are proposed at least six (but no more than twelve) months in advance of the wedding. The Calvary Church office will process all applications and will schedule the date. A final commitment will be made with the couple after confirmation from the officiating Pastor.

Weddings and rehearsals will not be scheduled on Sundays or holiday weekends. Due to special preparations for seasonal programs, there will be no weddings scheduled in the month of December; two weeks prior to Easter; or the Friday and Saturday after Vacation Bible School. No weddings will be scheduled after 6:00 PM. If you are planning to have your wedding reception at Calvary, please schedule your wedding no later than 5:00 PM since all receptions must be over by 9:00 PM in order to prepare the church for Sunday services. Only one reception will be scheduled per day. No equipment or furniture may be moved without the permission of an authorized Calvary representative.

General Conduct
In order to provide a joyous occasion in a sacred setting, all members of the wedding party are expected to conduct themselves in a Christ-like manner. The sacredness of the wedding is of utmost importance for the blessings of God and the happiness of the wedding party. Smoking, alcohol and dancing are not permitted at a Calvary reception. The bride and groom and their families are responsible for all personal items of the wedding party brought into the church. It is requested that neither rice nor colored rose petals be thrown. We suggest bubbles or tiny hand held bells.

FEE SCHEDULE
As part of the ministry of Calvary Church, the facilities of the church are made available to active members without charge. However, the following fees will be assessed:

Wedding Fees  Your payment is due (in full) two weeks prior to your wedding.
$140.00  Wedding Director
$250.00  Custodian for Sanctuary, Bride and Groom's Room (includes set-up, tear-down and clean up*)
$100.00  Custodian for Chapel, Bride and Groom's Room (includes setup, tear-down and clean up*)
$10.00  Candelabra Candles (optional)
$35.00  Pew Candles (optional)
$50.00  Sound Technician, Chapel
$60.00  Sound Technician, Sanctuary (if you require more than one sound technician, you will be charged an additional $60 for each person.)
$35.00  Additional charge for Sound Technician for wedding rehearsal in the Chapel
$45.00  Additional charge for Sound Technician for wedding rehearsal in the Sanctuary.

Note: At your discretion, an honorarium may be paid to the officiating Pastor.
* We will provide standard wedding set up diagrams for the sanctuary and chapel. Any requests over and above the standard set up may result in additional charges.

**Reception Fees / Rehearsal Dinner Fees**

- **$125.00** Catering Coordinator (5-hour minimum; $25 for each additional hour). Fee includes event set up, event time and event clean up. (We allow 2 hours for the standard reception.)
- **$15.00/hr.** Servers each (5-hour minimum per server. A sur charge will be applied after the five hours.)
- **$35.00** Chef carving and sauté during reception (per hour rate, 2 hour minimum)
- **$300.00** Crown Room Building Services Charges. These charges are for our standard reception set-up. (You are required to use our standard set-ups unless your numbers necessitate a change.) The standard set-up includes two columns which are included in the listed price.
- **$100.00** Banquet Room Building Services Charges
- **$60.00** Sound Technician (day of wedding) – 4 hour minimum: each additional hour $20 per hour

**Full payment** of the wedding fees and **50% of the reception fees** are due to the church two weeks prior to your wedding. You will receive a bill reflecting these charges no later than three weeks prior to the wedding. Checks should be made payable to Calvary Church, 5801 Pineville Matthews Road, Charlotte, NC 28226. We do accept credit card payments (Visa, Master Card, American Express and Discover). You will receive a final bill for your reception fees within 60 days following the reception, and the balance will be due upon receipt.

**Additional Notes:**

- All wedding receptions should end by 9:00 PM. **Non-compliance with this deadline will result in a $100 surcharge per half hour.**
- The Food Service Manager will provide linen, equipment, and food fees.
- Arrangements and fees for desired services such as musicians, (organist), soloists, photography/video taping, must be made separately by the bride and groom.
- PowerPoint or video presentations will not be allowed during the wedding ceremony.
FROM YOUR WEDDING DIRECTORS...

