

Liberty University
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**A HOUSE MENDED: HOPE FOR CHRISTIANS WHO ARE MARRIED TO OR
COHABITATE WITH UNSAVED SPOUSES/PARTNERS**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
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ABSTRACT

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John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2020

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Some Christians face unique challenges within the context of their marriages and cohabitating relationships because their spouses or partners are unsaved. This unequally yoked spiritual dynamic may negatively impact not only their marital/cohabitating relationships, but also their Christian spiritual growth and maturity. Many of these Christians are unsure about what the Bible advises about their situation. Unfortunately, many churches do not have programming to support this Christian demographic.

This thesis project, through a qualitative, phenomenological research framework, will seek to understand, interpret, and describe the experiences these individuals contend with as a result of their unequally yoked marital/cohabitating way of life. Ideally, the goal of this thesis project is to bring to light the challenges faced by these uniquely situated Christians to assist the local church in developing and implementing programming that addresses the unique needs of these couples and assist in keeping married couples together and promote marriage for cohabitating couples, enhancing the quality of life for them and their families.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This researcher seeks to examine the experiences of unequally yoked married Christians, as well as those couples who cohabitate as married couples, in an effort to assess their level of happiness and success. Having theorized that unequally yoked couples struggle due their unbalanced faith and worldview, and based on biblical counsel as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:14 advising against them, this researcher desires to bring to light their need for support and inform local churches of their responsibility to bring the hope and help that may be found through godly biblical support. If the local church provides this support these couple's quality of life may improve and their likelihood for divorce may decrease.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a misconception of facts in recent reports contending that Christian divorces are equal in number to their secular counterparts.¹ The truth is that faithful, consistent Christians have markedly lower divorce rates.² In a study conducted by Shaunti

¹ Stetzer, Ed, "Marriage, Divorce, and the Church: What do the stats say, and can marriage be happy? Are Christian divorce rates the same, or even higher, than the rest of the population? Is a happy marriage possible?" *Christianity Today*, February 14, 2014. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/marriage-divorce-and-body-of-christ-what-do-stats-say-and-c.html>; and Stanton, Glenn, "Divorce Rate in the Church – As High as the World?" *Focus on the Family*, 2011. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/focus-findings/marriage/divorce-rate-in-the-church-as-high-as-the-world>.

² Ibid.

Feldhahn, a Harvard-trained social researcher, popular speaker, and best-selling author, she concluded that:

53% of Very Happy Couples agree with the statement, "God is at the center of our marriage" (compared to 7% of Struggling Couples).

30% of Struggling Couples disagree with the statement, "God is at the center of our marriage."³

Further, Samuel Perry concluded that, "Marriage research consistently shows that spousal religiosity is positively associated with higher marital quality and stability."⁴ These assertions provide hope for all married Christians; however, does one's Christianity give the Christian an edge or a wedge when their spouse is unsaved? There is research suggesting that the predictor of positive effects of marital religiosity is dependent upon the "religious homogamy" of the couple," in other words, when both parties are religious.⁵ In contrast, "marriages in which there is a good deal of heterogamy in the areas of religious practice, identity, or belief tend to have lower marital quality and stability."⁶

These unequally yoked Christians, married or cohabitating, struggle within the context of their relationships because their situations may negatively impact certain aspects of their lives like their ability to spend time with God, socialize with other Christians, agree on financial decisions, as well as agreement on decisions regarding rearing children and running the household. Others may be ridiculed for their Christian beliefs by their unbelieving spouse/partner. The struggle to cultivate a loving happy relationship without

³ "Marriage, Divorce, and the Church...", *Christianity Today*, February 14, 2014.

⁴ Perry, Samuel L. "Perceived Spousal Religiosity and Marital Quality Across Racial and Ethnic Groups." *Family Relations* 65, no. 2 (04, 2016): 327-41, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1807679962?accountid=12085>, 327.

⁵ Ibid., 328.

⁶ Ibid.

compromising biblical principles is a very present reality for these Christians. Conflicting worldviews may also create dysfunction in many dimensions of their marital relations.

Christian partners in these unequally yoked relationships contend with loyalty conflicts; loyalty to God versus loyalty to their spouse/partner. They may feel trapped and may rationalize that their only remedy for peace, tranquility and happiness for their sake and/or the sake of their children is to divorce. It is the contention of this researcher that if support were provided these Christian spouses/partners, then divorce among this demographic would be less desirable.

Many churches currently have no ministry that serves these uniquely situated Christians. The goal of this thesis project is to compile, interpret, understand, and express the experiences of these individuals as a result of their unequally yoked relationships. The purpose of this study is to assist the local church in developing and implementing programming that addresses their needs with a goal towards keeping married couples together and enhancing their quality of life, as well as supporting and advising cohabitating Christians to promote marriage and improve their quality of life.

Statement of Limitations

This research is limited in that the participants are restricted to adult Christians who are married to spouses who have not received salvation through belief in Jesus Christ. In addition, this research is limited in scope to individuals who are Christians and have chosen cohabitation with an unsaved partner, as this cultural trend has infiltrated Christian churches.⁷

⁷ Barna reports, “[R]eligious leaders will be wise to notice that a growing number of their constituents—particularly in younger demographics—are accepting cohabitation as the norm,” concludes Stone. “As with premarital sex, the arguments against cohabitation will seem increasingly antiquated as the general culture accepts and promotes it. When everyone in their circles and everyone on television is living together,

Further, this research is limited in scope to members of the following churches located in New Jersey and Delaware: Cathedral of Holiness Missionary Baptist Church and The Crossing (Lewes Church of Christ).

This thesis project is further limited in its scope to addressing the needs of the Christian party to the marriage or cohabitation relationship only. Subject matter that relates to the needs of unbelieving spouses/partner and/or the children of the participants will not be covered in this thesis project. The researcher will identify the challenges met by this specific demographic of Christian to develop guidelines to address these challenges for the purpose of encouragement and support for these individuals with a goal towards preserving and enhancing the quality of their marriages or cohabitating relationships.

A potential limitation to this thesis project includes the extent of honest information shared by the participants. Further, the researcher may not obtain a satisfactory number of sample participants for the study to yield quality results. Another limitation may be the abandonment of the study by the participants while in progress. Another potential limitation may be that the issue involved may be relevant to congregants outside of those churches included in the study, which this researcher does not have access to for this study.

Statement of Methodology

This researcher's methodology is phenomenological inquiry where Christians married to or cohabitating with unsaved spouses/partners were asked to participate in an anonymous survey seeking to determine what they are experiencing as unequally yoked couples.

young people will begin to see it as benign." (*Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation*, Research Releases in Family & Kids, June 24, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation/>).

Phenomenological inquiry is a method of qualitative research that concentrates on the lived experience within a specified group and seeks to describe the nature of that experiential phenomenon.⁸

With regard to methodology, this researcher first will seek to obtain IRB approval and once granted, will seek permission from the senior pastors of the following churches located in New Jersey and Delaware: Cathedral of Holiness Missionary Baptist Church, Gloucester County Community Church, Crossroads Worship Center, The Crossings (Lewes Church of Christ), Bay Shore Community Church, and the Dagsboro Church of God, to solicit church members who meet the criteria for participation in the study.

The researcher will mail out personally addressed letters to the designated senior pastors explaining the purpose of the project – that it is being performed for the completion of the researcher’s DMIN degree, as well as to address a potential gap within the context of local churches ministering to the needs of some of its members as it relates to Christian members who are married to unsaved spouses or cohabitate with unsaved partners. Of those six churches that the researcher sought participation, two agreed to permit their members to participate in the research.⁹

The researcher developed a forty-six question survey and purchased an account with Survey Monkey® as a means for participants to take the survey. All survey questions were reviewed and approved by the IRB.

⁸ Creswell, John W., and John W. Creswell. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* Third edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014.

⁹ Concerns that participation in the research would reflect endorsement of cohabitation was expressed by one of the pastors. This same concern may have been a contributing factor for lack of participation by the other pastors, however, the researcher cannot conclusively confirm that assumption at this juncture. Perhaps this should be a concentrated study for future research.

Upon grant of permission by the senior pastors of The Crossing (Lewes Church of Christ and Cathedral of Holiness Missionary Baptist Church, an announcement via each church's email announcements will be disseminated providing information to church members regarding the researcher and the research project and providing all pertinent information outlining the purpose and criteria for participation in the study. These announcements will be limited to soliciting volunteers who are Christian members married to unsaved spouses and to Christians who cohabitate with unsaved partners. The anonymous nature of the survey will be emphasized. The announcement will provide the researcher's contact name and email address for anyone who is interested in learning more about the study or may have more questions regarding potentially participating in it.

Some individuals who respond to the announcement and/or email will receive a follow-up email with more detailed information about the study along with a consent form. Those who proceeded to the survey after reading the consent form will be deemed to have consented. Other participants, though church email announcements will be provided the link to the survey on Survey Monkey® and upon entering the survey will receive the consent form as the first two questions of the survey. If they proceeded to take the survey, they will be deemed to have consented. The researcher will seek to obtain a pool of as many as possible to obtain a good sampling of Christians who fit the research criteria.

The survey questions will include detailed questions about the participant to gain a comprehensive picture of the participant's present unequally yoked marital/cohabitating situation. The researcher will review and analyze the survey results to be used in comparison with other research data collected in the study to identified patterns of challenges experienced by these individuals for use in program design.

It is the goal of this researcher to determine how to provide separate and specialized assistance for Christians who are married to or cohabitate with unsaved spouses/partners to help to preserve their marriages and promote marriage for those who cohabitate. These couples' differing perspectives, life goals and worldviews make the Christian party to these unions a unique class of Christian who merit such specialized support through church programming. By compiling the aforementioned data outlined above and by analyzing same against the backdrop of biblical principles and insights, this researcher hopes to present a phenomenological picture that understands and describes the experiences and challenges faced by these Christians to assist local churches to develop programming to support them. The purpose of developing the programming is to enhance the quality of these marriage relationships, as well as sustaining their marriages in accordance with God's desire and design. Currently, there is little programming provided for these Christians, therefore, this researcher hopes to fill a gap in ministry by conducting this study.

Chapter Summary

Through phenomenological inquiry this researcher seeks to acquire a picture of the lived experience of unequally yoked couples. Although the pool of participants was smaller than desired, the data obtained through the anonymous survey still provided valuable insights into the reality experienced by these married/cohabitating Christians. Patterns of experiences were identified, and particularly those areas of challenge; areas where the local church may be able to support and provide help. Therefore, the inquiry into the experiential phenomenon of these couples was worthwhile and should prove beneficial in building stronger relationships and developing local church programming.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher began research on this topic to address the problem of support for unequally yoked married Christians. Upon review of the literature, this researcher discovered that a handful of books did exist on the topic. Most of them provide practical, rather than scholarly insights, albeit all included biblical support for its practical recommendations. All of the books primarily addressed the wife-Christian, with side references to husband-Christians sporadically referenced here and there throughout the work.

As theorized by this researcher, none of the books addressed church programming as a resource of strength and guidance for these Christians, except for one. Jo Berry produced a book called *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband Into the Faith*,¹⁰ and in the last chapter she addresses how to set up a ministry within the local church to support these Christians. In addition, one article by Marcia Dummier Mitchell entitled “Spiritually Single: Ministering to the Unequally Yoked.”¹¹ was discovered and did offer some suggestions to churches with assisting these Christians within the local church.¹² This gap in church

¹⁰ Berry, Jo, *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband in the Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

¹¹ Marcia Dummier Mitchell, “Spiritually Single: Ministering to the Unequally Yoked,” *Preachers Magazine Vol. 72 No. 2*, (Dec. 1997).

¹² Ibid.

programming is vital to supporting these Christians as evidenced by Nancy Kennedy's discovery that:

Sadly, a common complaint among married women who go to church alone is feeling like they don't fit anywhere. Sunday school classes are generally designed for couples, or singles—and they are neither. It's like churches don't know what to do with the “spiritually single.” It's an anomaly. Square pegs in round holes.¹³

Like Kennedy, Berry felt these Christians were being neglected upon discovering that few churches address their needs in any specialized manner. She expressed her beliefs that it is the churches responsibility to “learn about their unique problems, literally bear the burden of their unsaved mates with them.”¹⁴ This is the problem this researcher hopes to resolve so that one group of sisters and brothers are provided hope for happy and healthy marriages.

It appears to this researcher that any significant solution to the problem failed to launch at any point in history; however, the problem remained for those Christians who are in an unequally yoked marriage and are faced with the challenges that accompany that marital dynamic.

Review of Literature

This thesis project includes the review of books, journal articles and other sources including commentaries and other articles. In addition, use of the Holy Bible is its foundation as a source of hope and counsel for the problem this thesis project seeks to

¹³ Kennedy, Nancy, *When He Doesn't Believe: Help and Encouragement for Women Who Feel Alone in Their Faith*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 189.

¹⁴ Berry, *Beloved Unbeliever*, 162.

address. It is also the measuring stick from which all other sources used herein are measured for credibility and correctness.

Books

In *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband Into the Faith*,¹⁵ Jo Berry wrote over twenty-five years ago on the topic closely related to what this researcher is seeking to address. Her book is geared toward personal and group studies, which outline scripturally-based guidelines for coping with an unbelieving spouse. Berry's program is informational. She tackles the biblical mandates of 1 Corinthians 7 with clarity and accuracy. This researcher believes a more support group/community accountability ministry would be more helpful after the biblical informational segment to assist with sustaining and enhancing the unequally-yoked marriage.

In *When He Doesn't Believe: Help and Encouragement for Women Who Feel Alone in Their Faith*,¹⁶ Nancy Kennedy from both her personal experience and through research provides powerful insights on the many issues that impact Christian women in unequally-yoked marriages. A key and relevant element that Kennedy covers is found in Chapter Four entitled "Saved or Unsaved, He's Still a Guy." Therein she shares insights she learned about male behavior in general and cautioning Christian wives to not attribute typical male behavior with their spouses' unsaved status. She offered that "Too often women blame their

¹⁵ Berry, *Beloved Unbeliever*.

¹⁶ Kennedy, *When He Doesn't Believe*.

difficulty in communicating and relating with an unbelieving husband on their unequal yoke,”¹⁷ when that may not necessarily be the case.

In *I Don't Want a Divorce: A 90-Day Guide to Saving Your Marriage*, Dr. David Clarke provides helpful guideless for several types of bad marriages, with a goal of not just avoiding a divorce, but of not being “stuck in the same old miserable marriage” by building a new healthy, passionate, joy-filled marriage.¹⁸ As wonderful as his program is, it clearly applies to marriages that consist of husbands and wives who are both Christians. Particularly since the first “pillar” upon which to begin rebuilding is by “improving and strengthening your relationship with God.”¹⁹ This is an element unknown to the unsaved spouse.

In *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*,²⁰ E. Mavis Hetherington does not present guidelines for maintaining marriages but rather informs those considering them what to expect from the experience as a preparatory tool for the process. She covers the full gambit of potential parties affected by the divorce through present and future relationships, including children, stepchildren and remarriage.

In *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, Everett Worthington presents a comprehensive guide to brief therapy. In Chapter 7 he concentrates on conflicting values. One significant statistic that Worthington points out is that: “Research has shown that when Christians—and even non-Christians—observe a counselor challenging a client’s religious

¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸ David Clarke and William G. Clarke, *I Don't Want a Divorce: A 90-Day Guide to Saving Your Marriage* (Revell: Grand Rapids, 2009), 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Hetherington, Mavis E. and John Kelly, *For Better, Divorce Reconsidered or For Worse* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).

values, the observers evaluate the counselor negatively.”²¹ When an unsaved spouse is subjected to Christian counseling they may feel biased by them and their spouse due to their lack of or differing religious values, which may negatively impact couples counseling through Christian and /or pastoral counseling. Ultimately, like many other Christian-based counseling books, they rely on Scriptural guidance: “Clients will deal better with values to the extent that you can get them to think through their own values in light of Scripture.”²² This is productive for the Christian spouse, but not for the unbelieving spouse.

In *Love & Respect*,²³ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs attributes many couples landing in divorce court due to what he has dubbed the “Crazy Cycle,” which boils down to “without love from him, she reacts without respect; without respect from her, he reacts without love,” thus the marriage breaks down. Eggerichs asserts that the two main ingredients to a happy marriage are respect for him and love her. He bases this on the “secret” hidden in Ephesians 5:33, which says “Each one of you also must *love* his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must *respect* her husband” (NIV).²⁴ While Eggerichs’ book includes plenty of biblical backing, it does not come off as religious as many of the other Christian books on marital help, rather its principles can easily be understood and applied by the non-Christian spouse as well.

²¹ Everett L. Worthington. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 107 (*emphasis added*).

²² Ibid., 110.

²³ Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires. The Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

²⁴ Ibid., 14-15 (*emphasis added*).

In *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*,²⁵ Lee and Leslie Strobel emphasize the significance of the opportunity for such an appointment. Strobel claims that wives in this position “represent one of evangelism’s single most strategic groups of people in America. Really!”²⁶ He backs that up with statements from Thom S. Rainer whose “groundbreaking study into evangelism” discovered that “The wife is the most important relationship in reaching the unchurched.”²⁷ Strobel, having lived out the unequally yoked dynamic himself, lends credence to the experience. His testimony that his wife is the reason why he is a Christian and serving the Lord today may be encouraging to wives who find themselves dealing with a hard case, like Strobel used to be. The fact that he is now famous for authoring *The Case for Christ*,²⁸ after once being a staunch opponent of Christianity is powerful.

