

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships
Among Couples

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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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis project is to provide methods for married couples to follow as it relates to Ephesians 5:25-33 and Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling. As divorce rates increase and couples struggle to remain in their marital union, this project brings relevant data, information, research, and solutions to couples so they can maintain. This project provides insight from the perspectives of couples and ministers as it relates to characteristics of a healthy marriage, the current state of marriages, common marital issues, biblical principles, and solutions to resolve problems so that couples can have healthier marriages based on what God envisioned marriage to be. Researching methods included data analysis of interviews, surveys, and feedback from a focus group session. Acknowledging the importance of implementing effective marriage counseling combined with interventions that demonstrate suitable approaches to possessing healthier, biblically-based marriages that prevent couples from divorcing is necessary. This research project stands to influence other marriage counselors, pastoral counselors, ministers, pastors, and Christian counselors in their plans to direct married couples and design plans for couples to flourish. For couples, the newly created course will allow them to gain ways to sustain their marriages using better mechanisms to maneuver through the marital journey and life.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	10
Ministry Context	11
Statement of the Challenges Faced in Marriages.....	16
Purpose Statement	17
Basic Assumptions	19
Definitions	19
Limitations.....	21
Delimitations.....	22
Thesis Statement	22
Chapter 2	23
Conceptual Framework.....	23
Literature Review	23
Divorce.....	23
Marriage Counseling and Interventions	28
Love and Forgiveness in Marriage.....	33
Summary	34
Theological Foundations	35
Biblical Principles of Marriage	36
Jesus Christ’s Relationship with the Church.....	42
Theoretical Foundations.....	46
Chapter 3	59
Methodology	59
Research Design Rationale.....	59
Intervention Design.....	61
The Research Groundwork	64
Ethical Considerations	68
The Role of the Researcher	69
Implementation of the Intervention Design.....	71
Interview Questions for Couples Design	72
Marriage Satisfaction Survey Design	73
Interview Questions for Clergy and Ministers Design.....	74
Focus Group Session Design	75
Data Triangulation	75
Observation and Interview Protocol	76
Data Analysis	78
Chapter 4	80
Results	80
Marital Satisfaction Survey Results	81
Interview Questions Results.....	83
The Current State of Marriage	83
Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage	86
Qualities of a Biblically-Based Marriage.....	89
Communication in Marriage	93
Prayer Life in Marriage.....	97
Forgiveness in Marriage.....	99

Intimacy in Marriage.....	101
Conflict Resolution in Marriage	103
Divorce.....	104
Traditional Marriage Counseling vs. Marriage Counseling Guided by Biblical Principles.....	106
Focus Group Session Results.....	108
Chapter 5	110
Conclusion	110
Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage	110
Qualities of a Biblically-Based Marriage.....	111
Common Marital Issues Revealed	113
Communication in Marriage	113
Prayer Life in Marriage.....	114
Forgiveness in Marriage.....	115
Intimacy in Marriage.....	116
Conflict Resolution in Marriage	116
Divorce.....	117
Theological and Theoretical Practical Implications	118
Future Recommendations	119
Final Statement	121
Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Official Approval Notice.....	123
Appendix A.....	125
Appendix B.....	129
Appendix C.....	133
Appendix D.....	135
Appendix E.....	136
Appendix F.....	137
Appendix G.....	138
Appendix H.....	139
Appendix I.....	140
Appendix J.....	141
Appendix K.....	144
Appendix L.....	147
Appendix M.....	148
Bibliography	150

List of Tables

Table 1.	Comparisons of Marriage Counseling and Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling	52
Table 2.	Marital Satisfaction Survey Results.....	81
Table 3.	Couples Interview Question 2.....	84
Table 4.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 2.....	85
Table 5.	Couples Interview Question 6b.....	87
Table 6.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 6b.....	88
Table 7.	Couples Interview Question 6d.....	89
Table 8.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 6d.....	89
Table 9.	Couples Interview Question 7b.....	91
Table 10.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7b.....	91
Table 11.	Couples Interview Question 7e.....	92
Table 12.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7e.....	92
Table 13.	Couples Interview Question 7h.....	93
Table 14.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7h.....	93
Table 15.	Couples Interview Question 8b.....	94
Table 16.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 8b.....	96
Table 17.	Couples Interview Question 8e.....	96
Table 18.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 8e.....	96
Table 19.	Couples Interview Question 8f.....	97
Table 20.	Couples Interview Question 9b.....	98
Table 21.	Couples Interview Question 10b.....	99
Table 22.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 10b.....	100
Table 23.	Couples Interview Question 11b.....	101
Table 24.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 11b.....	102
Table 25.	Couples Interview Question 12b.....	103
Table 26.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 12b.....	104
Table 27.	Couples Interview Question 13c.....	104
Table 28.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 13c.....	105
Table 29.	Couples Interview Question 14d.....	107
Table 30.	Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 14d.....	107
Table 31.	Building Healthier Marriages Through HFMC & Biblical Principles	120

List of Abbreviations

BCT	<i>Behavioral Couples Therapy</i>
CBT	<i>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</i>
CBCT	<i>Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy</i>
EFCT	<i>Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy</i>
DC	<i>Demonstration Church</i>
HFMC	<i>Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of marriage in modern society is vital to the secular community and the body of Christ. Humanity fails to emphasize the importance of getting married and staying married because marriage is not viewed as an essential life goal for some people anymore. When viewing the subject from this perspective, marriage may not prove to be a necessity. Despite popular opinions, the marital union is a necessity, because the foundation of marriage should provide a relational example for every individual especially since the basis of marriage was created after God's unique purpose.

Divorce tends to be an easy option when couples face trials and tribulations which is why married couples should be equipped with strategies that will keep them together. Couples, single persons, organizations, and more have rendered approval for couples to divorce when issues persist. God desires for His people to engage in healthy marriages while Satan desires for couples to engage in divorce.¹ Matthew 19:8 declares "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" proving that divorce was not an option in the earlier creation of marriage by God. Pursuing a healthy marriage consists of consistent, intentional work completed by God, the husband, and the wife. The obtainment of a healthy marriage is a major component in preventing divorce. As more married couples strive to implement strategic tactics moving to healthier marriages, society will observe the decline of divorce rates.² Beginning with the strengthening of marriages in actual

¹ Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 175.

² Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 178.

churches provide positive examples for people who may not be as active in a local ministry. Healthy marriages provide the foundation for strong, Christian communities.

Ministry Context

According to the United States Census Bureau,³ the population of the city of Shreveport, Louisiana was estimated to be 188,987 on July 1, 2018. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the population is female, while 15.2% are 65 years or older, 24.5% are under 18 years old, and 7.1% are under 5 years old. Concerning racial and Hispanic origins, 57.1% are African Americans, 38% are white, 0.4% are American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.7% are Asian, 1.8% are two or more races, and 2.5% are Hispanic or Latino. From 2014-2018, 75,842 households exist with an average of 2.49 persons per household. As of July 1, 2018, 86.7% possessed a high school graduate degree or higher, while only 24.5% possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. The average median household income is \$38,279 with 25.4% of the population in poverty. The per capita income over the last 12 months from 2018 was \$25,022. As of August 2016, Shreveport ranked 17 out of 25 for cities with the lowest cost of living by *Business Insider*. According to LendEDU given by way of the city of Shreveport, it also ranked 5 out of 250 in the United States for ideal locations and conditions for postgraduates to find their first home. In 2017, the county of Caddo Parish documented 249,365 as it relates to the population. Married-couple families totaled 30,108 with 12,186 having children under 18 years old. Single-parent householders with a female present and no husband present reported 16,938 with 9,894 with children under 18 years old.⁴

³ Official Government Website of Shreveport, Louisiana, <https://www.shreveportla.gov/>. Accessed March 31, 2020.

⁴Ibid, Accessed March 31, 2020

Couples who enter covenant marriages in Caddo Parish are required to complete additional premarital counseling, a declaration of intent, and an affidavit signed by the couple, marriage counselor, and notary. It is understood that Covenant marriages fall under the Covenant Marriage Act which considers marriage as a lifetime commitment. When couples experience marital complications, the couples are required to engage in marital counseling and other reasonable actions to preserve the strict Covenant of their marriage. Covenant marriages stand bound by Louisiana state law.⁵

Demonstration Church is a local ministry in Shreveport, Louisiana consisting of a mixed population of believers with the ethnicity being majority African Americans with a multiplicity of ages. Individuals engage in community-oriented outreach events systematically designed to reach the unchurched. Activities central to the church's design include strategic evangelism, community events, marriage workshops, empowerment sessions, and Holy spirit-filled worship services. The congregation often provides food giveaways and clothing donations for the community and city. Demonstration Church centers on demonstrating love to people which is an essential part of building a relationship. It is with that same love that Christ loves the church. It is the desire of the church that through the demonstration of love, the power of Jesus will be displayed in worship services and the community. The foundational scripture states, and my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.⁶

Demonstration Church, currently comprised of one congregation, seeks to encourage people to become the best version of who God desires them to be. The regular, practicing

⁵ Caddo Parish Clerk of Court. <http://www.caddoclerk.com/>. Accessed March 31, 2020.

⁶ I Corinthians 2:4, King James Version.

member strives to attend worship services regularly, pay tithes and offerings, and engages in regular attendance at other community-oriented events. They strive to adhere to the biblical teachings by applying principles found in the Bible to their daily lives. Leaders encourage members to be productive in their spiritual walk and good, thriving citizens in the community and world. Marriage building workshops, seminars, and retreats have become a pivotal portion of this ministry which is beneficial for producing healthier marriages. Couples in Demonstration Church and the surrounding areas of Shreveport would benefit from more specifically centered strategies based on faith, hope, and work.⁷

The Great Commission of the Church found in Matthew 28:18-20 calls for believers to go into the world spreading the gospel and making disciples and positive, healthy marriages prove to serve as a fraction of effectively spreading the gospel. Demonstration Church includes many married couples that were raised up mostly in single-parent homes which displayed no healthy examples of a true biblical model of marriage. Observations prove couples deal with marital issues such as financial problems, infidelity, sex, insufficient quality time, trust issues, household responsibilities, and family problems. Issues range from minor occurrences to major occurrences where couples are left feeling resentful to the other spouse. Problems left unresolved leave couples in unhealthy spaces over a period that eventually turns into major marital strife. Another factor that causes couples not to resolve issues is communication. Individuals fail to communicate properly because they simply do not know how to effectively communicate with spouses. Marriage workshop, once a month, has not proved to be efficient enough for couples. They would benefit from one-on-one sessions, additional group sessions, retreats, and seminars to effectively resolve issues by getting to the root of the issues. About 90% of the couples had

⁷Everett L. Worthington. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intersivity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005.

little to no premarital counseling and has not participated in any marriage counseling aside from marriage workshop. Other observations made include multiple couples dealing with on-going infidelity by the husband and it appears the issue of reoccurring infidelity is a major problem in preventing marriages from being healthy. For the other couples that participate, their issues center on trust, communication, sex, and financial issues, while only two couples deal with family issues and household responsibilities. Every couple would also benefit from in-depth teaching on how marriage should look based on the biblical idea of marriage, which is God's intention for the marital union.

Around the 1960s, many scholars argued that a racial and an ethnic divide developed as it relates to marriage. Differences exist in racial lines as it relates to marital stability which supports the need for this type of study. In 2014, there were more white children and Hispanic children living with both parents than African American children. Percentages observed included 70% of non-Hispanic white children, 59% of Hispanic, and one-third of black children were living with both biological parents.⁸ The major ethnicity of the participants in this study is African Americans living in this modern society. For African American couples, family patterns tend to establish the cycle for whether marriages last or not which brings the vital point of the necessity of couples engaging in effective marriage therapy. Sociologists Robert Mare and Christopher Winship documented in the 1960s how marriage rates began to decline much more rapidly for black women than for white women across all age groups.⁹ Interesting enough, by the mid-twentieth century, marriage rates were similar for black and white individuals. By 2012,

⁸ R. Raley Kelly, Megan M. Sweeney, and Danielle Wondra. "The Future of The Growing Racial and Ethnic Divide in U.S. Marriage Patterns Children." 25, no. 2 (2015): 90. Accessed March 28, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43581974?seq=1>.