It is our privilege to work with you in planning your wedding. We are available to you by phone, or will meet with you at the church. We will discuss your wishes in placement of attendants, ushers for seating of family, lighting candles, use of candelabra, plants and flowers, etc. We will be more than happy to offer you suggestions, guidance and feedback that will make your day a special one for you and your guests. The following is a list of the wedding equipment that is available for you:

WEDDING EQUIPMENT
Four brass candelabra which include:
  - One 15-candle arch shaped candelabra
  - Two 9-candle "tree" shaped candelabras
  - One unity candelabra (holds 3 candles)
Kneeling bench
Brass urns for flowers
Two plant stands (mahogany)
Two plant stands (ivory, suitable for chapel wedding)
Podium for guest book
Gift table with cloth

There is a $10 fee for candles for the above candelabra. The candles are dripless and in metal sheaths. Twelve brass pew candleholders are also available for the center aisle (every other pew). A $35 fee includes pew candles and set-up if you choose to use them. Check with the Wedding Director(s) regarding bows.

The plants in the chapel and sanctuary are available for weddings in those locations respectively. If you use flowers, we recommend one arrangement for each side since the bride and groom will be standing in the center of the platform.

THE WEDDING REHEARSAL
The use of wedding equipment is optional. The platform will be set up for your approval at the rehearsal. The wedding director (under the direction of the officiating Pastor) will direct the rehearsal and the wedding, showing you when to walk, where to stand, etc., and will take you briefly through the order of service (approved by the officiating Pastor).

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO INFORMATION
No flash photography will be allowed during the ceremony. However, you may take a picture of the bride coming down the aisle. No walking around in the chapel or sanctuary during the ceremony is permitted, especially at the front. Be as discreet and inconspicuous as possible.

FLORIST INFORMATION
Brass urns for large arrangements take size 5 paper mache containers. Please use only chenille wire (pipe cleaner) for attaching bows or greenery to candelabra. The plant stands for urns are 32" x 11" x 11". The church cannot provide storage/cooler facilities or production space for florists. Therefore all floral arrangements must be delivered already assembled the day of your wedding and removed following the wedding. Due to possible carpet damage, no loose red rose petals may be used for the wedding or reception.

DECORATING GUIDELINES
Calvary Church Wedding Policies and Procedures
Adapted: 03/12/07
Rev. 1 October 12, 2009
Decorating is permitted only in the sanctuary or chapel for the wedding and in the Crown Room or Banquet Room for the reception. You (or someone you designate) will be responsible for removing all decorations immediately following the wedding and reception. (Deadlines will be one hour following the wedding for the sanctuary or chapel, and one hour following the reception for the Crown Room or Banquet Room.) **Candles can only be used if purchased and placed by Calvary staff.**

**STEP THREE: CONTACTS**

The following personnel are essential in facilitating the procedures and details that will ensure the success of your wedding. It is your responsibility to contact each of them as soon your wedding date is confirmed. **Do not contact them until you have met with the officiating pastor.**

**Wedding Directors:** A Wedding Director will be assigned to you by the officiating pastor. The Director will guide you through the process of preparation for your special day. They will offer guidelines for your personal photographer as well as assist in the general use of the church’s facilities and audio equipment. **It is Calvary’s policy that when using our facilities, you must use our Wedding Director.**

- **Music:** Amy DeVries at 704-887-3687 (Worship Department).

  In the wedding ceremony we solemnize and celebrate a covenant made before God. Since the ceremony is therefore a sacred service, the music should honor our Lord. Appropriate music to enhance the joy and worship of your wedding ceremony should be communicated and approved by the pastor. Recommendations for soloists and/or instrumentalists are available through the Worship Department.

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**Calvary Church Wedding Policies and Procedures**

**Approved by Calvary Church Session:**

[Signature (Clerk of Session)]

Oct 12, 2009

[Printed Name]
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VITA

Scott H. Vail

PERSONAL
Married: Kimberly G. Smith, May 9, 1987.
          Lindsay N. Vail, born June 1, 1991.

EDUCATIONAL

MINISTERIAL
License: April 16, 2000, Peace Church, Wilson, North Carolina.

PROFESSIONAL
Engineer, Becton Dickenson, 1987-1990.
Executive Pastor, Calvary Church, 2007-present.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES & ASSOCIATIONS
Certified Facilitator, Prepare & Enrich, March 2009-present.
Certified Teacher, Evangelical Training Association
July 30, 2011

Scott Harold Vail
IRB Exemption 1342.073012: Reducing the Divorce Rate Among Christians in America: Making Prenatal Counseling a Prerequisite for Marriage

Dear Scott,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (5)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior unless:

(a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
(b) any disclosure of the subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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