Joseph Warren Kniskern in his survival guide *When the Vow Breaks: A Survival and Recovery Guide for Christians Facing Divorce*, concluded regarding keeping the peace in verse 15 asked:

But would God ask a Christian to break up his or her marriage to an unbeliever (as Ezra and Shecaniah did of the Israelites in Ezra 9 and 10)? Paul does not recommend this action but seeks to preserve the peace of an existing marriage. We know from 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 that despite the many disadvantages of a mixed marriage, the Christian is not to divorce an unbeliever who wishes to remain in the marriage. If the unbeliever wants to leave the marriage, the Christian is to let the unbeliever go. The Lord is not

²⁵ Strobel, Lee and Leslie Strobel. *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

²⁶ Ibid., 123.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

quick to salvage a failing mixed marriage because of His greater concern for the faith of His people.²⁹

The bottom line is that the Bible does support that these marriages are challenging, and guidelines do exist for Christians who seek direction. As with all of God's children, there is hope, and these Christians may have healthy and marriages. For those who may be struggling in their unequally yoked marriage, this researcher hopes that the church helps these Christians bear the load and recognize it as a worthy ministry.

Journal Articles

Marcia Dummier Mitchell, in her journal article entitled "Spiritually Single: Ministering to the Unequally Yoked," concluded that these Christians contend with guilt, loneliness, the balancing of church and home life, as well as problems with raising children.³⁰ Mitchell felt the church could do more to specifically assist these uniquely situated members of the body, and recommended five courses of action that the church might take to assist and support these spiritually-single members. Those courses of action are addressed later in this research paper.

Robert B. Lawton, in this article "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?," wrote about how God viewed marriage as important and that is why he created it, attempting to clarify God's reasoning for creating women. His article focuses on Genesis 1:18 where God states, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." Lawton

²⁹ Kniskern, Joseph Warren. *When the Vow Breaks: A Survival and Recovery Guide for Christians Facing Divorce*. (Nashville, TN:B&H, 2008), 222-223.

³⁰ Marcia Dummier Mitchell "Spiritually Single: Ministering to the Unequally Yoked," *Preachers Magazine Vol. 72 No. 2*, (Dec. 1997).

contemplated whether that decision by God was based on the possibility “that the story of the creation of woman is basically etiological or at least that 2:24 is an etiological insertion,” as some would argue.³¹ For purposes of this research, that point is irrelevant. What is relevant is that God thought it was important enough that He would create that relationship.

Steven C. Burton in his journal article "Sanctification and oneness in 1 Corinthians with implications for the case of 'mixed marriages' (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)," concludes that “In the case of a mixed marriage, the unbelieving partner, together with the children, is sanctified by remaining in oneness with the believing partner.”³² In keeping this important principle in mind, support for the Christian members of a mixed marriage should be a priority for local churches, particularly in light of its ramifications upon the unbelieving spouse and children.

Bernadette Pivarunas in her journal article, "A Qualitative Exploration of a Faith-Based Support Group for Women with Disordered Eating" covered the effectiveness of support groups with a faith-based component.³³ The incorporation of religious components into the care provided through support groups seems to have a positive effect. Pivarunas notes that, “It would seem that the experience of a faith-based support group was helpful in facilitating increased self-efficacy, connectedness, and hope and even perhaps in promoting positive religious coping among young women with an eating disorder.”³⁴ While the instant

³¹ Robert B. Lawton, "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (March 1986): 97-98.

³² Stephen C. Barton, "Sanctification and oneness in 1 Corinthians with implications for the case of 'mixed marriages' (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)." *New Testament Studies Jan 2017* (January 1, 2017), 1.

³³ Pivarunas, Bernadette. "A Qualitative Exploration of a Faith-Based Support Group for Women with Disordered Eating." *Pastoral Psychology* 65, no. 2 (04, 2016): 215-225, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1771280901?accountid=12085>. Accessed March 27, 2020.

³⁴ Pivarunas, “A Qualitative Exploration,” 222.

article was addressing eating disorders, this researcher was specifically researching whether there was greater success or more benefits for Christians who participated in faith-based groups as opposed to secular groups. Pivarunas' results revealed that there were.

In his article "Perceived Spousal Religiosity and Marital Quality Across Racial and Ethnic Groups,"³⁵ Samuel Perry analyzed certain predictor as it relates to a married individual's religious commitment and its effects on their marriage among various racial and ethnic lines. He concluded that, "perceived spousal religiosity is a strong predictor of marital quality across the four most prominent racial or ethnic groups in the United States, but that this effect is stronger for Asian, Black, and Hispanic Americans than for non-Hispanic White Americans."³⁶ Perry's findings were insightful for the present research inasmuch as they provided recent data on marriage that include a faith dynamic. It also points out the disparities between "religious homogamy" versus religious heterogamy in terms of marital quality and stability.³⁷

Karney and Bradbury, performed a recent study entitled "Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability in the 2010s: Challenging Conventional Wisdom."³⁸ This was a fascinating study that basically determined that the key ingredient to a happy and healthy marriage derives from the level of connectedness between the partners. The relevancy of this particular conclusion is obvious to the present study and this researcher would have

³⁵ Perry, Samuel L. "Perceived Spousal Religiosity and Marital Quality Across Racial and Ethnic Groups." *Family Relations* 65, no. 2 (04, 2016): 327-41, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1807679962?accountid=12085>.

³⁶ Perry, "Perceived Spousal Religiosity," 337.

³⁷ Ibid., 328.

³⁸ Karney, Benjamin R. and Thomas N. Bradbury. "Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability in the 2010s: Challenging Conventional Wisdom." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82, no. 1 (2020)

appreciated prior knowledge of this study upon developing the questions for this study. As it stands, the researcher did not inquire as to levels of connectedness within the couples as it relates to unequally yokedness, something that could be further explored in another study.

Commentaries

A review of commentaries to gain an in depth understanding of what scholars are saying about the subject of unequally yoked marriages and divorce was done. Commentaries found to be particularly insightful are elaborated on in this section.

In *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 2d Ed.*, Gordon Fee provides biblical insights regarding divorce for “mixed marriages” as set forth by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. Fee concludes that Paul advocates against divorce in these types of marriages. In essence, Fee claims that:

Paul argues: mixed marriages are essentially Christian marriages (v. 14), and when maintained, they afford an opportunity for the unbelieving partner to be saved (v. 16). Thus, as throughout, the exception (v. 15) is real but not ideal; it is allowed but not to be pursued.³⁹

Significantly, Fee translates the meaning of the unbelieving spouse deemed sanctified as a state wherein the “‘consecration’” of the part, in the sense of ‘setting it apart’ for God, ‘sanctifies’ the whole.”⁴⁰ Thus, it is not saying that salvation of the Christian spouse constitutes transferred salvation to unbelieving spouse, but that the unbelieving spouse is “set apart in a special way that hopefully will lead to their salvation (v. 16).”⁴¹ Similar

³⁹ Fee, Gordon D, *The First Epistle of the Corinthians*, Rev. Ed., The New International Commentary of the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, 1987, 2014), 329.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 332.

⁴¹ Ibid., 333.

conclusions are made with regard to the children of these marriages. Fee claims that “Paul is setting forth a high view of the grace of God at work through the believer toward members of one’s own household (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1), and for him that constitutes grounds enough for maintaining the marriage.”⁴² The crux of the whole matter for Fee is that the Christian spouse is not to pursue divorce. If, however, the unbelieving spouse seeks divorce, then it is permissible.

In the *Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Pratt’s interpretations on 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 mirror Fees. On the issue of sanctification in verse 14 he states,

The term sanctified denotes being made special or set apart for God’s use or purposes (cf. 1 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 9:13; 1 Pet. 3:15). It does not mean that these unbelievers were redeemed or justified in Christ.... Rather, through the believing spouses, the unbelieving spouses participate in the community of the sanctified people of God.⁴³

One thing that Pratt covers that Fee does not surrounds the issue of desertion. Pratt offers that verse 15 lends to Christian traditions “that support the idea that desertion is a legitimate ground for divorce. Since one who fails to provide for his families is ‘worse than an unbeliever’ (1 Tim. 5:8), some believe that desertion may be legitimate grounds for divorce even when the deserting partner claims to be a believer. The act of desertion presumably disproves his or her profession of faith.”⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Pratt, Richard L., Jr., 2000. *Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 114. Accessed August 20, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 114-115.

Thomas Oden in *I Corinthians* also agrees that in the case of unequally yoked couples, the couples are encouraged to stay together despite the mixing of Christian spouses with pagan spouses because “her cleanness overcomes the uncleanness of her husband, just as the cleanness of a believing husband overcomes the uncleanness of his unbelieving wife”⁴⁵ The unbelieving spouse receives the benefits of the Christian spouse as well as the potential for becoming a believer themselves.

In *I Corinthians*, Leon Morris delineates the crux of the issue faced by Christians in unequally yoked marriages when he states that in such cases “everything hinges on the attitude of the pagan partner.”⁴⁶ If the unbeliever desires to remain, the Christian must let them. If the unbeliever desires to leave, likewise, the Christian spouse must permit it. This is a tough pill for Christians when the Christian spouse desires to work on the marriage, but the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave. It is also difficult for those Christians who feel they have grounds for divorce but whose unbelieving spouses refuse to leave, making life at home miserable. This issue reinforces the purpose for this research – the need for support for these Christians. Further, on the matter of the unbelieving spouse being sanctified by the believing spouse, Morris also expresses “it is a scriptural principle that the blessings that flow from fellowship with God are not confined to the immediate recipients, but extend to others (e.g. Gen. 15:18; 17:7; 18:26ff.; Kgs. 15:4; Isa. 37:4).”⁴⁷ Morris, while seemingly pro-maintaining the marriage offers regarding Paul’s statement in verse 15 on seeking peace, “Marriage

⁴⁵ Thomas C. Oden. *1-2 Corinthians : I Corinthians*, (Taylor & Francis Group, ed. 2013), 64. Accessed August 20, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁶ Leon L. Morris. *1 Corinthians*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 2014), 86. Accessed August 20, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁷ Morris. *1 Corinthians*, 86.

should not be seen simply as an instrument of evangelism. The guiding principle must be ‘peace’ (v. 15).”⁴⁸

Theological/Theoretical Basis

Theology is the foundation for this research project. Successful marriages are important to God. God created them, made provision for them, and placed a high premium on their value. This is partially reflected in Genesis 1:18 where God states, “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.” If God, in His infinite wisdom, deems that it is not good for individuals to be alone then it follows that preserving marriages are a worthy mission within His kingdom. Further, in Matthew 19:8 Jesus explains how Moses permitted divorce due to “hardness of your hearts” but that “from the beginning it was not so.” It was never God’s intent that married couples divorce. In fact, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).

Unfortunately, the statistics for Christian marriages ending in divorce generally compares at the same rate as non-Christian marriages; however, they are not the same when the couple puts God at the center.⁴⁹ One recent study regarding “happy couples” concluded that, “Highly happy couples tend to put God at the center of their marriage and focus on Him, rather than on their marriage or spouse, for fulfillment and happiness.”⁵⁰ This same study

⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁹ Stetzer, Ed. “Marriage, Divorce, and the Church: What Do Stats Say, and Can Marriage be Happy?” *Christianity Today* (Feb. 14, 2014), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/marriage-divorce-and-body-of-christ-what-do-stats-say-and-c.html> (accessed, April 26, 2018).

⁵⁰ Ibid., quoting Shaunti Feldhahn, *Highly Happy Marriages*, pg., 178.

showed that just over half, 53%, actually claim to have God at the center of their marriage. To accomplish this feat within the context of a Christian couple where both have received salvation through belief in Jesus Christ is challenging enough, so where does that leave the unequally yoked married couples? Is this a realistic achievement for them? Can an unequally yoked marriage have God at the center when only one spouse knows Him? Is there some compensatory element that could fill the void the Christian experiences for the unsaved spouse's lack of godly dependency? These are the questions this researcher contemplated in theorizing for this research project.

Jesus' teachings in Matthew 19 on divorce, along with Paul's instructions found in 1 Corinthians 7, when combined and taken into consideration against the biblical foundations of marriage found in Genesis 2:24 assists in gaining "a better understanding of the issue of divorce and marriage in the Scriptures."⁵¹ Jesus does not specifically mention unequally yoked marriages, but the apostle Paul does. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 the Scriptures provides:

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (NKJV)

In this portion of Scripture, verses 12 and 13, clearly relate to Christians who are married to unsaved spouses by addressing a brother who "has a wife who does not believe" or a woman "who has a husband who does not believe," respectively. Fee cites Paul's consistency in his

⁵¹ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament – Volume 1*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2001), 591. *WORDsearch CROSS* e-book.

views on divorce, as commanded by Jesus, i.e., “Believers are not to initiate divorce.”⁵² If the unsaved spouse wishes to stay, the Christian is instructed to maintain the marriage. If the unsaved spouse leaves, the Christian is instructed to let them go. Both scenarios are dependent upon the unbelieving spouse’s action. It appears that Paul does not condone divorce for unequally yoked Christians, but he does permit it on that one exception –not the exception that the spouse is an unbeliever, but the exception that the unbeliever chooses to leave.

Fee claims that “Paul is setting forth a high view of the grace of God at work through the believer toward members of one’s own household (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1), and for him that constitutes grounds enough for maintaining the marriage.”⁵³ This view against divorce mirrors closely God’s heart on the matter of divorce generally. Divorces are not to be pursued with very few exceptions and for this reason every effort should be made to support married Christians in the maintaining of their marriages. Thus, this researcher believes there may be a gap in meeting this need within the local church. There are many helps offered to married couples and for those who are single. What is the local church offering to the unequally yoked Christian?

By identifying the unique challenges faced by Christians who maintain marriages with unsaved spouses, this researcher hopes to present the case for separate and individual support programming for these Christians. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 2:14 “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Because they and their

⁵² Fee, *The First Epistle of the Corinthians*, 330.

⁵³ Ibid., 333.

spouses draw from differing worldviews, and because their perspectives on life contrast, even if these couples participate in traditional counseling, the results will have differing effects upon each party to the marriage. As the Scripture points out, godly counsel may seem foolishness to the unsaved spouse, even absurd. Kennedy agreed with this view stating, “expecting your unbelieving husband to understand spiritual things is unreasonable on your [the Christian’s] part.”⁵⁴ Thus, support resources that provide assistance to these unique Christians in a separate format, whether in addition to couples counseling or otherwise support group, may be warranted to assist them with maintaining happy marriages and avoiding divorce.

Because of the priority God makes for preserving and maintaining marriages and in accordance with Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6:10 to “...do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith,” it may be advisable for the local church to develop programming to assist these Christian brothers and sisters with their challenging unequally yoked marital or cohabitating relationships. Also, as a body of believers, we have the responsibility to help our brethren bear their burdens as per Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Further, the Fifth Chapter of First Timothy addresses the proper treatment of church members. When in the section regarding caring for widows, the apostle Paul writes, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”⁵⁵ It would then seem logical to this researcher that any group of special need should be provided whatever help is reasonably possible from their church family.

⁵⁴ Kennedy, *When He Doesn’t Believe*, 29.

⁵⁵1 Timothy 5:8. *New American Standard Bible* (The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, Calif, 1960).

Chapter Summary

Theological and theoretical contemplation brings to the forefront the value of relationships through the biblical lens, and here, specifically marriage. God is the creator of marriage; as such, the value placed upon marriages is understood. Divorce and marital disfunction exists among Christians, and addressing those issues is important to God. The unique dynamics of an unequally yoked marriage are addressed in the Bible as a phenomenon experienced by some Christians (see Cor. 7:12-13). Whether these two individuals are able to become one flesh given their believer/unbeliever pairing is a point of consideration for this research. Further, because these spouses' viewpoints differ, traditional marital counseling by the church may be ineffective and further, as per Scripture, godly counsel may seem foolishness to the unsaved spouse (see 1 Cor. 2:14). However, Paul's advises that these Christians must not divorce if their unbelieving spouse desires to remain.

This unequally yoked dynamic may cause strain on the marriage, as studied here, particularly on the Christian party to the marriage. For this reason, biblical guidance should be shared by the local church to its unequally yoked Christian membership in support and encouragement for those sisters and brothers who find themselves bearing a burden from this unique relational dynamic. It is the church family's responsibility to do so. To assist these Christians with cultivating healthy marriages, preventing divorce, and promoting spiritual growth and maturity, the local church will fill a ministerial gap, while serving the Lord well.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Through a qualitative, phenomenological research framework, this thesis project seeks to understand, interpret and describe the experiences and challenges of Christians who are engaged in unequally yoked marriages or cohabitating relationships. This research is designed to bring to light the reasons why these Christians, despite having their faith and their church families for support, contemplate divorce due to their unequally yoked marriages or fail to get married when cohabitating with an unsaved partner. This researcher, using a methodology consisting of a qualitative questionnaire-type survey of forty-six questions using Survey Monkey® software, presented questions regarding the participants' spiritual life, personal life, church life, home life, relational experiences and thoughts regarding marriage and divorce as they specifically related to their unequally-yoked relationship.