⁹ Ibid, 93.

social class and the racial gap presented more of an issue than race alone. African American men tended to be affected by social class and their education status. By 1980, whites and blacks demonstrated educational deviations in family patterns that were similar. College-educated individuals saw declines in divorce while those who had no degree divorced at a higher rate.¹⁰

Based on recorded statistics, there is a definite need for the confines of marriage to be redefined and analyzed to save more marriages while facing the challenges in our postmodern culture in 21st Century North America. Additionally, modern thinking presents the need to redefine the terms of ‘marriage’ and ‘family’¹¹ and what it means to be married based on the biblical foundation of marriage. Reestablishing the biblical foundation of marriage is necessary in preventing divorce especially since God’s order never fails. In doing this, marriage counselors can implement relevant solutions, strategies, and protocols designed to look like God’s idea for marriage which is the biblical model of matrimony. Marriages continue to end in divorce because marriages should be maintained through proper education and effective counsel. The stability of the marital union is dependent upon the preservation of the biblical model of marriage between a husband and wife. The biblical model and bond of marriage is not easily broken, and it does not give up easily. When couples fail to acknowledge and apply God’s blueprint of marriage, divorce will be inevitable. Not only will ministry be affected, but the community will continue to witness an increase in divorce rates which continues to affect God’s

¹⁰ R. Raley Kelly, Megan M. Sweeney, and Danielle Wondra. “The Future of The Growing Racial and Ethnic Divide in U.S. Marriage Patterns Children.” 25, no. 2 (2015): 90. Accessed March 28, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43581974?seq=1>, 98.

¹¹ R. A. Mohler "God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (03, 2007): 25.

design for the marital union and the world. When ministry is affected, the Great Commission as it relates to God's ideal is affected.¹²

Statement of the Challenges Faced in Marriages

The purpose of this study is to provide marriages in Demonstration Church future strategies and interventions, with counseling that is integrated with the biblical principles of marriage found in Ephesians 5:25-33, to maintain healthy marriages thereby preventing divorce. The goal of marriage counseling is to resolve marital conflicts and improve the health quality of the marriage.¹³

Historically, around the 1940s, marriage counselors had great success with counseling and through this detail, 24,000 licensed counselors were produced in the last 65 years.¹⁴ However, marriage counselors have not always had successful outcomes in preventing divorce. As the twenty-first century emerged, observations were made that not all marriage counselors were effective in their strategies.¹⁵ Presently, couples in Demonstration Church and other local ministries do not see the value in proper marriage counseling, therefore, they do not participate consistently in effective implementation of strategies that work to bring positive change to their matrimonial union. Marriage counseling linked to the biblical model of marriage prevents divorce which simply means all strategies are founded based on strategic plans combined with discernment, guidance of the Holy Spirit, and biblical truth. Couples, who are not counseled,

¹² Mohler, R.A. "God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (03, 2007), 167.

¹³ Whitman, Lauren. 2017. "How to Begin Marriage Counseling." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31 (2): 74.

¹⁴ Dowbiggin, Ian. "Review of Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States, and: More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss". *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66, no. 2 (2011): 265.

¹⁵ Ibid, 265.

trained, and engaged in these fundamental principles are subject to having lifelong bouts of unhealthy incidents. Due to the varying amount of younger age couples to middle age range couples, 75% of the couples at Demonstration Church have been observed in situations that would not have escalated otherwise, if different approaches would have been taken, per the leaders of Demonstration Church Shreveport, LA.

The foundation of which marriage was built hinges on God's plan for a woman and man to live as one together. Even in troubled times, the role of couples must be consistent with interventions that bring solutions in harsh times which is why it is necessary to note that counseling must be correlated to Scriptures.¹⁶ With the Word of God being a support to hope-focused therapy, it allows for the counseling to be favorable with the original intention of God's plans for married couples. Present goals at Demonstration Church encourage couples to seek pastoral marriage counseling while future goals include ensuring that counseling is integrated with the biblical model of matrimony to change unhealthy marriages into lifelong, healthy marriages and arm couples with tactics that truly resolve conflicts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis project is to provide and implement strategic biblically-based strategies for building healthy marriages within Demonstration Church. Couples are neglecting the original model of marriage for a modern ideology of how the media portrays marriage. Initial observations prove that couples do not know how to effectively deal with unresolved problems to ensure their marriages remain healthy. Additionally, the ideal for how couples treat each other does not consistently mirror the example found in Ephesians 5:25-

¹⁶ R. A. Mohler "God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (03, 2007): 25.

33. Forsaking the biblical principles of marriage which are also aligned to hope-focused strategies results in unhealthy marriages which leads to higher divorce rates.¹⁷

All marriages require maintenance, thus interventions built on the biblical paradigm allows couples to refrain from divorcing during critical moments in marriage. This allows married couples to reach God's desire plan for marriage.¹⁸

Married couples tend to forget there is a difference between being church-centered and Christ-centered. God desires for marriages to prosper and to be patterned after Jesus and His love for the church. Christ-centered marriages are modeled after the correlation of Jesus Christ and the Bride of Christ.¹⁹ When couples fail to follow the model of Jesus Christ and the Bride of Christ, they run the risk of suffering in an unhealthy relationship which usually results in divorce.

The project collects data from married couples and ministerial leaders. The purpose of this research is to reveal various factors that impact marriages when both spouses are engaged in full-time ministry positions. Ideal factors would include married couples who both work in ministry, married couples where one spouse is engaged in ministry while the other is not, married couples where one spouse is more spiritual than the other spouse, and married couples who place more value on ministry needs than marriage needs. Pending research findings, future possible solutions could be the implementation of strategic solutions such as a series of marriage seminars, communication workshops, intentional vision sessions, and effective role-play counseling sessions for couples.

¹⁷ Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*. IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 18.

¹⁸ Dale Johnson. "Marriage : A Portrait of the Gospel from the Beginning." *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1 (April 1, 2016):31.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

Basic Assumptions

Basic assumptions include the Holy Bible being the inspired Word of God. The biblical principles within the Bible are truths inspired by God. It is also assumed that God's order as established in the Bible is righteous. The study is conducted under the assumption Demonstration Church follows the biblical guidelines associated with the view of marriage. The desire is that this study would become a blueprint of how the model of marriage in the Bible can save marriages through effective counsel and strategies. Further assumption includes marriage is a union between a man and a woman, a husband and wife. All participants are open to biblically-based methods to improve the quality of their marriages.