There was a total of eight adults who participated in the research. Of those eight, seven are female and one is male; six are married and two cohabitate; and seven have children. Six of the participants have been Christians for twenty-one years or more. Six have also been in their marriage or cohabitating relationship for eleven years or more.

It is this researcher's belief that the lack of participation was affected by two factors. First, the topic involved is deeply personal and thus qualifying individuals may not have wanted to share this deeply private and personal experience, despite the anonymous survey.

Second, the incorporation of the cohabitating participants may have been seen by some pastors as endorsing that lifestyle and they therefore rejected the invitation to permit their congregations to participate.

Rationale

The rationale for this research project is derived from the researcher's personal awareness of certain challenges that some women contend with that appeared to directly relate to their unequally yoked marriages. These Christian women were frustrated about their circumstances. Each expressed their desire to do God's will in whatever action they would take to address the challenges. Each also expressed that their local church had nothing in place where they felt they fit in or could find help. All were unsure as to biblical guidelines on whether it was permitted to divorce and most had contemplated it. Thus, this researcher sought to see if other women felt similarly, and if so, to reveal to the local church a gap in ministering to this Christian demographic. Initially the researcher sought to only survey unequally yoked married couples, however, as many of today's young adults are cohabitating, unequally yoked cohabitators were invited to participate as well.

Research Design

The primary focus of the design of this research was to provide an anonymous format that would promote the most honest and raw responses. The researcher developed a forty-six-question survey to obtain research data (see Appendix B). Many of the questions were designed in such a way that the responses would provide a picture of the experience of the participants as it relates to the effects of being a Christian in an unequally yoked marriage or

cohabiting relationship. In addition, other questions were designed to reveal whether these participants felt they needed support from their local churches, whether their churches offered support for individuals like them, and whether they would participate in support offered by their church if it were available.

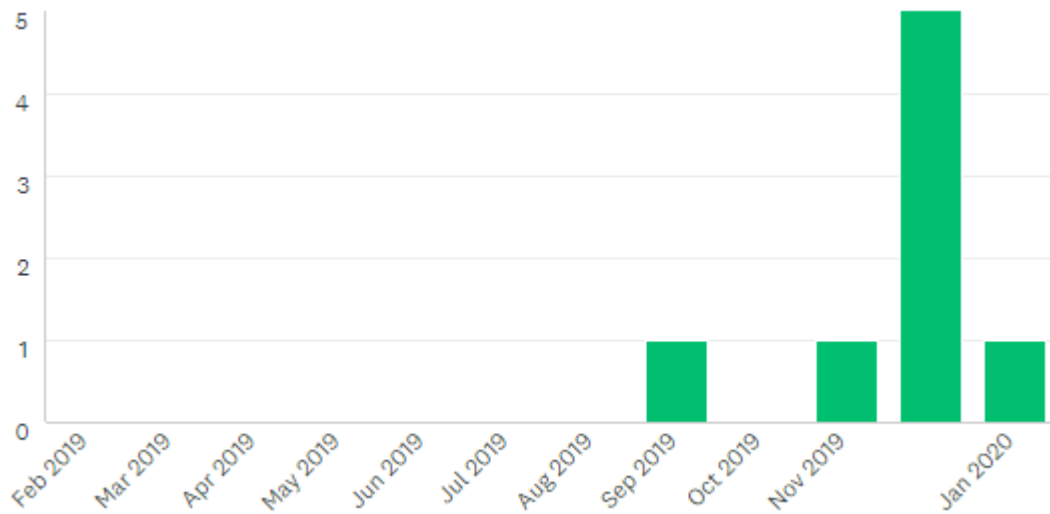
Permission from the pastors to provide the survey to what the researcher felt was a healthy pool of diverse churches was requested through formal letter (See Appendix C). There were six churches in total; three in Sussex County, Delaware and three in the southern parts of New Jersey that were sent requests. Of the six, two pastors agreed to permit participation; Mark Magee of The Crossing (Lewes Church of Christ); and Bishop Dawn R. Brown of Cathedral of Holiness Missionary Baptist Church. Both pastors responded with agreement via email.

Both pastors were then provided summary information and the survey link. Both circulated that information through their weekly email of church announcements. Bishop Brown also requested flyers (See Appendix D), which she placed at the rear of the church where other announcements were placed. The email and the flyer both gave a brief outline of the purpose of the research, the researcher's information for questions, and the link to the survey.

The survey was delivered via link to Survey Monkey®. The IRB approved consent form was placed at beginning of the survey and then the participants proceeded to answer the survey questions. Alerts from Survey Monkey were received when a participant completed the survey. The survey ran for approximately five months with eight responses in total. The responses were spaced out with the majority of the responses received in the month of

November 2019, five in total. Each of the other three months, August, October, and December 2019 received one response each. See Table I below for response volume.

Table I. Response Volume



Participants

There were eight participants in total. All of the participants are Christians. There were seven females and one male. Six of the participants are married and two cohabitate. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey there is no way to determine from which of the two churches the participants derived.

Within the open-survey timeframe concern was expressed by the researcher regarding the lack of participation from both the pastors and the participants. The researcher expressed to her mentor the concern expressed by one of the pastors who felt that participation in the research project might reflect as an endorsement of cohabitation, which is something they did not endorse. For that reason, the pastor was hesitant to share information about the research project with his church. The researcher was encouraged to keep trying to acquire additional

churches. Further, the researcher requested the two participating pastors to resend the requests for participation to their congregants, which they both did. Still, the response was much lower than expected and desired.

Measures

Primarily the measures involved in this research were to determine whether the impact of being in an unequally yoked marriage or cohabitating relationship is positive or negative. In addition, the researcher sought to measure if the participants felt they needed or wanted support from their local church. Finally, this researcher was looking to measure whether the participants had access to help from their local church if they needed it.

Data Management

The data is secured through password protected computer on the researcher's home computer. In addition, the data is maintained through log-in and password protection on the Survey Monkey® website, accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

All data analysis was done through the Survey Monkey® program. Each question was analyzed separately and the researcher was provided options on the best way to present the data, like whether to display it in a pie chart versus a bar chart. The researcher went through the data results in each question in search of trends and patterns and presented them within the results.

Ethical Considerations

IRB

All aspects of the research project were submitted to the Liberty University IRB and approval was granted (See Appendix A).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of the participants was maintained through anonymous format of the research. Further all research materials and data are maintained on the researcher's password protected personal computer.

Risks and Benefits

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Compensation

No compensation was provided nor offered to participate in this research project.

Chapter Summary

Researcher's methodology here consists of a qualitative, phenomenological study of unequally yoked couples. The participants were presented with questions regarding their spiritual life, personal life, church life, home life, relational experiences and thoughts regarding marriage and divorce as they specifically related to their unequally-yoked marriage

or cohabitating relationship. Rationale for the study is to identify a gap in the local church's support of Christians who are in unequally-yoked marriages and/or cohabiting relationships.

Research design for this thesis projected included the solicitation of local church members to take an anonymous online survey through a Survey Monkey® link. Members from two churches participated over a period of five months. There were a total of eight participants who took the survey. The data collected was analyzed by this researcher to identify patterns relevant to the study. While the response was less than desired, there was sufficient data to present in this thesis project.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview

Cultivating and maintaining a happy, fulfilling marriage within the context of an unequally-yoked relationship may prove quite challenging. Likewise, unequally yoked Christians who cohabitate may find the relationship challenging, particularly when their partner is resistant to marriage. Some challenges may seem universal as relationships go, whether unequally yoked or not, however, there is an added element of contention when a Christian is unequally yoked with an unsaved spouse/partner, even for those universal areas of conflict. There are also challenges unique to the unequally yoked dynamic, suggesting that perhaps there is a need for specialized support for these Christians. The challenges, both universal and unique, are grouped in four categories: Couple Factors; Spiritual Factors, Emotional Factors and Parental Factors. After presentation of the demographics of the results, each category will be addressed separately.

Demographics

For purposes of background, there were a total of eight individuals who participated in the survey. Among those eight, six are married and two cohabitate, all having

spouses/partners who are unsaved.⁵⁶ Seven of the eight participants are females, and seven of the eight participants have children. The same high female ratio reflected among the unequally yoked participants here is supported by the books that were written for Christians in unequally yoked marriages; as essentially all of the books this researcher found and read were written to help wives. Some were written by husbands like Lee Strobel, but for the purpose of sharing how their wives helped them find Jesus. It appears that the unequally yoked experience primarily occurs with female Christians—either they marry a non-believer against Scriptural guidelines or they become believers at some point after the marriage. Actual statistics on the accuracy of whether that is truly the case was not found by the researcher; however, further research as to the actual numbers in each category and their relevance as it relates to successful, happy marriages is a worthwhile topic for further study.

Primarily, the participants appear to be mature Christians. Seventy-five percent are long-standing Christians of 21 years or more, with one other having been a Christian between six to ten years and one other between two to five years. Further, fifty percent of the unequally yoked participants have been married/cohabiting for 21 years or more. A total of 87.5% of the participants have been in their unequally yoked relationship for 6 years or more, including the 50% that fell into the 21 years or more category (See Tables II and III below, respectively). The results reflect that the majority of the participants are mature Christians who have been engaged in long-standing marriage or relationships. Due to the anonymity of the survey and the manner the questions were presented, the researcher is unable to discern

⁵⁶With regard to Question No. 3 “Is your spouse/partner an individual who has not received salvation through belief in Jesus Christ (unsaved)?”, which is key to the purpose of the research, two of the participants responded “no.” Perhaps the phrasing of the questions confused them and they responded “no” because their spouse/partner is not saved. Otherwise, these two individuals should not have completed the rest of the survey. Because the researcher has no way to clarify the response, for purposes of this research analysis, these two participants will be counted as qualifying participants for the entire survey.

whether the one participant, who is essentially a newlywed is a mature Christian. If they were, having been in their marriage or cohabitating relation for between one month to two years, they blatantly did so against biblical advice. Second Corinthians 6:14 warns, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” If, however they are participants who have been Christians in the two to five years range, they may have been unaware of this biblical guideline.

Table II. How long have you been a Christian?

Answer Choices	Responses	
1 month to 1 year	0.00%	0
2-5 years	12.50%	1
6-10 years	12.50%	1
11-15 years	0.00%	0
16-20 years	0.00%	0
21 years and over	75.00%	6
	Answered	8
	Skipped	0

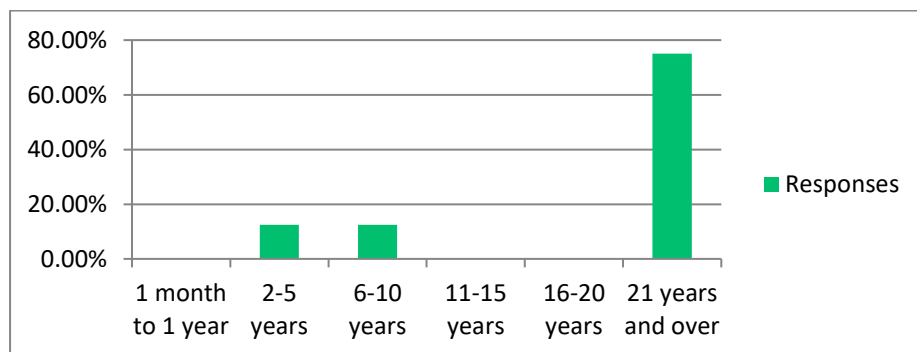


Figure II. How long have you been a Christian?

Table III. How long have you been in an unequally yoked marriage or cohabitating relationship?

Answer Choices	Responses	
1 month to 1 year	12.50%	1
2-5 years	0.00%	0
6-10 years	12.50%	1
11-15 years	12.50%	1
16-20 years	12.50%	1
21 years and over	50.00%	4
	Answered	8
	Skipped	0

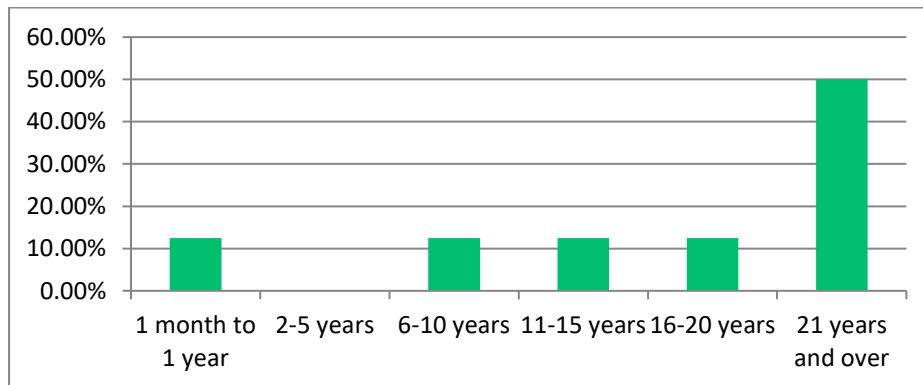


Figure III. How long have you been in an unequally yoked marriage or cohabitating relationship?

These stats insinuate that unequally yoked relationships tend to be enduring. This calls into question the effectiveness of modeling Christ in the unequally-yoked home. This is discussed further below in the section on longevity. The next section will discuss the impact of being unequally yoked on being a couple.

Couple Factors

Based on the research results, it appears that unequally yoked couples contend with several impactful matters that may affect the quality of life for the Christian party of the relationship, which is the focus of this research paper. Issues like contemplating divorce in light of Christian beliefs, the ability to socialize as a couple, headship of the family, financial decisions, and the ability to follow godly principles in the home are among the areas reported as impacted. Each of these areas of conflict may affect not only the Christian party's quality of life, but also their spiritual growth. Significantly, 75% of the participants say that being a Christian always or frequently affects their marital/cohabitating relationship in a negative fashion. This result reflects Clarke and Clarke's statement that "Chances are very good that your spiritual life has been weakened by your marriage problems. Marital conflict weakens every area of your life."⁵⁷ For this reason, because unequally yoked Christians are possibly being negatively impacted, and thus weakened spiritually, it supports the hypothesis that the local church should get involved to assist these Christians as a means of support and encouragement. It may be that a potential marital ministry for such Christians be developed in the local church. Providing the best advantage for married couples to succeed should be a pastoral priority.

This researcher has contemplated whether an assumption exists that because Christians have an advantage in trials, due to their ability to draw upon their faith for comfort, strength, and direction, that the need for help may not be dire, or at least, seen as minimal. Vertically speaking, these participant's relationships with God appear to be easy to maintain, as reflected by the longevity of the participants' relationships with God (See Table

⁵⁷ *I Don't Want a Divorce*, 26-27.

II). This is a positive reflection upon the strength found in faith. However, in that vertical relationship, the other party involved is faithful, meaning God.⁵⁸ Thus, for the Christian, God's supernatural abilities compensate for the Christian's natural weaknesses thereby keeping the relationship cemented.

In contrast, the horizontal relationship of the unequally yoked with their spouse/partner may seem one-sided, fitted for its description "unequal," and thus it creates a strain as worldviews clash at many points, including decision making and lifestyles. While it is true that the Christian party to an unequally yoked relationship may possess the byproducts of faith as a resource for support, like many other challenging aspects of life, even Christians may need help sometimes and the instant research results reveal that these Christians do and are open to help and support (see Figures IV, V, VI, XXVI, XXVIII, XXX, and XXIX).

The following Figures IV and V reflect the responses from Questions Nine and Ten of the survey, which reveal that there is a negative impact made upon Christians who are in unequally yoked relationships. Significantly, of the participants, only one reported that being a Christian did not affect their marriage, neither negatively nor positively. Ideally, a positive impact would be desirable, and 25% reported positive effects. Unfortunately, most reported negative effects; a significant 75% did so.

⁵⁸ Lamentations 3:22-23, *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."* (NKJV)

Q9 How much does being a Christian affect your marital/cohabitating relationship? (select one only)

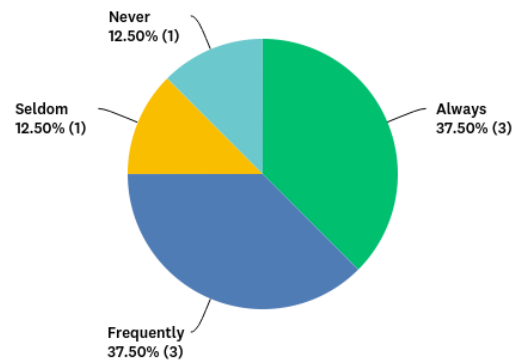


Figure IV – How much does being a Christian affect your marital/cohabitating relationship?

Q10 Is the effect on your relationship mostly positive or negative?