Other assumptions include the instructions given to man and wife in Ephesians 5:25-33 aid in guidance that is related to future intercessions for married couples, and how the relationship between man and wife follows as the example of the relationship between the church and Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate ideal for what God envisions for covenant relationships.

Definitions

The definitions for the following terms exist to allow readers comprehension to be clarified as it relates to the content and context of the project:

Biblical marriage - “a spiritual and legal covenant between two complementary counterparts (one biological male and one biological female), through which they are joined by God in a one-flesh union, and commit to pursue and enjoy a conjugal, exclusive, indivisible, lifelong love relationship.”²⁰

²⁰ E.L. Worthington, Jr, E.M. Brown, and J.M. “McConnell Forgiveness in Committed Couples: Its Synergy with Humility, Justice, and Reconciliation”. *Religions* **2019**, *10*, 6.

Decisional forgiveness - “making a decision about one’s behavioral intentions toward the offender.”²¹

Divorce - “the legal dissolution of a marriage.”²²

Emotional forgiveness - “defined as the emotional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive, other-oriented emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love for the offender.”²³

Forgiveness - “as a person, having been offended by someone else, consciously leaving behind these negative experiences.”²⁴

Marriage - “the one institution that brings together men and women to be husbands and wives and turns them into fathers and mothers”²⁵ and “intended to be an introductory look at how Christians should engage marriage from every angle of the Christian’s life—their place in culture, their engagement as everyday Christians, and their role in the body of Christ—the church.”²⁶

Non-traditional marriage - “a state in which two individuals are wholly committed to live with each other in sexual relationship, under conditions normally approved and witnessed to

²¹R. A. Mohler "God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (03, 2007): 5.

²²Ann Sumner Holmes. *The Church of England and Divorce in the Twentieth Century: Legalism and Grace*. First ed. New York: Routledge, 2017;2016, 16.

²³E.L. Worthington, Jr., E.M. Brown, and J.M. McConnell. “Forgiveness in Committed Couples: Its Synergy with Humility, Justice, and Reconciliation.” *Religions* 2019, 10, 6.

²⁴ Isil Goztepe Gumus, and Sennur Tutarel Kislak. 2019. “The Predictive Role of Forgiveness and the Level of Repetitive Thinking on Mental Health and Marital Adjustment in Married Individuals.” *Dusunen Adam: Journal of Psychiatry & Neurological Sciences* 32 (3): 236–45

²⁵Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker. 2017. *The Gospel and Marriage*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1.

²⁶Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker. 2017. *The Gospel and Marriage*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 3.

by their social group or society. According to this rather awkward definition, two people—opposite sex, same sex, transgender, or whatever gender they consider themselves to be—are married if: a) they are sexually involved and committed to maintaining a common residence, b) society as a whole does not object to their relationship (as it currently would in cases of incest, for example), and c) someone can attest to the validity of their living arrangement.”²⁷

Single-parent family - “Families with children under age 18 headed by a parent who is widowed or divorced and not remarried, or by a parent who has never married.”²⁸

Traditional family - “Structurally, the traditional family is made up of a man, a woman - the marital couple - and children from their sexual relationship.”²⁹

Traditional marriage - “a legally accepted relationship between a man and a woman in which they live as husband and wife.”³⁰

Limitations

The research limitation of this thesis project is confined to the organization of Demonstration Church and the city of Shreveport, Louisiana. Participants in the project derive from members of Demonstration Church and individuals who have consented to be a part of the project study. Individuals who participate are encouraged to give honest feedback based on the implementation of project experiments. Truths are accurately reported based on findings with adjustments made when necessary. Beyond the control of the researcher includes how the

²⁷ Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker. 2017. *The Gospel and Marriage*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 9.

²⁸ Tish Davidson, “Single-Parent Families,” Children's Health, accessed March 28, 2020.

²⁹ Mirela Cristiana, Nilă Stratone, and Bogdan Marinescu. "The Traditional Family, in the Role of the Fundamental Matrix of the Formation of Individual Consciousness – a Radiography at the Level of the Romanian Society." *Challenges of the Knowledge Society* (2019): 1235.

³⁰ Ibid, 8.

attendance for participants vary every several months because of the ever-evolving culture of the church. Unmarried individuals, single people, divorced people, and married couples attend a marriage workshop monthly. The researcher has no control over the cancellation of monthly meetings due to weather, sickness, or death. It is possible that participants vary based on culture, background, age, and role in ministry.

Delimitations

This action research project addresses the problem of married couples not having enough biblical based strategies to effectively solve critical issues that negatively impact the marital union within Demonstration Church. Some participants, who are not actual members of the church, engage in events, seminars, and workshops as it relates to marriage. Those individuals make up the rest of the population for the study. The age of participants is 18 years and older. The number of years that each couple has been married varies. No race, gender, or social class is excluded from the thesis project. The meeting times vary based on special seminars and events. Regular marriage workshop meetings are hosted every third Monday monthly. The methodology based on principles in Ephesians 5:25-33 will be created in precise details combined with strategies, solutions, and activities supported by scripture. The framework of the methodology centers on hope-focused strategies that are rooted in Biblical principles.

Thesis Statement

By providing a method for married couples to follow the model found in Ephesians 5:25-33, this thesis project will provide insight, strategies, and interventions related to foundational biblical principles that demonstrate suitable approaches to having a healthy, biblically based marriage thereby preventing couples from divorcing.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The literature review findings show significant aspects related to divorce trends, marriage statistics, healthy marriages, effective marriage counseling, interventions, love, and forgiveness. Communication, love, and forgiveness prove to be key aspects that scholars and counselors found when helping to move married couples to healthier relationships.

Literature Review

The literature review consists of literature related to divorce, marriage, biblical principles of marriage, and counseling works related to this research study. There is a need to acknowledge works from each of these subjects because of the content of this study. While many different works are cited from each of these subjects, not many works can be cited that align the topic of marriage and the importance of having a strong, biblical foundation as the basis for a healthy marriage. Many works acknowledge this fact at some point, but there is a need to publish more works that give specific strategies that marriages can utilize to have a healthy marriage based on Christ's desire from the beginning.

Divorce

Divorce is a controversial subject. Evidence of divorce rates doubling from 1950 to 1979³¹ supports the fact of divorce rates increasing from decades ago. Additionally, the same study produced results that support a decline in divorce rates after 1980.³² Yet, according to author Anne Kim, marriage is no longer a priority among individuals³³, and Linda Waite and

³¹ Dana Rotz. "Why Have Divorce Rates Fallen The Role of Women's Age at Marriage." *The Journal of Human Resources*, 51.4 (2016), Print, 961.

³²Ibid, 961.

³³ Anne Kim. "Why is marriage thriving among (and only among) the affluent?" *The Washington Monthly*, March 2016. 48, 16

Maggie Gallagher reveal in their studies how more Americans are choosing not to be eager in rushing into marriage instead they choose to cohabitate and birth children without spouses³⁴. Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher effectively give positive insight on why marriage in America appears to be unpopular especially among those demographics who live at or below the poverty line in their book *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Further observations by Anne Kim also reveal that educated people and middle-class individuals are among those choosing to marry and build families because of economic stability and child-rearing.³⁵ While the benefits of getting married exist, the major benefit that most affluent individuals wed is to bore and raise children. Many elite Americans still marry because of the advantages³⁶ of raising children. Other people who live at or under the poverty line see no value in marrying and building a legacy for their children. According to *Healthy Marriage Programs: Learning what Works*, M. Robin Dion offers relevant observations of how low class married couples run the risk of getting a divorce³⁷. Further information given demonstrates how couples in the middle class or higher class are more apt to stay married rather than face divorce. Current research reflects that elites marry at the same rate that couples did in the 1950s because they desire to give their children more than families in lower social classes³⁸ and they feel like being married allows their children more opportunities. While these couples

³⁴ Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 176.

³⁵ Anne Kim. "Why is marriage thriving among (and only among) the affluent?" *The Washington Monthly*, March 2016. 48, 17.

³⁶ Ibid, 17.

³⁷ M. Robin Dion. "Healthy Marriage Programs: Learning What Works." *The Future of Children* 15, no. 2 (2005): 151.

³⁸ Anne Kim. "Why is marriage thriving among (and only among) the affluent?" *The Washington Monthly*, March 2016. 48, 19.

marry for the sake of children and other economic reasons, this is not a clear indication that the marriage will always be a healthy one.

Dana Rotz characterizes how the divorce rate is decreasing because many women are leading the labor industry resulting in many women not getting married. This fact is vital in analyzing the pattern in which successful women operate because it has a negative impact on marriage rates. This fact also produces a growth and a drop in marital instability.³⁹

Despite articles like the one, the media still glorifies marriage⁴⁰ and divorce by supporting the need to rush into marriage and the urgency to divorce when it appears that it is not working out. Consequently, this infiltrates the minds of married couples causing them not to fight for their marriages making it seem like it acceptable to just give up and divorce. With the increase in media glorification, married couples begin to feel like since the majority approves divorce then it must be okay to divorce.⁴¹ In addition, modern viewpoints of marriage support components that do not necessarily favor the true institute of marriage⁴², instead, many modern viewpoints support marriages that are not biblical. The evidence of high divorce rates is noticed in recent surveys about single parenthood and divorce revealing how 40% of the population in the United States support that marriage is archaic.⁴³

³⁹ Dana Rotz. "Why Have Divorce Rates Fallen The Role of Women's Age at Marriage." *The Journal of Human resources*, 51.4 (2016): n. page. Print, 962.

⁴⁰N. M. Punyanunt-Carter, et al. (2018). "College students' perceptions of media portrayals of divorce." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(7), 574-589

⁴¹ Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 175.

⁴²Camille Sanrey, Benoît Testé, and Jessica Mange. "'Homosexual Marriage' or 'Marriage for All'? Social Lexical Markers' Effects on Persuasion." *Journal of language and social psychology*. 35.5 (2016): 471-490

⁴³ Julie Hanlon Rubio. "Family: What Does It Mean to Be Promarriage?" *In Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church*, 85-124. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016, 89-90.

According to Rutgers University's national marriage project, the divorce rate is about 50 percent.⁴⁴ The Healthy Marriage Initiative also contributes to rising divorce rates to the increase in single parents, same-sex couples, and social welfare issues.⁴⁵ Age may be another component that affects divorce. Dana Rotz's study significantly reveals that an increase in age results in a decrease in divorce rates⁴⁶ which is essential to this study.

The 1990 literature review in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* reported that married people live longer than unmarried people identifying the reason being each person takes care of the other person.⁴⁷ Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher also support the grounds of married people living longer because they tend to be happier, and they learn to adjust to being happy and content with their spouses. Happiness is a key factor in a healthy marriage as well as the contributions it has towards mental health.⁴⁸ Additional studies indicate that happiness is a critical factor in being healthy. It is no surprise that individuals need that avenue of happiness to have a healthy marriage and positive psychological health.⁴⁹ Being healthy is part of being whole. Healthy marriages are part of that design and it is also part of God's design for people to

⁴⁴ M. B. Ahmed (2018, Nov). "Effective counseling can help stabilize marriages." *Islamic Horizons*, 47, 36-37.

⁴⁵ Meg Yardley. 2019. "Is the Healthy Marriage Initiative Really Healthy for Families?" *Columbia Social Work Review*, 3(1), 43.

⁴⁶ Dana Rotz. "Why Have Divorce Rates Fallen the Role of Women's Age at Marriage." *The journal of human resources*. 51.4 (2016), Print, 962.

⁴⁷ Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier And Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 47.

⁴⁸ Isil Goztepe Gumus and Tutarel Kislak Sennur. 2019. "The Predictive Role of Forgiveness and the Level of Repetitive Thinking on Mental Health and Marital Adjustment in Married Individuals." *Dusunen Adam: Journal of Psychiatry & Neurological Sciences*, 32(3): 238.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 237.

be whole in the marital union and community.⁵⁰ Lyle Lloyd reveals wholeness between a man and a woman being vital to marriage, individualism, and the community. All components are connected and designed to be interconnected as a part of God's intended plan. God's design for marriage is intended to bring out the healthiest version of a person which is why being whole and healthy, individually, and as one unit, is important. Marriage allows for people to become whole and healthy.⁵¹ Dealing with issues that arise in marriage are a part of the healthy foundation needed to sustain a lifetime of marital love.

The Healthy Marriage Initiative also recognizes higher divorce rates and implements programs based on recent statistics to ensure that low-income social classes receive support in their marriages so they will not engage in divorce. The goal of the healthy marriage initiative is to increase healthy marriages in low-income families⁵² and as a result, child poverty would be impacted possibly promoting people to marry in the future.

Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher⁵³ discuss key components of marriage and why people who are married have better lives. Not only do married people live healthy lives, but they live longer. The world releases many different myths about what marriage is and how marriage is not popular anymore. This book proves that those myths are inaccurate. Marriage does not have to be an unhappy place. Myths such as getting a divorce is the best answer for kids when marriage becomes unhappy, and marriage is mostly about children are only two of the myths that

⁵⁰ Lyle L. Vander Werff (Lyle Lloyd). "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975): 2.

⁵¹ Lyle L. Vander Werff (Lyle Lloyd). "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975): 2.

⁵² Meg Yardley. 2019. "Is the Healthy Marriage Initiative Really Healthy for Families?" *Columbia Social Work Review*, 3(1), 43-51.

⁵³ Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000

are discussed so individuals can stop using their children as crutches. Waite and Gallagher⁵⁴ continue in discussing the positive impact marriage has on men and women by centrally arguing how marriage does not have to take a negative influence on the health of women. Healthy maintenance allows for married couples to experience the total benefits of a healthy marriage. One of the most important chapters in the book speaks about sex in marriage. Couples do not always realize how important sex is in the marital union. The authors list many different advantages to sex and in their findings. They prove how married couples have a better sex life than singles. Many men fail to marry because they think they will miss out on something when it comes to sex. Other topics covered in the book include being mentally happy, budgeting finances, and parenting. Other topics like cohabitation and wedlock are outlined so that people can see what they should not be doing if they want to eventually experience a happy marriage in its entirety. For those individuals looking to wed in the future, not only does marriage have all of these major health benefits, but it is beneficial spiritually. The main point of this book is to plea the case for marriage and encourage individuals to take a chance on marriage and the blessings will follow.

Marriage Counseling and Interventions

Everett Worthington Jr.⁵⁵ gives dynamic hope-centered strategies for marriage counseling. This book outlines many different theories and interventions with the common goal of keeping couples together. The main point of the book is to show the strength of hope-focused marriage in preventing divorce. Many of the exercises demonstrated in the book hinge on the

⁵⁴ Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better Off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000

⁵⁵ E.L. Worthington, Jr.; E.M. Brown.; J.M. McConnell. "Forgiveness in Committed Couples: Its Synergy with Humility, Justice, and Reconciliation." *Religions*. 2019.

promotion of forgiveness, intimacy development, conflict resolution, communication, and commitment renewal regularly. He argues that hope-focused marriage is more conceptualized, which makes it more powerful for couples to continue in the improvement of their marriage. The authors argue the comparison between regular Christian approaches to counseling to hope focused counseling. The interventions provided in the book result in quicker changes with long-lasting results. Hope-centered marriage counseling has six different ideas which include therapeutic relationship, goal, focus, strategy, targets for change, and repertoire of interventions. Objective-based strategies allow couples to focus on major needs without getting distracted by the minor aspects. When counseling is not objective based, it also tends to be drawn out longer than needed resulting in dire consequences. One of the most influential portions in the book discusses the link between love, faith, and work and how they all play a significant role in marriage counseling strategies. Couples that consistently practice love consistently build trust, security, intimacy, and true friendship. To every married individual, keep the hope in the marriage, the good and the bad work together, look towards strategies that are hope-focused, and do not give up on developing communication, forgiveness, faith, and love.

To strengthen marriages and reduce divorce, studies show that couples need to embark on hope-focused therapy⁵⁶. It is important to seek strategies and counseling that are centered on hope-focused therapy especially since Everett Worthington Jr. supports the initiative to implement interventions that are objective driven which allows the therapy to focus on specific needs.⁵⁷ Worthington's concepts and tactics weigh heavily in this thesis study.

⁵⁶ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, IVP Academic Intersivity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 18.

⁵⁷Ibid, 25.

In addition to marriage counseling, marriage education is a requirement for couples to have a successful and healthy marriage. Dana Rotz's study also supports a decrease in divorce rates when marriage education occurs with both parties.⁵⁸ Research supports that when couples engage in forms of marriage education before and during marriage, it increases their chances of remaining married.⁵⁹ Marriage seminars and programs prove to be approaches that must be maintained to prevent divorce. Without the implementation of marriage programs, divorce rates will steadily increase. Research proves that public and private interest in programs that are designed to strengthen the institution of marriage will reduce the number of children growing up without both their parents and decrease divorce.⁶⁰ Children and rearing children proved to be one of the factors that appealed to affluent individuals to be married.

The implementations of programs paired with consistent marriage counseling corroborate to be effective when trying to prevent couples from divorcing in any demographics. Marriage counseling is a part of keeping the matrimonial unit healthy which corresponds to having a healthy relationship. A healthy marriage needs marriage counseling on a regular basis.⁶¹ Marriage counseling promotes healthy relationships among couples and allows couples to move towards greater levels of understanding when they are going through their most difficult times. M. Robin Dion claims that when marriage counselors help couples get where they should.⁶²

⁵⁸Dana Rotz. "Why Have Divorce Rates Fallen the Role of Women's Age at Marriage?" *The journal of human resources*. 51.4 (2016): n. pag. Print.

⁵⁹ M. Robin Dion. "Healthy Marriage Programs: Learning What Works." *The Future of Children* 15, no. 2 (2005): 140.

⁶⁰Ibid, 139.

⁶¹Lauren Whitman. 2017. "How to Begin Marriage Counseling." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31 (2): 74.

⁶² Ibid, 80.

Those new experiences demonstrate moments of healing, restoration, and reconciliation that move couples to healthier stages in a marriage.

Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. John Trent provide 40 effective topics combined with spiritual insights and simple, effective strategies to implement. The vast amounts of topics cover a wide range of marital issues and other common scenarios for different seasons in life. Each topic offers portraits, definitions, key ideas, assessment interviews, and advice for wise counsel. At the conclusion of each topic, action steps, biblical insights, and prayer starters reveal effective and simple solutions to implement with couples who are struggling to resolve ongoing problems. This book is an excellent tool for the counselor when dealing with marriages that are in a troubled state or those that are not in a place of crisis. Dr. Clinton and Dr. Trent describe concise instructions that help couples get married and remain married. Highlighted in the resource is the section about communication in marriage which is a pivotal part of the health index of marriage. The authors give strategic, simple steps to resolve poor communication conflicts.