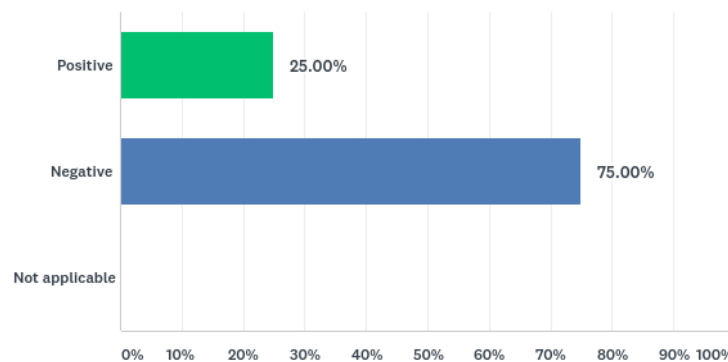


Figure V – Is the effect on your relationship mostly positive or negative?

The above charts begin to present the type of atmosphere that surrounds Christians who are within an unequally-yoked relationship. The added dynamic of differing worldviews makes the two becoming one flesh biblical picture of marriage seem unrealistic or at best

challenging. The toll taken on a marriage that suffers from constant or frequent negativity would be difficult for any spouse. The researcher has contemplated how much more of a toll it would take on a Christian spouse solely due to their desire and belief that the marriage must be maintained per godly principles. This may especially dismay a Christian who received salvation after marriage, as opposed to those who entered into an equally-yoked marriage and were aware of the biblical warnings against doing so. This specific subject matter would benefit from further research, particularly the difference, if any, between the experience between the two Christian journeys to an unequally-yoked marriage.

Participants were given five choices of what area of their relationship is affected by their unequally-yokedness, or they could write one in. The choices were: Intimacy, Raising children, Leading household, Finances, and Spending time with God. Of those choices, the top three were areas affected were raising children, leading the household and spending time with God. Specifically, the survey revealed that 25% of the participants are affected in how they raise their children; another 25% report that leading the household is affected; and another 25% report their unequally yoked relations affect their ability to spend time with God. One participant offered that the area most affected is intimacy and another reported “feeling disappointed that my husband will not worship with me.” These results imply that there are various areas in the marital and cohabitating relationship that is affected by the unequally yoked dynamic. Each area holds significance for a happy and healthy relationship, as well as for spiritual growth and avoiding divorce. While finances as an area affected is not reflected in the responses to Question 13, see Figure VI below, they are affected as it relates to giving to the church in response to Questions 19, see Figure XVI below. These areas of

contention create a prolific atmosphere for divorce contemplation and many of these participants have contemplated divorce.

Q13 Which one of the following areas is affected most in your relationship? (select one only)

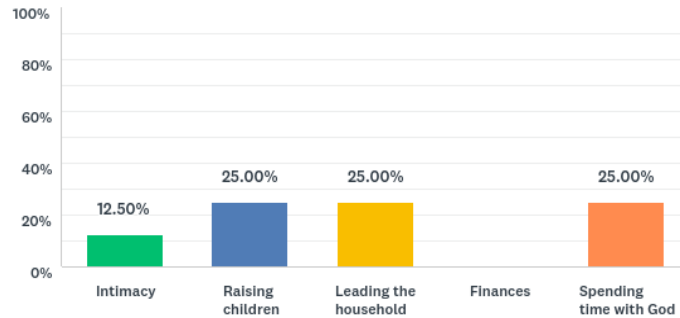


Figure VI – Which one of the following areas is affected most in your relationship?

Divorce Contemplation

Significant to this research is the desire to determine whether there is a need for the local church to assist and support unequally yoked Christian couples so that they may avoid divorce and to enhance their quality of life. The results of this research seem to support that such a need exists. Among those who participated in the survey, 87.71% have contemplated divorce and of those who have, half have contemplated it frequently, as reflected in Figure VII and Figure VIII, respectively.

Q40 Have you ever contemplated divorce/separation?

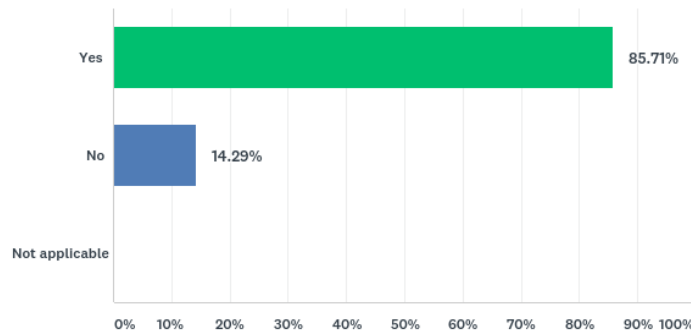


Figure VII – Have you ever contemplated divorce/separation?

Q41 How often have you contemplated divorce/separation?

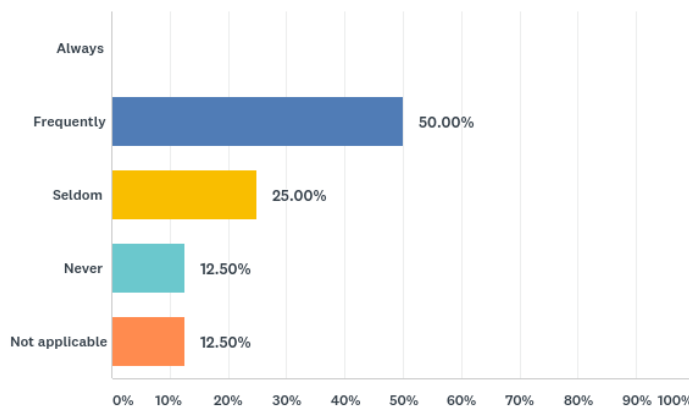


Figure VIII – How often have you contemplated divorce/separation?

In addition, half of those who contemplated divorce/separation say that their Christianity played a role in making that decision. Some of their explanations included the following:

Would prefer husband to have same beliefs so we can be on same page.
Stayed married because believe that is God's will.

After 7 years of marriage it started to come apart, it was my fault because I was trying to force my beliefs on him. I also was making the church more important than him. We are now married 27 years. I decided with some

research the problem was mine. I had to love him and be the wife God wants me to be, the example of a Godly woman....

I want to make sure that I follow God's instructions and have done all that He has told me before I separate.

These unequally yoked Christians, despite having an unhappy marriage and contemplating divorce/separation, expressed a priority for handling the situation according to biblical principles. Of those who contemplated divorce/separation, 37.50% feel their Christian beliefs have prevented them from getting a divorce and one individual felt stuck in their marriage due to their Christian beliefs.

The struggle for them may be understandable when one considers the reasons for their marital problems fall into the categories expressed in Jack Wellman's article "Primary Causes for Divorce: A Christian Study." Among the top causes of divorce listed by Wellman were some of the issues the participants expressed in their survey responses, specifically, "religious and cultural differences" was listed, along with "lack of communication, differences in priorities, and differences in child-rearing."⁵⁹ Lack of communication and differences in priorities and child-rearing may be common to Christian and secular couples alike. However, the unequally yoked specifically fall into the religious and cultural differences category, a category that may amplify the others. As known causes for divorce, the local church in its efforts to support and minister to its congregants, may find this fact to provide further support that a need exists here to provide assistance to strengthen and support these Christians.

⁵⁹ Wellman, Jack, "Primary Causes for Divorce: A Christian Study," What Christians Want To Know - October 1, 2012, <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/primary-causes-for-divorce-a-christian-study/>. (accessed 6/11/18).

Researchers have discovered there are many benefits that result from stable and fulfilling marriages; benefits that include health, happiness and living longer.⁶⁰ In contrast, “when the relationship falters, other pillars of well-being are also at risk.”⁶¹ Research has determined that the greatest contributing factor “of these effects is the quality and longevity of the connection between the partners.”⁶² With that correlation playing such a significant role in couple success and wellness, it is worthwhile for the local church’s involvement with unequally yoked couples to consider ways to help them forge solid connections, where ever and however they may be found.

As it relates to the two participants in a cohabitating relationship, both or 100% would prefer to be married and both or 100% feel that their Christian beliefs have prevented them from getting married, see Figures IX and X below. Again, another sign that church support may help these Christians with coping with and addressing their situation in a manner that is biblical, instructive, and supportive.

Q43 If you cohabit with your partner, would you prefer to be married?

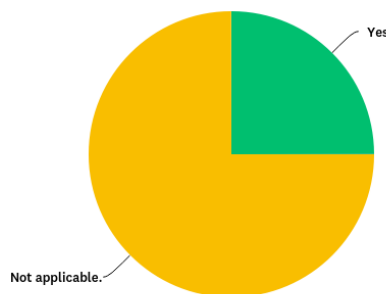


Figure IX – If you cohabit with your partner, would you prefer to be married?

⁶⁰ Karney, Benjamin R. and Thomas N. Bradbury. "Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability in the 2010s: Challenging Conventional Wisdom." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82, no. 1 (2020): 100.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Q44 If you cohabitate, do you feel that your Christian beliefs have prevented you from getting married?

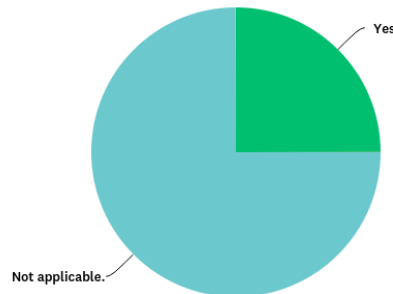


Figure X – If you cohabitate, do you feel that your Christian beliefs prevented you from getting married?

Socializing

Fifty percent of the participants claim their biggest obstacle as an unequally yoked couple is their inability to socialize together. (See Figure XI below). The high percentage alludes to a desired need that is not being met among this Christian demographic. Some couple studies have discovered that socializing is beneficial to strengthening marriages. Virginia Pelley recently wrote about some of the findings in these studies in her article “The Profound Importance of Having “Couples Friends.” Quoting a finding of Kathleen Holtz Deal, Ph.D., MSW, professor emerita in the school of social work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, Pelley offered: “When socializing, people are happy, which can make them more appealing. You see things that make you more appreciative of your partner than in the day-to-day of home life where you don’t have those opportunities.”⁶³ In addition, these

⁶³ Pelley, Virginia, “The Profound Importance of Having “Couples Friends:” Experts agree that meaningful friendships with other couples can make your own relationship stronger.” *Fatherly*, August 30, 2018. <https://www.fatherly.com/love-money/the-profound-importance-of-having-couples-friends/>.

couple friends may prove to be good means to gauge how their own relationship measures up. Research appears to indicate the depth of the relationship with the other couple directly impacts the friendship's ability to positively influence the other couple's relationship. Pelley further offers,

The type of couples who have the most to gain from friendships with other couples are "emotion sharing" types who, per Greif, are able to foster deep, satisfying connections. But not every couple is into that. Some people would rather just have fun and take a break from their complicated lives. Greif says there's nothing wrong with that, so don't stress if there's no ride-or-die couple in your life.⁶⁴

Quoting Keith Welker Ph.D., a social psychologist at the University of Massachusetts, Boston who also performed a study on this topic, Pelley added, "To get the benefit of couple friends, there needs to be high self-discloser interaction, not just hanging out with two warm bodies who happen to be in relationships with each other," Welker says. "Boring double dates don't seem to have a great effect on relationship satisfaction."⁶⁵ Thus, if the local church were to consider implementing a ministry promoting couple friends, this information would be something to consider in terms of effectiveness of such a ministry.

Gaining the necessary trust to cultivate the transparent friendships that produce positive impacts on marriages may be where "couples friends" hit a wall. Building trust takes time and typically requires common ground. The unsaved party to the unequally yoked may have trust issues with befriending a Christian couple; fearing ulterior motives may be at work for instance. On the other hand, the Christian party may be leery of befriending a secular couple as the threat of evil company corrupts good may unintentionally influence

⁶⁴ Pelley, "The Profound Importance of Having "Couples Friends:"

⁶⁵ Ibid.

them.⁶⁶ Thus, this researcher believes a couples friendship between unequally yoked pairs might be the most beneficial set-up.

Q12 What is the biggest obstacle you face in your relationship? (select one only).

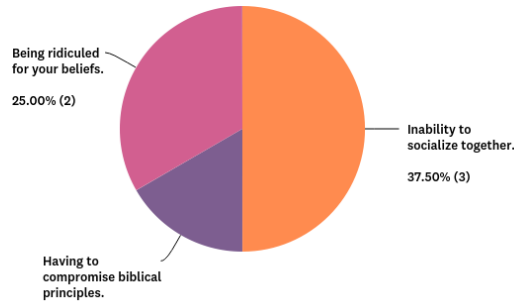


Figure XI – What is the biggest obstacle you face in your relationship?

While the inability to socialize is the standout area of obstacles, other areas of concern also surfaced in the survey responses. Twenty-five percent claim being ridiculed is the biggest obstacle they face in their unequally yoked relationship, an obstacle with obvious negative ramifications to the Christian partner's self-esteem and self-image, among other emotional disorders. According to Crabb, individuals need security and significant to develop personal worth.⁶⁷ This participant seems to be under attack and thus, harmful to their wellbeing. In addition, one of the participant's biggest obstacle is compromising biblical principles, an area of great concern for Christians and one that may cultivate a myriad of other issues with regard to a Christian's spiritual wellbeing.

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:33.

⁶⁷ Crabb, Larry, *Effective Biblical Counseling: A Model for Helping Caring Christians Become Capable Counselors*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 63.

Following Godly Principles at Home

As the sanctification process is a key element to the Christian walk, this researcher sought information on the unequally yoked Christian's ability to practice their faith at home. More than half of the participants, 62.50%, expressed that it is somewhat difficult to follow godly principles at home, with 37.50% reporting that it is not difficult at all (See Figure XII below). While unsaved spouses/partners do not seem to have a problem with their spouse/partner going to church, they are not as amenable with bringing church home. These Christians may be leading somewhat compartmentalized lives, keeping church and home separate to some extent. The synoptic gospels record in Mark 3:23–27; Matthew 12:25–29; and Luke 11:17–22 of how a house divided against itself cannot stand. Some of these individuals appear to be confronted with this very situation, at least to a certain degree.

When it comes to allegiances, individuals are either for Christ or against Him.⁶⁸ In the case of the unequally yoked, it is not a matter of the Christian individual going against themselves. It is a matter of each of the parties to the marital union going against the marital union itself. The question becomes can this union stand against opposing worldviews? The results reveal that they can stand, as many of the participants are maintaining long-standing relationships despite their unequally-yoked union. The question then becomes can the quality of the marital relationship be good? Here is where the dividedness breaks down the union. These individuals report struggles following godly principles within their homes. If nowhere else, individuals typically expect to be able to be themselves in their home. Some of these Christians are restrained from doing so because of their unequally yoked union. The emotional effects of such a situation may cultivate negative effects on their spiritual growth

⁶⁸ Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23.

and wellbeing. The spiritual factors involved are discussed further below in this research paper.

Q18 How difficult is it for you to follow godly principles in your home?

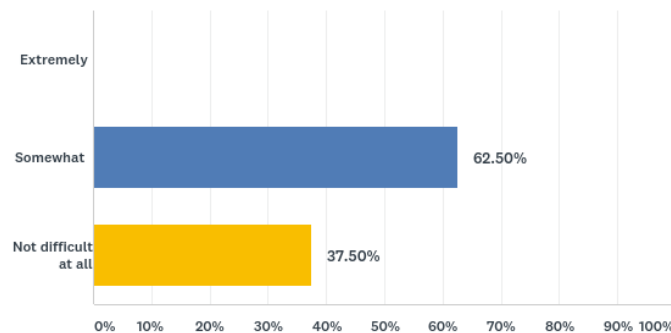


Figure XII – How difficult is it for you to follow godly principles in your home?

Spiritual Factors

Spiritual growth and maturity are foundational elements for Christians. Unequally yoked Christians may face additional challenges as a result of being married to or cohabitating with an unsaved spouse/partner in developing their spiritual growth and maturity. Factors like the ability to spend time with God, feelings of being responsible for their unsaved spouse/partner's salvation, the ability to practice biblical morals and values freely, and permitting conflicting headship of the home are among the challenges that may affect these Christians' spiritual growth and maturity. The local church's support, particularly in this area, would seem a natural and expected branch as churches are in the business of assisting members with their spiritual growth and maturity, and some of these Christians may need a little extra help in this department.

Spending Time With God

Spending time with God may occur in a variety of ways. It may refer to prayer, reading Scripture, attending church, watching Christian programming, among many other things. The researcher when presenting options to Question 16 did not follow it with an elaboration on what spending time with God meant as it relates to this survey. This would be an area where follow-up questions would be pertinent, especially given the percentage of individuals who claim that spending time with God is an aspect of their life that they would change with their unsaved spouse/partner was fairly high. The results report that 37.50% of the participants say that spending time with God is an area affected by their unequally yoked relationship (See Figure XIII). Further, 50% of the participants want to spend time with God with their spouse/partner, with one participant writing in that they would like to change “feeling disappointed that my husband will not worship with me.”

Q16 What aspect of your life would you change with your unbelieving spouse/partner that would enhance your quality of life?

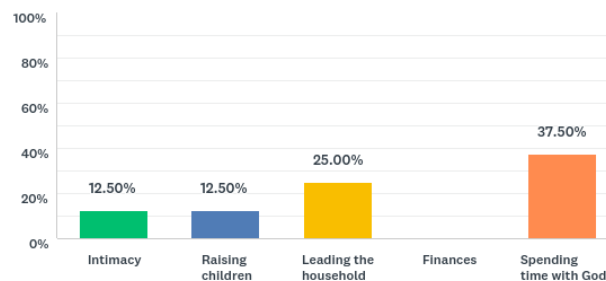


Figure XIII – What aspect of your life would you change with your unbelieving spouse/partner that would enhance your quality of life?

Hinderance of a Christian’s ability to spend time with God is an important area of concern for the church to be apprised of. Spending time with God is where significant ground is gained in a Christians’ spiritual growth and maturity. Through fellowshipping,

prayer and bible study, among others, Christians find peace, renew their strength, seek answers, gain insight, unload burdens, learn godly living, and get to know their Heavenly Father, developing a relationship with Him. The potential spiritual handicap these unequally yoked Christians may be experiencing is difficult to miss given the results. Consequently, the matter of providing support and encouragement through the local church is paramount to the encouragement, support, growth and maturity of these individuals.

Responsibility for Unsaved Spouse's Salvation

Some of the research materials shined a light on a common burden that may be carried by unequally yoked spouses as it related to their perceived responsibility for their unsaved spouse/partners' salvation. In fact, individuals like Lee Strobel have dubbed it as a calling of the spouse to evangelize their mate. This belief may present undue and unnecessary pressure on these Christian spouses. The Bible clearly states in John 6:44 that it is God who draws men and women to himself. That is not to say that God does not use spouses as a means to reveal himself and draw individuals to salvation, but more relevant is for the Christian spouse to live out their Christianity such that the lifestyle may appeal to their spouse, causing them to seek more knowledge about it. First Peter 3:1 states "without a word, [the husband] may be won by the conduct of their wives." For that reason, unequally yoked Christians may consider their situation as an opportunity for ministry for their unsaved mate. However, taking it to a level where the Christian feels burdened with the responsibility may be unhealthy for the Christian and for the marriage. The research participants were not queried about their experiences on this topic, which is worthy of further investigation.

Beliefs Conflict

Among the choices presented to participants as an obstacle related to their unequally yoked relationship was having to compromise biblical beliefs. Figure XI above reveals that at least one participant classified this as the biggest obstacle in their relationship. The participant did not specifically elaborate the type of compromise and the survey was not formatted for the participants to do so, however, it is a matter of import for the local church.

Living a holy lifestyle is a goal of Christians. The Bible in 1 Peter 1:16 admonished God's children to "Be ye holy, for I am Holy." Further, Ephesians 5:1 advises Christians to be "imitators of Christ." Having to compromise biblical beliefs would likely stunt the sanctification process, making becoming holy and Christlike more challenging, as well as causing the Christian to experience guilt for their compromising actions. These are issues of concern for the local church in ministering to its members. This is also an area where further research would be appropriate.

Serving in the Church

One area that does not appear to be an obstacle for unequally yoked Christians is their ability to serve in the church. The results report that 87.50% of the unbelieving spouses/partners do not prevent their Christian counterparts from attending church, and when they do, it is seldom (See Figures XIV and XV). This is encouraging news as these Christians are not hampered by inaccessibility to the church. For that reason, inviting them to participate in ministry events may help to strengthen and encourage them spiritually and emotionally. It also opens the door for them to participate in any ministry that might be implemented to help them in their unequally yoked situation. In both instances, it affords the

local church with the opportunity to help them carry the burden of their challenging relationship.

Q14 Does your unbelieving spouse/partner prevent you from attending church?

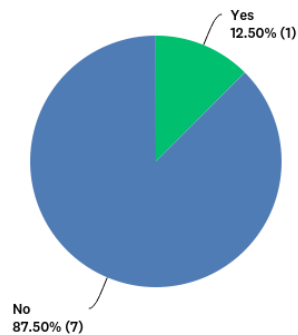


Figure XIV – Does your unbelieving spouse/partner prevent you from attending church?

Q15 How often are you prevented from attending church? (select one only)

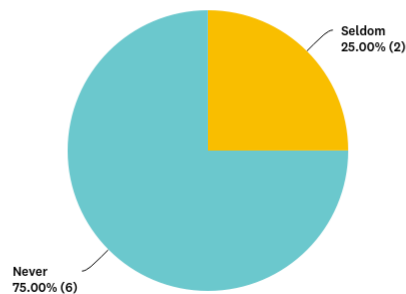


Figure XV – How often are you prevented from attending church?

Although unsaved partners do not seem to have problems with their Christian spouse/partner attending church, they do seem to have a problem with them supporting their church financially. Of the participants, 50% claim that supporting their church financially causes trouble in their relationship, but all participants contribute either always (75%) or frequently

(25%). (See Figures XVI and XVII, respectively). This result presents somewhat of a disturbing observation. Some of these spouses appear to be defying their spouses in this area of finance. While not directly asked, it may be that these spouses feel their obedience to God in paying tithes and offerings trumps the desires of their unsaved spouses/partners.

Q19 Does supporting your church financially cause trouble in your relationship?

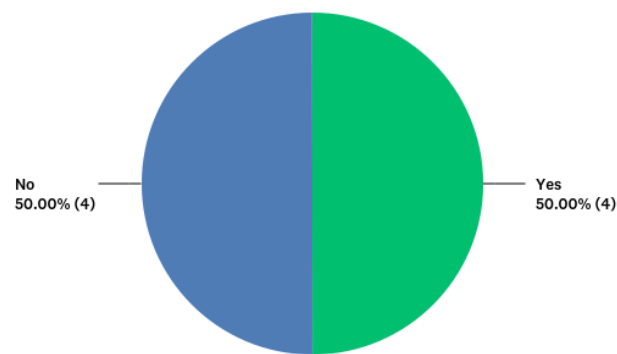


Figure XVI – Does supporting your church financially cause trouble in your relationship?

Q20 How often are you able to contribute financially to your church?

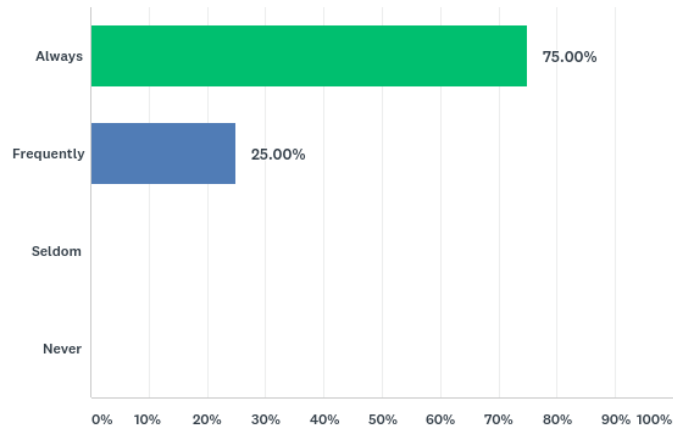


Figure XVII – How often are you able to contribute financially to your church?

Further, this could present an interesting dilemma for Christian advisors, whether they are counselors or pastors, inasmuch as on the one hand, the Christian is being obedient to godly principles with regard to tithes and offerings;⁶⁹ on the other hand, this could be seen as disobedience to the husband's headship in the home in the area of finances.

A similar argument could be made with regard to the unequally yoked Christian giving time to the church, as well as participating in ministry groups. Among the participants, 62.50% say giving time to the church causes trouble in their relationship, but all participants give time regardless, either always (37.50%), frequently (50%) or seldom (12.5%). In contrast, 62.50% say participating in ministry groups does not cause trouble in their relationship, while 37.50% do struggle in this area. All participants claim to participate in one degree or another, however, 50% always, 37.50% frequently, and 12.50% seldom. (See relevant charts below).

⁶⁹Malachi 3:10.

Q21 Does serving (giving your time) in the church cause trouble in your relationship?

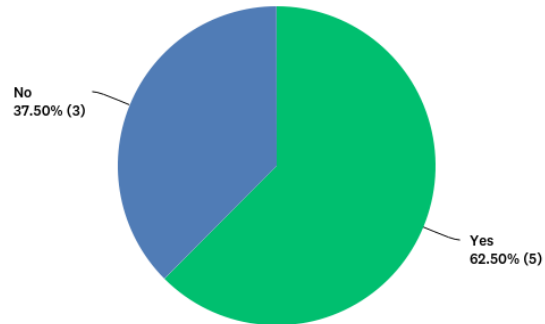


Figure XVIII – Does serving (giving your time) in the church cause trouble in your relationship?

Q22 How often are you able to serve (give your time) in the church?

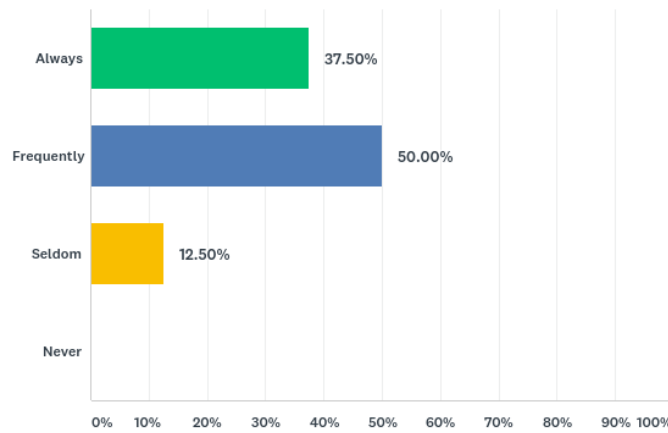


Figure XIX – How often are you able to serve (giving your time) in the church?

Q23 Does participating in ministry groups (women's ministry, men's ministry, choir participant, hospitality helper, etc) cause trouble in your relationship?

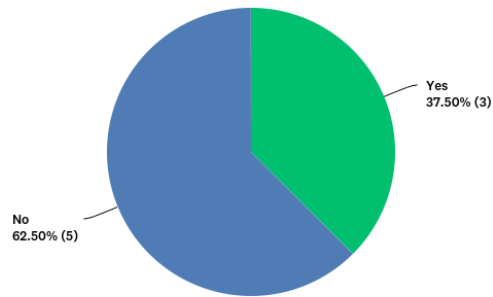


Figure XX – Does participating ministry groups cause trouble in your relationship?

Q24 How often are you able to participate in ministry groups?

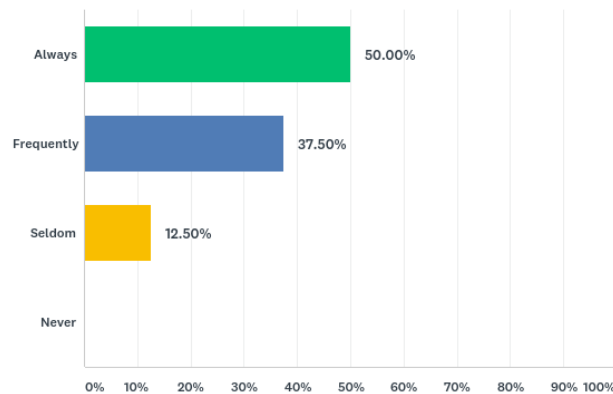


Figure XXI – How often are you able to participate in ministry groups?

Headship of the Home

Twenty-five percent of the participants expressed their desire for their spouse to take the headship role in the home (see Figure XIII, Q16). This desire likely stems from the biblical principles they have learned as Christians as a litany of Scriptures reflect this structure. (See, 1 Cor. 11:3, Gen. 3:16, Eph. 5:22-23, Col. 3:18, and 1 Pet. 3:1, among others). Sarah Flashing offers regarding this area of challenge that “If her husband isn’t a Christ follower, he cannot provide leadership in matters of faith even though he might be able

to function with the borrowed capital of godly wisdom in other meaningful ways.”⁷⁰ In the absence of a husband fulfilling his God-ordained responsibilities, wives should not seek to assume his role but to fulfill their own God-ordained responsibility of living in a way that demonstrates respect and purity, that “they may be won without a word” (1 Peter 3:1, NASB). It may not be the ideal reflection of the godly marriage the Christian spouse desires, but that does not necessarily mean that marital happiness cannot be achieved and maintained.

Christians who are in unequally yoked relationships seems to be challenged by spiritual factors that include spending time with God, feeling responsible for their unsaved spouse/partner’s, beliefs conflicts, serving in the church, and headship of their homes. This may present an added challenge for a successful marriage, an area that the church may be able to assist with through counseling, mentoring or educating, among others. Spiritual factors are important for the Christian spouse/partner as it relates to their spiritual growth and maturity, but their emotional wellbeing is another area this research sought to evaluate in these unequally yoked marriages or cohabitating relationships.

Emotional Factors

The researcher sought to gain insight into whether or not unequally yoked Christians experienced certain emotional factors linked directly to their unequally yoked marriage/cohabitating relationship. Specifically, the participants were asked whether they experienced aloneness, grief, or depression. The results reveal that some participants do

⁷⁰ Flashing, Sarah. “Honoring God in an Unequally Yoked Marriage.” The Gospel Coalition, INC., U.S. ed., June, 19, 2012. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/honoring-god-in-an-unequally-yoked-marriage/>.

suffer emotional effects from their unequally yoked situation. However, most claim they do not. The results of each emotional factor are addressed separately below.

Aloneness

Clinton and Hawkins offer that, “loneliness is a human response to being alone because God created humans with a need for relationships. From the moment of birth, humans seek attachment and connection.”⁷¹ Common words associated with loneliness include isolation, disconnection, and alienation. These are words that should never be associated with sisters and brothers of faith. Of those surveyed, 37.50% said they feel alone in their Christianity because of their unequally yoked relationship. Interestingly, while 62.50% reported that they do not feel alone, in what appears to be a contradiction, 75% of the participants say they feel alone in their Christianity “to a certain degree,” with 50% of them feeling alone “frequently.” That result left only 25% of the participants reporting that they seldom feel alone and 25% saying they never feel alone (see Figures XXII and XXIII).

The exact nature of the aloneness these individuals are experiencing is unclear and may need further exploration. It may be that they feel isolated from other church members by not being able to share their unique struggles due to the personal nature of their situation. Clinton and Hawkins note that the “loneliest people are often **in crowds**.”⁷² On the other hand, they may be feeling lonely in their unequally yoked relationship because loneliness “happens when a person feels there is no one with whom to share joys and

⁷¹ Clinton, Tim and Ron Hawkins. *Biblical Counseling Quick Reference Guide: Personal & Emotional Issues*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007, 143.

⁷² *Biblical Counseling Reference Guide*, 143 (emphasis in original).

disappointments,”⁷³ and they are unable to share with their spouse/partner because they may be the reason for the disappointment or may resent the joys from spiritual experiences. Some combination of both may be a more accurate picture of their situation. Either way, help from their church family may be warranted to assist them with overcoming their feelings of aloneness.

Q33 Do you feel alone in your Christianity because of your unequally yoked relationship?

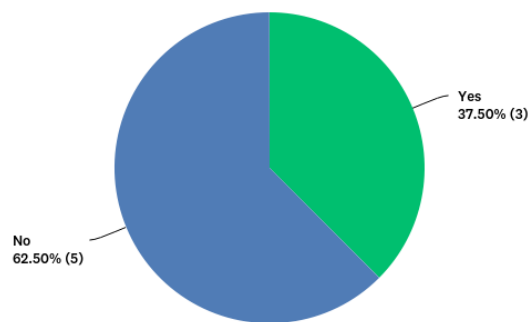


Figure XXII – Do you feel alone in your Christianity because of your unequally yoked relationship?

Q34 How often do you feel alone?

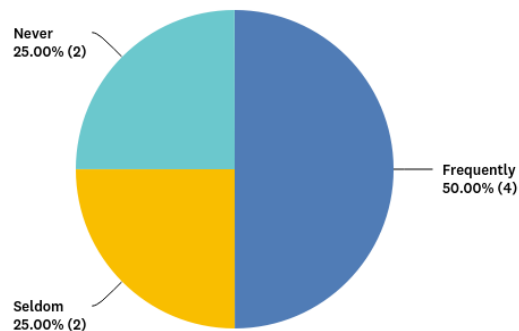


Figure XXIII – How often do you feel alone?

⁷³ Ibid.

Grief

The participants were asked whether they felt they suffered from grief as a result of their unequally yoked relationship. Half of the participants reported that they do experience grief; with half of those who said they do, experiencing it frequently, while the other half experiencing it seldom (see Figures XXIV and XXV below).

Q35 Do you suffer from grief because of your unequally yoked relationship?

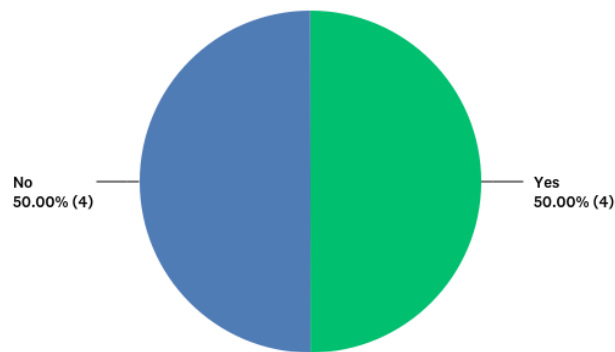


Figure XXIV – Do you suffer from grief because of your unequally yoked relationship?

Q36 How often do you experience grief?