Communication matters attest to be a substantial concern with couples, therefore, solutions to improve communication efforts must be maintained in marriage counseling. Lauren Whitman writes about how communication skills must be improved within the confines of marriage counseling which further supports the same tactics Dr. Clinton and Dr. Trent give in their book. Communication is part of the marriage education process.⁶³ Communication strategies are taught in the marriage education and counseling component. The Bible is consistent with the human need to communicate. Men and women have an innate need to

⁶³Lauren Whitman. 2017. "How to Begin Marriage Counseling." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 31(2): 141.

communicate which is why they need to relate to their mate and to God⁶⁴. Not only do men and women need to communicate, but they need to communicate effectively, and many people do not know how to efficiently communicate which is further supported in the literature by Lauren Whitman, Dr. Clint, and Dr. Trenton.

Everett Worthington Jr. lists six steps to communicating better that coincide with the same instructions given by a variety of scholars:⁶⁵

- Identify the difficulties.
- Do not try to change everything at once.
- Begin with the positive.
- Analyze the situations carefully.
- Do not lose sight of the goal: to communicate valuing love in a positive way
- Get a book that described a structured way to change communication.

Worthington also lists ten other intervention strategies for communicating better. All six steps promote couples to learn effective communication skills, hope-focused marriage counseling, and marriage education which are all key to reaching a healthy marriage.

Norman H. Wright⁶⁶ supports that the lack of communication is the main issue between couples. Finding relevant and practical solutions for the communication gap reduces conflict, anger, self-esteem issues, and misunderstandings. Norman Wright employs couples to make intentional efforts to understand each other at deeper levels.

⁶⁴ Lyle L. Vander Werff (Lyle Lloyd). "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975), 3.

⁶⁵ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 157.

⁶⁶ Norman H. Wright. *Communication: Key to Marriage: A Practical Guide to Creating a Happy, Fulfilling Relationship*, Regal, 2000.

Love and Forgiveness in Marriage

Love and forgiveness work collectively to move couples to positive stages of resolution. Lyle Werff summarizes that love is the foundation in great relationships and are built that way because the capacity to love was a direct gift of God.⁶⁷ Raja Halwani⁶⁸ presents specific differences between love, lust, and infatuation. It also examines the different types of love followed by a deep analysis of whether romantic love is moral. The most important component proves to be the examination of true love and its connection with sex and marriage. It also acknowledges the necessity of marriage filled with connections to moral models, sexual actions, and passionate love.

In 2019, Isil Goztepe Gumus and Tutarel Kislak Sennur⁶⁹ emphasized that the positive effects that forgiveness has on health, happiness, physical, and mental health which contributes to a better marital union while discussing predictive measures of impact.⁷⁰ Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher also support the necessity of forgiveness as an integral part of positive emotional health⁷¹ in a healthy marriage.

Everett Worthington published another book⁷² outlining five simple steps to true forgiveness. The simplistic steps, called REACH, prove to be a brilliant approach to teach

⁶⁷Lyle L. Vander Werff (Lyle Lloyd). "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975), 12.

⁶⁸Raja Halwani. *Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Marriage: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge, 2018.

⁶⁹Isil Goztepe Gumus and Tutarel Kislak Sennur. 2019. "The Predictive Role of Forgiveness and the Level of Repetitive Thinking on Mental Health and Marital Adjustment in Married Individuals." *Dusunen Adam: Journal of Psychiatry & Neurological Sciences* 32.

⁷⁰Ibid, 237.

⁷¹Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 47.

⁷²Everett Worthington. *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving*, Crown. 2001.

couples to truly forgive which moves couples to healthier marriages. The extension of embracing genuine forgiveness rests on treating others right, being free from bitterness, not embarking on acts of revenge, and releasing blame. Although the literature was published in 2001, the principles are relevant and relatable to current literature. The practical skills given are similarly relevant to Biblical principles and teachings.

The 2017 publication composed by Frank Fincham and R. W. May,⁷³ proved the validity of prayer and forgiveness being key aspects in marriage and other relationships. Statistics in the report reveal the decline of the population praying. From 1972 to 2014, the number of those who pray declined from 94% to 79%. The study links the effectiveness of prayer and forgiveness. The study displayed the effectiveness of praying for your partner and forgiveness. Scores revealed a greater level of forgiveness based on a variety of types of responses by participants. Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. John Trent support the implementation of prayer and scriptural references into tactics listed in their utilization of marriage counseling.

Summary

Healthy implementation of hope-focused strategies proves to significantly decrease divorce rates⁷⁴. Many factors such as an increase in age, social class, and social demographics play significant roles in decreasing divorce rates. Concerned, strategic marriage counselors are sure to make significant strides in marriages through the maintaining of strategies that drive marriages to healthy levels based on the model found in Ephesians 5:25-33.

⁷³Frank Fincham & R. W. May (2017). "Prayer and forgiveness: Beyond relationship quality and extension to marriage." *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31(6), 734-741.

⁷⁴Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*. IVP Academic Intersivity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 18.

Theological Foundations

This section establishes the principles from the Bible that serve as the foundation of God's ideal for healthy marriages. God created marriage and the basic foundations of His intentions are found in Scripture. This section examines foundational doctrines found in the Bible that outline the basis for a healthy marriage which relate to following the design for the creation of marriage, the foundation of marriage, and the correlation of marriage to the church and Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the principles are necessary factors in determining the methods that will be created in this project. God desires for marriages to be a part of a bigger, divine purpose.⁷⁵ Through the examination of those principles, theologians, and scholars have been cited in this section along with other notable commentaries.

This study conducts an examination of the model of marriage from the Bible and does not use tactics that support the modern, nontraditional marital unions such as same-sex marriages or nontraditional family roles. Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6 do not support the viewpoint of modern, same-sex marriages. God honors committed sexual relationships in traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Although non-traditional family roles are observed in the Bible, it does not mean they are approved by God. For example, God warned that Solomon's polygamy would lead to the adulation of idol gods and Exodus 20:3 declares that there should be no other gods before him. Cultural traditions in Bible times played an active role in some rituals and customs. The findings in the thesis project are limited to the traditional model of marriage defined through biblical interpretations and God's ordained model.

⁷⁵ W.R. Blackburn., "Model marriage: an appeal to the churches concerning marriage vows", *Touchstone*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 43-47, 2018.