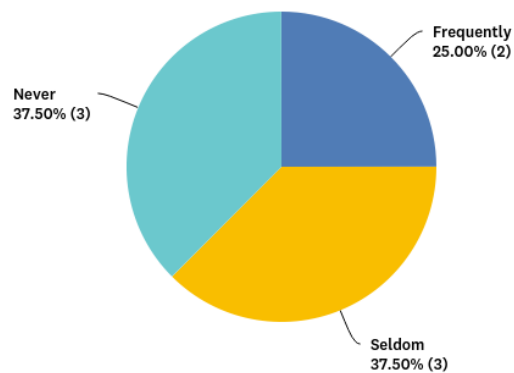


Figure XXV – How often do you experience grief?

Although, grief is more frequently associated with death, it is not always the case. Many other trials of life may cause grief. Among them might be “divorce, abuse, abandonment, illness, life transitions, disaster, or any other kind of misfortune.”⁷⁴ According to Clinton and Hawkins, grief is a “complex set of emotions,” and they reassuringly add that those emotions are “normal.”⁷⁵

Since these Christians seem to be experiencing grief, consideration of this emotional factor should be addressed when developing programming for this group. Significantly, programming should not be geared to simply cheer them up or to help them forget their situation, as that may “add to the burden because the person who is grieving has to either avoid [people] or ‘fake it’ rather than have the chance to share what [he or she] is really feeling.”⁷⁶ Lysa Terkeurst wisely wrote “the longer we avoid feeling [the pain], the more we delay healing.”⁷⁷ Further, the counseling community agree that “suffering and wayward people need more than a verse and a prayer.”⁷⁸ Therefore, upon considering ways the local church may support these Christians, it may be prudent to investigate ways to help them that promote facing and dealing with their circumstances, as opposed to escaping them.

A point of contemplation for this group, and perhaps an area for further study, may be the effects of grief as it relates to the Christian projecting their feelings of anger and sadness

⁷⁴ Clinton & Hawkins, *Biblical Counseling Quick Reference Guide*, 122.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 122-123.

⁷⁷ Terkeurst, Lysa, *It's Not Supposed to be This Way: Finding Unexpected Strength When Disappointments Leave You Shattered*, (Nashville: Nelson Publishing, 2018), 36.

⁷⁸ Powlison, David, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*, Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010, 270.

onto God, which may occur in cases of grief.⁷⁹ The research reflects that these Christians' challenging situation is enduring. Therefore, it might be beneficial to consider just how much impact the situation has on the Christian party's spiritual growth and maturity. If the Christian has long-standing feelings of God's non-involvement or distance in remedying what they feel is a negative situation, there may be a need for the church to get involved to support and encourage in an effort to counter those feelings. One significant caveat to assisting an individual with overcoming grief is that the goal "isn't to get things back to normal" but rather to "find and accept a new 'normal.'"⁸⁰ Some investigation into how a new normal would look for an unequally yoked couple may take some added research for the local church, but certainly a worthy quest given these sisters and brothers merit help if the church is able to provide it.

Depression

Depression does not appear to be a major problem with these participants as only one of the eight participants report that they have experienced depression due to their unequally yoked relationship. The one participant who does, experiences it frequently, and that is not to be downplayed. A clearer picture of this emotional factor may need further investigation as the number of participants here was low and may not reflect completely the extent to which unequally yoked Christian may experience depression. This may also reflect the strength of the participants' Christian joy (Neh. 8:10 and John 17:13).

⁷⁹ Clinton & Hawkins, *Biblical Counseling Quick Reference Guide*, 123.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 124.

There are some emotion factors that manifest in the Christian spouse/partner as a result of their unequally yoked union. The research here showed that aloneness and grief manifests to a greater degree than depression. Local church programming may be able to assist these Christians in dealing with these factors and if they can, should.

Parental Factors

Like the other areas of marital life affected by being unequally yoked, 25% of the research participants report that the area most affected for them is raising children (see Figure XIII above). This is an important sphere of influence for Christians. Christian parents desire their children to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ and for them to serve Him and share the gospel message with their offspring as well. While this researcher will not discuss the exact nature of the effects on children, studies show that parental conflicts do have effects on them. One recent study found that:

When parents are frustrated with their own relationship they may lack emotional energy to respond supportively to children's needs (Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001). That is, negative emotions in the interparental relationship may spread to parenting behaviors. In contrast, parents who are less preoccupied with relationship problems may have the emotional resources to be sensitive to their children's needs. Consistent with the spillover hypothesis, destructive conflict behaviors in the interparental relationship predict parents' emotional unavailability (Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006) and hostility (Coln, Jordan, & Mercer, 2013; McCoy, George, Cummings, & Davies, 2013).⁸¹

In another study aimed to assess how marital conflicts effect parenting practices researchers discovered that "parents' destructive marital conflict tactics influenced their way of coping with children's negative emotions 2 years later, but the influence operated differently for

⁸¹ Kopystynska, Olena, Katherine W Paschall, Melissa A Barnett, and Melissa A Curran. "Patterns of Interparental Conflict, Parenting, and Children's Emotional Insecurity: A Person-Centered Approach." *Journal of family psychology* 31, no. 7 (October 2017): 923.

fathers and mothers.”⁸² “For mothers, we found that mothers’ unsupportive parenting tended to increase with more fathers’ self-reported destructive conflict behaviors.”⁸³

Results suggested that mothers’ parenting is influenced by their spouses’ (i.e., fathers’) way of destructively dealing with disagreements in marital interactions, indicating the interdependent and relational nature of family relationships. Father’s self-reported destructive marital strategies affected the mother, resulting in higher levels of negativity in the mother’s self-reported parenting behaviors. Thus, destructive conflict behaviors displayed by fathers in the marital subsystem may spillover to negativity in the mother–child subsystem, leading to mothers’ greater tendency toward engaging in unsupportive parenting practices.”⁸⁴

Interestingly, one aspect that may help alleviate some of the conflicts may be accomplished through the parents’ social support system. A recent study on conflicts of co-parenting divorcees discovered that among the risk factors to children among co-parenting conflicts:

. . . [O]ne aspect that has received little attention in empirical research is the role of the social network, including friends, family, and even lawyers (Milardo et al. 2014). This oversight is surprising, given that it is generally recognized that the success and failure of relationships does not only depend on the individual partners but also on their social networks, *both in intact relationships* (Kennedy et al. 2015) and post-divorce relationships (McDermott et al. 2013). As an example, it has been found that social network approval is an important protective factor for the quality of romantic relationships (Le et al. 2010). Also, social network support was found to be an important protective factor for parents’ individual adjustment after divorce (Albeck and Kaydar 2002; Kramrei et al. 2007).⁸⁵

⁸² Gao, Mengyu Miranda, Han Du, Patrick T Davies, E. Mark Cummings, and E Mark Cummings. “Marital Conflict Behaviors and Parenting: Dyadic Links Over Time.” *Family relations*. 68, no. 1 (February 2019): 144.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Visser, Margreet, Catrin Finkenauer, Kim Schoemaker, Esther Kluwer, Rachel van der Rijken, Justine van Lawick, Hans Bom, J Clasien de Schipper, and Francien Lamers-Winkelmann. “I’ll Never Forgive You: High Conflict Divorce, Social Network, and Co-Parenting Conflicts.” *Journal of child and family studies*. 26, no. 11 (2017): 3056. (Emphasis added).

These findings support the benefits that may result from local church involvement with Christian parents who are dealing with conflicts due to unequally yoked relationships.

Church Involvement Factors

Christians expect to receive a certain level of assistance from the local church they attend. In essence, the church is a body of believers in Christ who are responsible for making disciples⁸⁶ and for loving God and loving people,⁸⁷ especially those of the house of faith.⁸⁸ The research results here discovered that 87.50% of the participants in the survey believe that their church should provide education and support for Christians in unequally yoked relationships (see Figure XXVI below). In addition, not only do they seem to believe the church should assist them, but they seem to believe the church needs to help others like them. Notably, all of the participants (100%), believe that education and support groups for unequally yoked couples would benefit other church members (see Figure XXX below). This result begs the question, and unfortunately one that this researcher failed to ask, of whether the participants are aware of other unequally yoked Christians who need support and if so, how many. Even with the low number of participants, the high percent of those who did participate to acknowledge their need and the need of others for support is difficult ignore.

⁸⁶ The Great Commission – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10 (NKJV).

Q27 Should your church provide education and support for unequally yoked relationships?

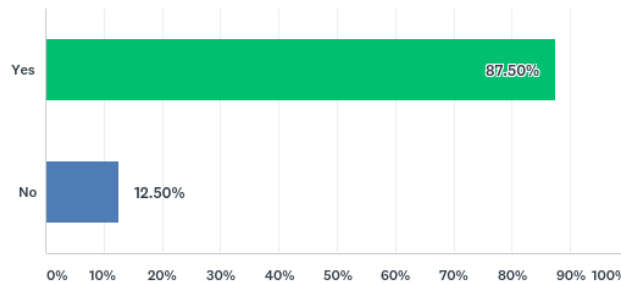


Figure XXVI – Should your church provide education and support for unequally yoked relationships?

Q31 Do you believe that education and support groups for unequally yoked couples would benefit other church members?

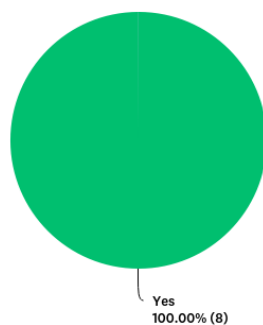


Figure XXX – Do you believe that education and support groups for unequally yoked couples would benefit other church members?

Unfortunately, 75% of the participants report that their church does not provide adequate education and support for unequally yoked Christians (see Figure XXVII below). This may point to a gap in the programming of some local churches in meeting this need. Further, this potential gap coincides with the actual literature as many of the available books on this topic do not address church programming as a resource of strength and guidance, with the exception of Berry's book *Beloved Unbeliever* and Mitchell's article "Spiritually Single:

Ministering to the Unequally Yoked.”⁸⁹ It is significant that the church meet the needs of its members whenever possible. Discovering gaps and addressing them is one way it may do so.

It has been some time since Kennedy’s discovery that:

Sadly, a common complaint among married women who go to church alone is feeling like they don’t fit anywhere. Sunday school classes are generally designed for couples, or singles—and they are neither. It’s like churches don’t know what to do with the “spiritually single.” It’s an anomaly. Square pegs in round holes.⁹⁰

It appears that not much has been done since her discovery to help these women. It was an urgency felt by Berry then it should be an even greater urgency addressing the neglect of these Christians now. This researcher believes, like Berry, that it is the churches responsibility to “learn about their unique problems, literally bear the burden of their unsaved mates with them.”⁹¹ It is Berry’s contention that this responsibility falls to the elder women of the church as instructed by the apostle Paul in Titus 2:4 to teach them “to love their husbands, to love their children.” Berry’s passion for these unequally yoked individuals derived from her bible study class, of which half were unequally yoked. She claimed they were easily recognizable as those who “always had the most questions, the ‘what ifs,’ the deepest feelings of frustration. They obviously needed more counsel.”⁹² She eventually got permission to develop a ministry for these Christians.

A group setting similar to what she developed may be positively received based on the research data. Her group met once per month for educational purposes, selecting relevant

⁸⁹ Mitchell, “Spiritually Single.”

⁹⁰ Kennedy, *When He Doesn’t Believe*, 189.

⁹¹ Berry, *Beloved Unbeliever*, 162.

⁹² Ibid, 163.

topics and having designated speakers teach the topics. She also scheduled activities to “be arranged intermittently, whenever they were feasible, to include the husbands,” listing events like potluck dinners, theater parties, beach trips, or ball games.⁹³ These would be excellent ways to meet the need reflected in the research here that being able to socialize with their unbelieving spouse is a problem.

Mitchell, who dubbed the unequally yoked as “Spiritually Single,”⁹⁴ concluded that these Christians contend with guilt, loneliness, the balancing of church and home life, as well as problems with raising children.⁹⁵ Like Berry, she felt the church could do more to specifically assist these uniquely situated members of the body. Mitchell recommended five courses of action that the church might take to assist and support these spiritually-single members:

1. Encourage friendships and fill the empty spot in the pew next to him or her.
2. Eliminate the word “couples” from classes or activities.
3. Schedule some “ladies only” or “men only” activities.
4. Make sure tables are longer than “four only” for seating.
5. Quietly provide a class or training for spiritually singles.⁹⁶

Item number one might help but it would be indirectly and who is to say the empty spot is from a missing spouse, hence not necessarily identifying an unequally yoked individual.

Further, this researcher disagrees with eliminating the word “couples” from classes or activities because there is a need for ministries geared towards couples, but for those that are not, there is no need to use the term couple. With regard to item number three, today, many

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, “Spiritually Single,” 18.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 19.

churches provide ministry events for ladies only or men only, so that is a positive for these Christians as they may fellowship with believers separately, although this is not what many of them desire. Further, item number four is self-explanatory, inasmuch as having odd number seating allows for singles to find a seat among couples, thereby making room for them, but not necessarily helping them.

However, item number five is relevant and may be a valuable tool to meeting the needs of this spiritually-single Christian demographic today. There is some question as to why it would need to be “quiet,” however. Still, that may be a desirable format for the unequally yoked. Either Berry’s or Mitchell’s proposed programming offers worthwhile consideration, as well as other programs individual churches may determine to fit their members. What is important, is that the church help. As present, at least according to these participants, many of the churches are not. (see Figure XXVII below).

Q28 Does your church provide adequate education and support for unequally yoked relationships?

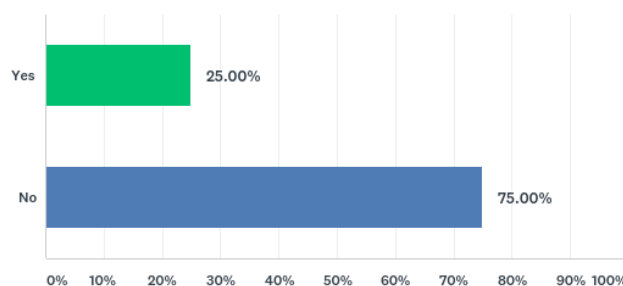


Figure XXVII – Does your church provide adequate education and support for unequally yoked relationship?

In addition to if the church should help, the participants were asked how their church could help. They were presented with five choices, plus an on option to write in some other manner of help not listed. Assistants through support groups ranked first. Notably, none of

the participants selected specialized workshops or seminars, and none of them wrote in an answer. The results of their choices are reported below in Figure XXVIII. Those areas chosen by the participants are discussed further below.

Q29 How could your church support you better in your unequally yoked relationship?

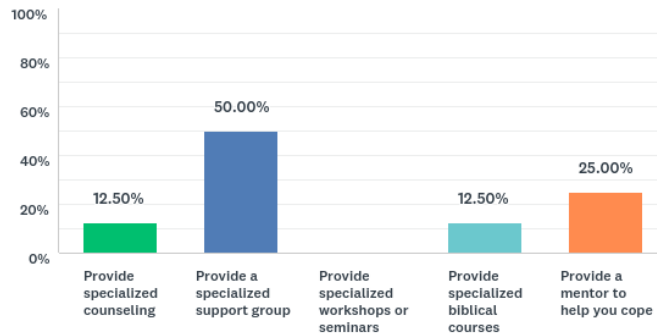


Figure XXVIII – How could your church support you better in your unequally yoked relationship?

Support Groups

Providing a specialized support group was favored by 50% of the participants as the best way the church could help support them (see Figure XXVIII above). In addition, 75% of the participants report that they would attend a church support group for unequally yoked relationship (see Figure XXIX below). These percentages may indicate the confidence and comfortability these Christians have in their local churches and their preference to be helped by them as opposed to some other manner outside of the church. This is mere conjecture, however, their unique classification as unequally yoked, a classification derived from the Bible and not the secular world, makes their preference understandable and even logical. Who else would know about a biblical issue better than the pastor, Christian counselors, or bible teachers?

Q30 Would you consider attending a church support group for unequally yoked relationships?

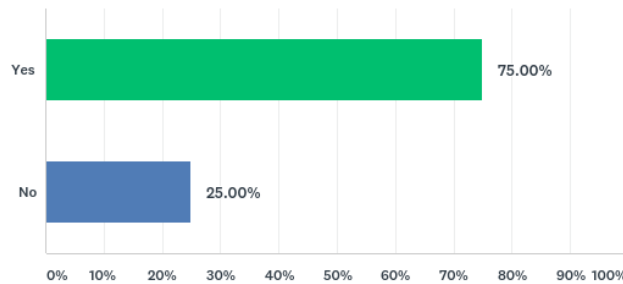


Figure XXIX – Would you consider attending a church support group for unequally yoked relationships?

Support groups are known to “focus on specific emotional or relational needs,”⁹⁷ which fits the instant challenges faced by unequally yoked Christians. An article published by the American Psychology Association offered that group formats are becoming more popular as recent studies reveal their effectiveness.⁹⁸ These studies are finding that the effectiveness appears to stem from the group members’ “common identity and a sense of shared purpose.”⁹⁹ In addition, the group can assist each other for the benefit of one another because the studies referred to in the article also showed that “seeing others' progress can help group members realize they, too, can cope and feel better.”¹⁰⁰ To an even deeper degree the participants’ shared religious beliefs add an element of common identity, which appears to increase connectivity and bear positively on the effects of the support group experience.

⁹⁷ Clinton, Timothy and George Ohlschlager, *Competent Christian Counseling: Foundation & Practice of Compassionate Soul Care, Vol. I*, Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2002, 451.

⁹⁸ Paturel, Amy, “Power in numbers,” American Psychology Association, *Monitor on Psychology*, November 2012, Vol 43, No. 10, pg. 48, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/11/power> (accessed on 3/2/30).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

It may be that for these Christians, support groups would be the best avenue for the local church to help as some have determined that a “support group format lends itself to faith-based interventions as support groups typically assemble cohesively around a commonly shared experience and/or set of ideals such as religious faith (Albrecht and Goldsmith 2003; Anderson 2013; Docherty 2004; Keating 2013).”¹⁰¹

In addition, one study determined that, when one’s religious faith was understood it “acted as a powerful tool . . ., bolstering self-efficacy, instilling hope, and even promoting positive religious coping.”¹⁰² Being understood adds a level of comfort, as well as eliminates having to explain your religious worldview to those who might not understand it. Ultimately the level of connection is deeper as “participants feel an integral aspect of their identity, their religious faith, is understood and nurtured beyond what is typical in non-religious relational therapy groups;”¹⁰³ however, the study admitted that at present, these conclusions are conjecture and further exploration is recommended.

One point of observation in the instant research was the level of commitment the participants had to their Christian faith. They attended, served, and supported their local churches despite the struggles they faced due to their unequally yoked relationships. Therefore, it seems logical that they would be receptive of a support group that was developed and run by their local church. The God-connection was key to the eating disorder support groups as well and they determined it played a significant role in successful therapy. That research concluded:

¹⁰¹ Pivarunas, "A Qualitative Exploration of a Faith-Based Support Group," 216.

¹⁰² Ibid., 221.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 222.

Lastly, thematic analysis identified how religious beliefs interacted with participants' beliefs about relationships; within the identified need for relational growth was the understanding that one's relationship with God came before all other relationships and that any healing from the eating disorder would proceed from and through God. To this end, one participant said, "It was so critical that God was the center."¹⁰⁴

A God-center therapy within the secular counseling arena is difficult to fathom but in a local church setting, that type of therapy is expected.

These types of groups could provide encouragement, education and perspective in dealing with issues specific to the unequally yoked dynamic.¹⁰⁵ Clinton and Ohlschlager offer that the "church can uniquely combine professionals and lay persons to lead a wide variety of groups in a manner and intensity matched by no other organization."¹⁰⁶ This puts them in a unique position to be able to positively impact and minister to this class of Christian. Further, providing specialized support groups present an occasion for the local church to not only meet the needs of these Christians, but also to provide opportunities for other church members to serve and use their gifts.

Among the modalities of Christian counseling small groups presented in Clinton and Ohlschlager's book *Competent Christian Counseling*, is a combination of what they labeled "support groups" and "counseling/therapy groups." Counseling/therapy groups are similar to support groups as define above with the exception that the leaders are trained in a variety of techniques to provide assistance in many different problem situations and the "leaders are more skilled in process application."¹⁰⁷ Special care should be taken when choosing a leader

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹⁰⁵ *Competent Christian Counseling*, 451.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, citing (Bibbert & Wichern, 1985; Galloway, 1995; Price, Springle & Kloba, 1991).

¹⁰⁷ Clinton & Ohlschlager, *Competent Christian Counseling*, 451.

for such group. One who has the strong qualities of a Christian leader along with training and gifting in the area of pastoral counseling would fit well. A potential format, as suggested by Clinton and Olhslager is shown below in Table IV:¹⁰⁸

Table IV: Support Group Format

1.	Arrival and Socialization (Mixing)
2.	Praise and Worship
3.	Opening Prayer
4.	Development or Reminder of Ground Rules
5.	A Teaching on The Holy Spirit
6.	Study of The Bible-Related Material
7.	Praise Reports
8.	Prayer Requests
9.	Prayer
10	Socializing and Departure

With prayer, discussion and guidance, the local church may develop the necessary programming that works best for their group.

Mentoring

There were participants who expressed their desire for a more personal approach, with 25% preferring church support by providing a mentor to help them cope. Mentoring has been defined as “a relationship where a more experienced individual (the mentor) provides guidance and support to a less experienced organizational member (the mentee).”¹⁰⁹ This form of support has been found “likely to improve mentees' mental health and, potentially, to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 453-454.

¹⁰⁹ Gill, Michael J., Thomas J. Roulet, and Stephen P. Kerridge. "Mentoring for Mental Health: A Mixed-Method Study of the Benefits of Formal Mentoring Programmes in the English Police Force." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 108, (2018): 201.

reduce their anxieties.”¹¹⁰ Two established benefits of mentoring, in both adults and youth is self-efficacy and self-worth.¹¹¹ In youth, it has proven helpful as a vehicle promote identity development.¹¹² In this case, for the equally yoked Christian, it may be that a mentor might help them promote their identity as a child of God and all the benefits and resources that stem from that identity. Ultimately, it seems “mentoring positively supports mentees' affective well-being and prepares them to face stressful and anxiety-provoking situations.”¹¹³ Thus, a local church might consider this option in providing support for unequally yoked Christian members; however, mentoring seems to fit more within the realm of coaching for a career path by someone who had taken that path. It may be difficult to find individuals who have successfully navigated the waters of an unequally yoked marriage to engage them in mentoring unequally yoked Christians who are struggling in their marriage. Further exploration as to whether this method of assistance would be beneficial should probably take place.

Specialized Counseling

One participant reported that they would be better supported by their church providing special counseling. This avenue of support would require greater effort for the local church. Identifying a qualified candidate internally with the appropriate credentials to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹¹¹ Ibid. and Deutsch, Nancy L., Cristina L. Reitz-Krueger, Angela K. Henneberger, Valerie A. Futch Ehrlich, and Edith C. Lawrence. "It Gave Me Ways to Solve Problems and Ways to Talk to People: Outcomes from a Combined Group and One-on-One Mentoring Program for Early Adolescent Girls." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 32, no. 3 (2017): 293.

¹¹² Deutsch, Nancy L., et al., "It Gave Me Ways to Solve Problems," 293.

¹¹³ Gill, Michael J., et al., "Mentoring for Mental Health," 203.

provide the counseling might be challenging if the local church desired to handle inhouse. Another option for support in this manner is to refer the individual to an outside qualified counselor for help. The local church may wish to include these options among the others when assessing the best way to provide support for these Christians.

Bible Courses

Finally, one participant expressed that providing specialized biblical courses would be helpful. Certainly, this may be done as local church education is regularly developed and incorporated. In terms of delivery methods, there is no shortage as this information may be delivered via book study, bible study, workshops and seminars, among others. Providing biblical courses is likely the easiest and most convenient manner in which the local church may provide support to these Christians.

Longevity of the Situation Calls for Help

One of the most glaring yet surprising results of the survey is that fact that 75% of participants are long-standing Christians for 21 years or more with 50% having been in an unequally yoked relationship for 21 years or more. This calls into question whether modeling has much effect on an unsaved spouse/partner, since they remain unsaved? Upon considering this result in light of Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:16 which states, "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" when advising Christians to remain married to their unbelieving spouse, this result seems to be in contrast. However, Paul offers no

guarantee, solely an opportunity to share Jesus. It is only the Father who may call individuals to salvation.¹¹⁴

This may be a source of discouragement and grief for a Christian in this unequally yoked position. They may feel as if their prayers seeking salvation for their spouse are going unanswered or they may feel as if they are a failure as a Christian modeling the life of Christ unsuccessfully, or at least to a degree that is not appealing to their spouse. Lee Strobel stated in his book, “Leslie figured out how to live out her faith in a way that began to attract me rather than repel me.”¹¹⁵ But how long did it take Leslie to figure it out? Will every spouse eventually figure it out? Was it really Leslie or the Father? This may be the crux of the issue. The testimony of one of the examples in Lee’s book *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*, was “She had been married to David for thirty years, and their different beliefs about God were just one of the reasons why they ended up living separate lives under the same roof.”¹¹⁶ To spend that length of time in a bad marriage is certainly not ideal. Two separate lives, what’s the point? Dr. Clarke offers, “As your marriage breaks down, the amount of time you spend together become less and less. You become masters at avoiding each other.”¹¹⁷ Again, living separate lives becomes the norm. The researcher did not specifically phrase a question to respond to this specific result of marital turmoil, however, one may assume, this is a common dynamic among the unequally yoked, the Christian life and the non-Christian life.

¹¹⁴ John 6:44.

¹¹⁵ Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*, 18.

¹¹⁶ Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*, 106.

¹¹⁷ *I Don’t Want a Divorce*, 32.

Kennedy provides some insight into ineffective modeling:

As soon as my Christian actions become my focus, “maintaining my witness,” I negate Christ’s death. As a result, what I present to my husband isn’t the real gospel; it’s just a religion—what I do for God. In my attempt to model Christ, I don’t. He then gets a false picture, and I’m missing out on experiencing the grace and freedom I have in Christ—and we’re both miserable.¹¹⁸

Further, Kennedy affirms the significance of proper modeling. She stated the men she interviewed that became believers long after their wives, admitted that “they were encouraged more by the way their wives lived their faith than anything else.”¹¹⁹

One reason for the longevity of the unequally yoked relationship may relate to the fact that many of the participants desired to do God’s will. They either believe with a level of certainty that it was God’s will to stay married, or if unsure, are intent to remain in the relationship until they are certain of God’s will for the next step in their unequally yoked marriage. Despite those expressions, none of the participants, with the exception of one, felt stuck in their marriage due to their Christianity. This was a concern for Clarke whose philosophy for unequally yoked couples is “to not simply avoid divorce and be stuck in the same old miserable marriage” but rather to change the marriage into a “marriage that really works.”¹²⁰

Modeling Christianity is an important component for the Christian party to the unequally yoked relationship. First Peter 3:1-2 states regarding wives:

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may

¹¹⁸*When He Doesn’t Believe*, 72.

¹¹⁹ *When He Doesn’t Believe*, 100.

¹²⁰David Clarke and William G. Clarke, *I Don’t Want a Divorce: A 90-Day Guide to Saving Your Marriage* (Revell: Grand Rapids, 2009), 17.

be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. (NKJV)

The model suggested by Lee Strobel is the one used by a woman who was in an unequally yoked marriage for thirty years. Her model was “seeking wisdom from Scripture; praying to God for help; starting with a simple step of action; and gently persisting over a period of time despite initial rejection.”¹²¹ Therefore, it seems the local church must not underestimate the power of modeling Christ by a believing spouse to unbelieving husband.

Larry Crabb asserts what might be a worthy consideration for unequally yoked Christians in answer to the question, “What is the bridge that draws the life of Christ out of one person’s heart and carries it across the distance between two people into the deepest recesses of the other person’s heart?”¹²² He claims it is a matter of seeing and believing the vision God has for the individual with hope of its manifestation. He further stated:

When the gospel enables us to believe that something terrific is alive in another and that something terrifically alive in us could actually touch it, good things happen. We accept people for who they are, we grieve over every failure to live out their true identity, and no matter what happens, we continue to believe in what they could become without demanding that it happen on our timetable or for our sakes, or that we play a big part in making it happen.¹²³

Crabb presents a perspective that unequally yoked Christian may benefit upon adapting it their own. This perspective transforms what may have been perceived as a burden (the responsibility for the unsaved spouse/partner’s salvation), into a perceived joyful, positive

¹²¹ Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*, 107.

¹²² Crabb, Larry Dr., *Connecting, Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1997), 52.

¹²³ Ibid, 53.

and hopeful posture, free of any burden. This and the other information presented in this section should be taken into consideration when developing programming for this group.

Promoting Happiness in the Relationship Calls for Help

One of the biggest obstacles faced by the participates was their inability to socialize together as a couple. This may play a key role in the reason why many unequally yoked couples essentially lead separate lives. There are limits on the way they can socialize together. For example, the unbeliever may desire to go to a beef and beer and the believer may desire to go to a church concert.

Lee Strobel and Leslie Strobel personally experienced these areas of contention when Leslie became a Christian and Lee, for some time during the marriage, did not. Lee would shout at Leslie “This isn’t what I signed up for!” He claimed:

That was the opening salvo in what turned out to be a turbulent, strife-filled, emotional-churning phrase of our marriage. Our values began to clash, our attitudes started to conflict, and our priorities and desires were suddenly at odds. Arguments erupted iciness replaced warmth, and more than once I let my frustration and anger spill over into an epithet-laced tirade of shouting and door slamming.¹²⁴

This is perhaps an area where the local church could become creative. Who says a couples’ event has to be churchy? There has to be neutral venues where the unsaved spouse would be able to feel comfortable and yet the Christians are able to maintain honorable godly expectations.

¹²⁴Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*, 17.

Contemplating Divorce Calls for Help

An astounding 85.71% of the participants have contemplated divorce, and of those who contemplated it, they did so frequently. This statistic is a red flag to the local church regarding the need for help for these unequally yoked Christians. This is not surprising when considering that none of the participants' overall feeling about their unequally yoked relationship is positive, rather, the majority were neutral at 65.50%. The rest were negative, at 37.50%.

Biblically speaking, this is a real problem for these particular Christians. God hates divorce and desires that the earth be populated with godly offspring.¹²⁵ In addition, Jesus set the record straight for those who sought exceptions for permitting divorce by stating in Matthew 19:6 "What God has joined together, let man not separate." He further explained that Moses permitted divorce due to adultery because of the "hardness of people's hearts" but that is not the ideal. In addition, as previously stated, the apostle Paul, advised unequally yoked Christians to remain in their marriages unless they are deserted by their unbelieving spouse.¹²⁶ Thus, the condition of unequally yokedness is not grounds for a divorce, only adultery or desertion qualifies. This reinforces the need for the local church to support these Christians to help them maintain their marriages.

¹²⁵ Malachi 2:15-16.

¹²⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:15.

Positives Aspects

The majority of the participants feel as if their spouse/partner respects/values their beliefs, which may be something that the church could use as an area to work with and build upon. In addition, most are not prevented from attending church, which is good as the Christian has access to this valuable resource for spiritual fuel and encouragement while coping with their challenging relationship. For these reasons, the local church should welcome the opportunity to minister to this Christian demographic. In doing so, they may increase the quality of these marriages, assist cohabitators with choosing marriage, and decrease the number of divorces among this group.

Chapter Summary

Unequally yoked Christians reported wanting help and guidance from their local churches with managing their relationships. They also reported their willingness to participate in the programming designed for them and expressed that there were other members who would benefit as well. The church involvement factors laid out above present avenues of ministry that the local church may ensue in their efforts to help their members. Whether by support group, mentoring, counseling or biblical courses, the need for help seems to be present, and the local church should consider what their role is in dealing with this Christian demographic. The church is always concerned that its members are spiritually healthy. It has also concerned itself with promoting healthy marriages and avoiding divorce. These factors add another level of importance to assisting these unequally yoked Christians who desire to do the will of God and are struggling with doing so, contemplating divorce frequently. There is much the church can build upon as these unsaved spouses are not

disallowing church attendance and thus the access to help is there. Local churches, thus, may wish to query their membership and see if the need exists and provide help.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research here, there seems to be Christians who are engaged in unequally yoked marriages and cohabitation relationships who desire help from their local church with coping with the challenges of that relationship. Because of the priority God makes for preserving and maintaining marriages and in accordance with Paul's instructions in Galatians 6:10 to "...do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith," it may be advisable for the local church to develop programming to assist these Christian brothers and sisters with their challenging unequally yoked marital or cohabitating relationships.

In marriages where one spouse is a believer in Christ and the other is not, the challenge resides in how to preserve the marriage and assist it with thriving in the face of opposing worldviews and priorities. As per the Bible, what is clear is that God the Father and Jesus are pro marriage and preservation of marriages are their preference and priority. In Genesis 1:18 God states, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." Whether that decision by God was based on the possibility "that the story of the creation of woman is basically etiological or at least that 2:24 is an etiological insertion," as some would argue is irrelevant.¹²⁷ What is relevant is that God thought it was important

¹²⁷ Robert B. Lawton, "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (March 1986): 97-98.

enough that He would create that relationship. In addition, as is pointed out by commentary scholar Donald Senior, in Matthew 19 1-12 there is evidence supporting that Jesus advocates for marriage as a fulfillment of God's command uniting couples in an unbreakable union.¹²⁸ These Scriptures support the priority placed on the marriage relationship by God and Jesus. While the researcher recognizes that many churches place priorities on marriages, there is a glaring shortfall in assisting the unequally yoked. These sisters, primarily, and brothers in the faith have been essentially left to fend for themselves.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, he writes that the Corinthians should not divorce if the unbelieving husband or wife desires to remain within the marital relationship¹²⁹ Steven C. Burton in his journal article "Sanctification and oneness in 1 Corinthians with implications for the case of 'mixed marriages' (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)," concludes that "In the case of a mixed marriage, the unbelieving partner, together with the children, is sanctified by remaining in oneness with the believing partner."¹³⁰ In keeping this important principle in mind, support for the Christian members of a mixed marriage should be a priority for local churches, particularly in light of its ramifications upon the unbelieving spouse and children.

By providing guidance and biblical instruction, many unequally yoked couples can attain a happy and healthy marriage, albeit the Christian spouse will carry a heavy burden.

L.H. Andrews makes clear:

[I]f you have married [a non-believer], or will marry one that is not a faithful member of the body of Christ, you must not let them lead you astray; but do all you can to win them to Christ. If you fail, make the best of the situation.

¹²⁸ Donald Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Matthew*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1998.

¹²⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:12-15.

¹³⁰ Stephen C. Barton, "Sanctification and oneness in 1 Corinthians with implications for the case of 'mixed marriages' (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)." *New Testament Studies Jan 2017* (January 1, 2017), 1.

Suffer as you must, but be true to the Lord. And remember you cannot win them for Christ by staying away from worship, and doing things that are displeasing to the Lord, even if it does please them.¹³¹

If local churches provide support to those church members who are bearing the burdens associated with being in an unequally-yoked married or cohabitation situation, then perhaps happiness may be achieved and divorces may be avoided.

The one thing the local church may wish to avoid is what Clarke suggests, and that is to not give these Christians the advice that has been the norm from some time, at least for the wives with unsaved husbands:

There isn't much you can do about your situation, honey. The Bible teaches wives to submit to their husbands. If you submit to him and just keep on loving him, he'll eventually change into a godly husband. If he doesn't, well, that's too bad. I guess that's a burden God expects you to bear. Make God your husband. Oh, and keep praying.¹³²

Clarke's reasoning is that that advice will never work. Instead, he asserts that "As long as [an unequally yoked Christian wife] keep[s] meeting needs and 'submitting' to him and his sin, [the unsaved spouse] thinks everything's fine."¹³³ There is a tricky balance to be found for the unequally yoked wife, to which help from the local church may assist in helping her delineate and practice. This research revealed that these Christians desire to do God's will in this situation, which suggests that they would be open to the church's help.

As it appears these participants are open to participating in specialized programming for unequally yoked Christians and all agree that education and support groups for these

¹³¹ L. H. Andrews, "Courtship, Marriage, Home, Divorce." (1950).Stone-Campbell Books. 415. http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/415, 15.

¹³² Clarke, *I Don't Want a Divorce*, 184.

¹³³ Ibid., 185.

couples would benefit church members, this researcher believes that it is a worthwhile cause for local churches to inquiry among their congregants if such a need exists. The fact that 87.50% of the participants responded that their church should provide education and support for unequally yoked Christians reflects that they feel there is a need for such programming. Of the types of programming most favored was support groups. This might be a good place for the local church to start. Support group format and type would best be determined by each individual church upon assessment of the participants' desires for either an informal information discussion type group, a more formal counseling/therapeutic with a qualified facilitator type group, or some other format as appropriate or as the Lord leads.

Also, based on the premise and belief that prayer changes things,¹³⁴ that support group could be a prayer group. All of the books mention prayer as a resource for the unequally yoked. Nancy Kennedy, based upon her personal experience, offered that our prayers should be more focused on changes to self, as opposed to change to spouse.¹³⁵ Her experience was that as her prayer life increased, dependence on God became greater, which manifested into a grateful heart that “produces a calmness and enthusiasm for living that’s evident—and my husband sees.”¹³⁶ Stormie Omartian promotes prayer in her book *The Power of a Praying Wife*, on the premise that the Scriptures say we are all given a measure of faith.¹³⁷ Therefore, Omartian concludes, “Even if he doesn’t know the Lord, you can still

¹³⁴ James 5:16 “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, **[b]** fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

¹³⁵ Kennedy, *When He Doesn't Believe*, 137.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Omartian, Stormie. *The Power of a Praying Wife*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), 1997, 195, citing, Romans 12:3 “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as **God has dealt to each one a measure of faith**, (emphasis added).

pray for faith to rise in his heart and look for an improvement in his level of peace.”¹³⁸

Because the desire for group support is reflected in the research results, commencing a specialized prayer group for unequally yoked Christians may be beneficial.

It may be that the primary battle these unequally yoked married Christians face is with their relationship with God. Dr. Larry Crabb proposes that “Every problem is an opportunity to know God better.”¹³⁹ He challenges supporters with posing the question, “are we struggling more about their relationship with Christ than about their financial welfare or resistance to sin or career choices or relational success or health problems?”¹⁴⁰ Based on that premise it could be argued that one whose relationship with God is strong and on track would cultivate, peace, joy and hope that would trump their present unequally yoked marital challenges.

Unique to this unequally yoked dynamic with the younger generation is real possibility of cohabitation. In this regard, church leaders may need to reassess their approach. In addition, the church, in its efforts to stay current on contemporary culture, would benefit its kingdom work by addressing this Christian dynamic. As is concluded in Sarah Flashing’s article:

As our culture becomes less churchied, more single-marrieds will be in our midst. The challenge is not just for wives of unbelieving husbands—or husbands of unbelieving wives—to know how to glorify God in his design for marriage, but even

¹³⁸ Ibid, 196-197.

¹³⁹ Crabb, Larry. *Connecting, Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing Group, 1997), 152.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 153.

for pastors and ministry leaders to connect, equip, and minister to them.¹⁴¹

Ultimately, this research has brought to light that there are Christians in unequally yoked marriages or cohabitating relationships who are struggling and desire help from their local churches. It is this researcher's belief that the local church should provide them help.

Further Considerations

While much has been discovered regarding challenges faced by Christians who are in unequally yoked marriages and cohabitating relationship, the research here leaves a good deal of latitude for further exploration. It would be worthwhile for local churches to inquire among their congregations to determine if similarly situated Christians exist who want help. Further, it would be beneficial to conduct a study that monitors the effects of the various program types to determine: 1) whether providing programing for this group is helpful or not; 2) if it is helpful, in what areas (spiritual, marital or quality of life); and 3) whether any one particular program proves to be more helpful than another.

Advice to Pastors

This is obviously a delicate and personal experience for individuals, and one pastors hope none of their flock are faced with; however, if they do, I offer the following advice. Christians are concerned with what the Bible says about their situations, including unequally yoked Christians. Their desire is to do God's will, as was reinforced by this research; thus, helping them become familiar with the relevant scriptures such as 1 Cor. 7:12-16; 2 Cor. 6:14; Mal. 2:16; 1 Pet. 3:1, among others should be a priority. Addressing their situation in a

¹⁴¹ Flashing, Sarah. "Honoring God in an Unequally Yoked Marriage." The Gospel Coalition, INC., U.S. ed., June, 19, 2012. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/honoring-god-in-an-unequally-yoked-marriage/>.

biblically-informed manner is the best place upon which to build. Then strengthen them by reinforcing their status as God's child and reminding them of the hope that derives from having such a powerful advocate to help them cope and thrive in their marriages is a key element. Further, pastors should comfort these individuals by reassuring them that their church family is available to help, as many feel like they are not being supported.

A pastor could likely counsel these members individually if there are only a few; however, if a pastor determines that they have a number of members who fall into this marital dynamic, a support group may be justified. Inquiring among those individuals to determine their receptiveness of such a format would be warranted. The support group format outlined in Table IV above would be ideal. Bottom line: every effort should be expended to keep these couples together, as it is God's will and appears to be the will of many of these Christians as well.

A Note About Resiliency

While much focus has been given to what the Bible says about these marriages and how to help the Christian survive in them, there is little known about those individuals who have successfully navigated and thrived in their unequally yoked marriages. In her article "Can Unequally Yoked Marriages be Successful?" Sabrina Black warns the unequally yoked Christian to not have a "defeatist attitude" in dealing with their unequally yoked marriage.¹⁴² Black realized that her "problems had more to do with my negative attitude and my approach toward my husband than with his relationship (or lack of relationship) with Christ."¹⁴³ Perhaps there is some wisdom to be found in her discovery. Information is good but attitude

¹⁴² Black, Sabrina D. "Can Unequally Yoked Marriages Be Successful?"
<https://marriageemissions.com/can-unequally-yoked-marriages-be-successful/>

¹⁴³ Ibid.

may be the make or break ingredient here. It may just be that perspective plays the biggest role in establishing resiliency and success.

A research project that seeks out unequally yoked couples who have been successful in their marriages would be an excellent extension and perhaps the capstone to the formula in making these marriages survive and thrive! Such a project might discover what the Christian party does to overcome some of the typical complaints such as the inability to socialize together and spending time with God. They could share what is working, and what was not working that they changed. The answers to these inquiries and more would be quite insightful for pastors and unequally yoked Christians alike to assist with building stronger, happier marriages.

Personal Thoughts

In the end, this researcher admits that there are some things that remain to be explored. Gaps in survey questions, like inquiring whether these Christians felt burdened with the responsibility of evangelizing their unsaved spouse/partner, are important and relevant experiences for exploration of this group. Also, further elaboration on certain topics covered in the survey, for example, in what ways was their spending time with God hindered due to their unequally yoked relationship, would have added a better understanding of what exactly the Christian was experiencing. Certainly, this knowledge would assist the local church with developing programming that may help address those hindrances.

One major point of contention for this researcher was the attempt to group together married and cohabitating couples for this research. Although it is becoming more common for couples to cohabit today, and that some of those couples are unequally yoked, their couple dynamic remains different from married couples. They may have unequally yokeness

in common but the ties that bind the couples together are dissimilar. Married couples exchange vows. There is essentially no verbal or contractual mechanism that binds the cohabitating couples. This alone puts the individuals within the pairs in separate posturing, as their levels of commitment and loyalty would likely differ. Further, the focus on the married couple is to prevent divorce and cultivate a happy and healthy marriage. In contrast, the focus for the cohabitators is to promote marriage. For these reasons, this researcher believes it would be beneficial to query the two groups separately to highlight issues that may be unique to each.

**APPENDIX A:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 11, 2019

Angela M. Houchins

IRB Exemption 3876.091119: A House Mended: Hope for Christians Who Are Married to or Cohabitate with Unsaved Spouses/Partners

Dear Angela M. Houchins,

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 no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

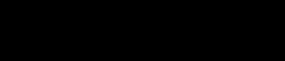
(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and 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,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONS

**A House Mended: Hope for Christians Who Are Married to or Cohabitate With
Unsaved Spouses/Partners**

1. Are you a Christian?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. Are you married or do you cohabitate to the extent that you consider yourself married?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Is your spouse/cohabitating partner an individual who has not received salvation through belief in Jesus Christ (unsaved)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

*If you answered “Yes” to **all** of the first three questions, please continue to complete the remainder of the survey. If you responded “No” to any of the above questions, thank you for volunteering to participate in this survey, however, your circumstances do not meet the desired research criteria and therefore you may exit this survey.*

NOTE: Throughout the survey, the terms marriage, spouse, marital status, marital situation will refer to both married and cohabitating Christians, unless otherwise indicated.

4. Which term best describes you?
 - a. Cohabitate
 - b. Married

5. How long have you been a Christian?
 - a. 1 month to 1 year
 - b. 2-5 years
 - c. 6-10 years
 - d. 11-15 years
 - e. 16-20 years
 - f. 21 years and over

6. How long have you been in an unequally yoked marriage or cohabitating relationship? (unequally yoked means a Christian believer in relationship with a non-Christian believer)
 - a. 1 month to 1 year
 - b. 2-5 years
 - c. 6-10 years
 - d. 11-15 years
 - e. 16-20 years
 - f. 21 years and over
7. Gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
8. Do you have children?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. How much does being a Christian affect your marital/cohabitating relationship? (select one only)
 - a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
10. Is the effect on your relationship mostly positive or negative?
 - a. Positive
 - b. Negative
 - c. Not applicable
11. Do you feel like your spouse/partner respects/values your religious beliefs?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

12. What is the biggest obstacle you face in your relationship? (select one only).
- a. Inability to fully practice Christianity.
 - b. Inability to be happy.
 - c. Inability to agree on financial decisions.
 - d. Inability to agree on child rearing methods.
 - e. Inability to socialize together.
 - f. Having to compromise biblical principles.
 - g. Being ridiculed for your beliefs.
 - h. Other (write in limited to one sentence in length):

13. Which one of the following areas is affected most in your relationship? (select one only)
- a. Intimacy
 - b. Raising children
 - c. Leading household
 - d. Finances
 - e. Spending time with God
 - f. Other: _____
14. Does your unbelieving spouse/partner prevent you from attending church?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
15. How often are you prevented from attending church? (select one only)
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
16. What aspect of your life would you change with your unbelieving spouse/partner that would enhance your quality of life?
- a. Intimacy
 - b. Raising children
 - c. Leading household
 - d. Finances
 - e. Spending time with God
 - f. Other: _____

17. In what way(s), if any, does your Christian faith create conflict in raising your children (if applicable)?
- a. Education
 - b. Methods of Discipline
 - c. Media accessibility (use of electronics, social media, cell phones, tablets)
 - d. Viewing programming guidelines (TV ratings, PG, PG-13, etc.)
 - e. Bed times
 - f. Spending time with God/praying/saying grace before meals
 - g. Other: _____
18. How difficult is it for you to follow godly principles in your home?
- a. Extremely
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Not difficult at all
19. Does supporting your church financially cause trouble in your relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
20. How often are you able to contribute financially to your church?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
21. Does serving (giving your time) in the church cause trouble in your relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
22. How often are you able to serve (give your time) in the church?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
23. Does participating in ministry groups (women, men, etc) cause trouble in your relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
24. How often are you able to participate in ministry groups?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom

- d. Never
25. Are you permitted to bring your children to church (if applicable)?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable
26. How often are you able to bring the children to church?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
 - e. Not applicable
27. Should your church provide education and support for unequally yoked relationships?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
28. Does your church provide adequate education and support for unequally yoked relationships?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
29. How could your church support you better in your unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Provide specialized counseling
 - b. Provide specialized support group
 - c. Provide specialized workshops or seminars
 - d. Provide specialized biblical courses
 - e. Provide a mentor to help you cope
 - f. Other: _____
30. Would you consider attending a church support group for unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
31. Do you believe that education and support groups for unequally yoked couples would benefit other church members?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
32. What related topics would be helpful for unequally yoked Christians? Please explain.

33. Do you feel alone in your Christianity because of your unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
34. How often do you feel alone?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
35. Do you suffer from *grief* because of your unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
36. How often do you experience grief?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
37. Are you depressed because of your unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
38. How often to you experience depression?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
39. What is your overall feeling about your unequally yoked relationship?
- a. Positive
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Negative
40. Have you ever contemplated divorce/separation?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
41. How often have you contemplated divorce/separation?
- a. Always
 - b. Frequently
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never

42. If you have contemplated divorce/separation, has your Christianity played a role in making that decision, if yes, in what ways?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable. (cohabitate)
If yes, state how/why: _____

43. If you cohabit with your partner, would you prefer to be married?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable.
44. If you cohabit, do you feel that your Christian beliefs have prevented you from getting married?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know.
 - d. Not applicable.
45. If you are married, do you feel your Christian beliefs have prevented you from getting a divorce?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know.
 - d. Not applicable.
46. If you are married, do you feel stuck in your marriage because you are a Christian?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know.
 - d. Not applicable.

APPENDIX C
PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

[Date]

[Pastor]
[Church]

Re: Permission Request

Dear [Pastor]:

As a graduate student enrolled in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am researching the challenges experienced by unequally yoked married or cohabitating Christians. My paper is entitled: A House Mended: Hope for Christians Who Are Married to or Cohabitate with Unsaved Spouses/Partners.

The goal of this thesis project is to compile, interpret, understand, and express the experiences of these individuals as a result of their unequally yoked relationships. The purpose of this study is to assist the local church in developing and implementing programming that addresses their needs with a goal towards keeping married couples together and enhancing their quality of life, as well as supporting and advising cohabitating Christians to promote marriage and improve their quality of life.

I am writing to request your assistance with recruiting potential participants from your church membership. Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous survey.

All participants will be provided with informed consent information prior to participating in the survey and will be advised that participation is completely voluntary; participants are free to discontinue participation at any time, prior to submitting their survey.

Thank you for your consideration. If you choose to grant permission, please respond via US mail on church letterhead or via email at amhouchins@liberty.edu.

Best regards,

Angela M. Houchins
Doctor of Ministry Student (DMin.)
Liberty University School of Divinity

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Christians Married to or Cohabiting with Unsaved Spouses/Partners

- Are you a Christian in a marriage or cohabitating relationship to an unsaved spouse/partner, also known as an unequally yoked relationship?
 - Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Do you feel like you are living in a divided home because of your unequally yoked relationship?
 - Would you like information from your church regarding your unequally yoked relationship?

If you answered **yes** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study designed to help Christians like you.

The purpose of this research study is to bring to light the unique challenges faced by Christians who are in unequally yoked marriages (or cohabitating relationships) to assist the local church in developing and implementing programming that addresses their needs. The goal is to keep married couples together, enhance their quality of life, and support and advise cohabitating Christians to improve their quality of life and promote marriage. Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous, online survey. The survey requires only 20-30 minutes to complete.

The study is being conducted online via Survey Monkey at the below link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ahousemended>

Angela M. Houchins, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry Program/Rawlins School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Angela at (609) 458-5702 or amhouchins@liberty.edu for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

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