Biblical Principles of Marriage

It is imperative to mention God created the institution of marriage which is defined as a covenant between a man and a woman several times in the Bible as described in Genesis 2:24, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Verse 24 is relative to Matthew 19:4-5 in displaying God’s ideal for marriage and recognizing three essential elements to maintaining a successful marriage which include the necessity of separating from parents so interference will not occur in marriage, the complete attachment to one another, and the God-sealed bond and sexual union of one flesh.⁷⁶ The same purpose of the marital union is for mankind to be subject to building communal needs and procreation which is referenced in Genesis 2:18, “And the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.” The creation of making a help meet for Adam represents the significance of the giving of self through Eve’s creation and the implication that the Hebrew word “bone” in verse 23, “the last is bone of my bones” signifies the entire body being relative to “essence” and “self.”⁷⁷

Divorce was never permissible based on God’s ideal for the creation of marriage. It was always God’s ideal that forgiveness should be granted limitlessly between husband and wife.⁷⁸ Couples tend to believe divorce is the only option when moving to alleviate pressures that are associated with marriage. While Moses permitted divorce, Jesus did not and Jesus said, “Moses provided for divorce as a concession to your hard-heartedness, but it is not part of God’s original plan. I’m holding you to the original plan and holding you liable for adultery if you divorce your

⁷⁶Howard F. Vox. *Genesis- Everyday Bible Commentary*, Moody Publishers, 2019, 5.

⁷⁷Ibid, 4

⁷⁸Rodney Reeves. *Matthew*. Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2017.

faithful wife and then marry someone else. I make an exception in cases where the spouse has committed adultery.”⁷⁹ Adultery was the exception. An argument between Jesus and the Pharisees sparked the debate on marriage and divorce while the book of Genesis still supported the fact that marriage should be forever (Matthew 19:4-6) and the Pharisees used Moses’ law to claim that divorce was permitted throughout the Scriptures.⁸⁰ Matthew 19:6 further supports the early foundation for the idea of married couples remaining together, “so they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”⁸¹ Moses allowed for divorce as a compromise to a hard heart, but that was not God’s intention.⁸² Jesus intended for marriage to be forever on earth with the exceptions of issues like sexual immorality and adultery.⁸³

Biblical theology also supports monogamous relationships by identifying a man and a woman as one man and one woman excluding polygamous relationships, homosexual relationships, and sexual immorality. In the response to a Corinthian letter, Paul wrote and warned against opening the door to sexual immorality. Husbands and wives should give themselves to each other only. Sexual immorality was an issue in the church of Corinth, and it was imperative that singles refrained from sex while married couples consisted of one man and one woman giving their bodies to their spouses only.⁸⁴ It clearly identifies the intimate sexual relationship between a husband and a wife, a male and a female.

⁷⁹Matthew 19:8-9, The Message Bible (MSG).

⁸⁰ Rodney Reeves. *Matthew*. Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2017, 375.

⁸¹Matthew 19:6. Amplified Bible (AMP).

⁸²Rodney Reeves. *Matthew*. Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2017, 376.

⁸³Ibid, 376.

⁸⁴Thomas R. Schreiner. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, InterVarsity Press, 2018, 135.

Genesis 1:28 gives instructions for man and woman to procreate, “and God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth,” which further supports the traditional family roles established from the beginning of time. According to Matthew Henry, man being made male and female was blessed with the blessing of increase and being fruitful. From Adam and Eve, God produced many couples, and once again, though man was made with the residue of the Holy Spirit (Mal. 2:15), Jesus stills argues against divorce and for the institute of the male and female marriage.⁸⁵ The scriptures continue to overlap in support of the traditional views of marriage as the foundation for healthy marriages and God’s ideal of marriage. Not only was God’s intention for men and women to procreate, which homosexual relationships cannot, but He also intended for the earth to be replenished so that the children of men can receive rightful, large inheritances and numerous long-lasting family (1 Chr. 26:5).⁸⁶

Historically, Genesis 2 provides an account of humanity’s first marital union. Then Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him”⁸⁷ represents God’s idea of desiring for man to have a companion with whom he could form closeness, laboring, security, and reproduction. His intention was purposeful in not wanting man to be alone. God took the rib from Adam and made a woman instructing that when a man leaves his father and mother, he shall cleave to his wife and be one.⁸⁸ The original purpose was that

⁸⁵Matthew Henry, *Genesis*. Blue Letter Bible Commentaries, 2020.

⁸⁶ Matthew Henry, *Genesis*. Blue Letter Bible Commentaries, 2020.

⁸⁷ Genesis 2:18, King James Version.

⁸⁸ Genesis 2:22-24, Matthew 19:5, King James Version.

marriage be a partnership where spouses can recognize themselves in each other (Genesis 2:23), while the simile of the rib offers a further interpretation that one can recognize themselves in the other person which is another form of individualized Eros.⁸⁹ Additionally, just like Eve was created from the side of Adam, the church was created from the side of Christ.

The church is born from the side of Christ on the cross as his spouse, a mystery mediated by baptism. Augustine finds this typology in Latin predecessors such as Hilary and Ambrose in order to convey the role of the sacraments in the formation of the church, but Augustine has not yet developed his mature sacramental theology.⁹⁰

This sacredness of marriage is observed in the Old Testament and the New Testament displaying the divine union of couples (Gen.2:24, Matt. 19:6), which is the “visible sign of God’s invisible divine mercy”⁹¹ ensuring God’s divine consent. There is great value in the marital union, and it is more sacred than any family connection⁹² which further shows the importance of God’s approval. Prior to Genesis 2, male and female were created in the image of God with an innate need to communicate (Genesis 1:27) so they can be able to relate to each other and commune with God.⁹³ Further confirmation of the acknowledgment of marriage being between one male and one female is supported in Matthew 19:8 which states “from the beginning”, it was not the intent for Moses to instruct men to put away their wives. The same scripture supports God’s disapproval of divorce.

⁸⁹ Helmut Thielicke and John W. Doberstein. "The Biblical Interpretation of Marriage." In *The Ethics of Sex*, 101-24. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1964. Accessed March 28, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1p5f26t.11

⁹⁰ James K. Lee "The Church as the Bride of Christ." In *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church*, 57-74. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2017, 58-59.

⁹¹ Danijel Berković. "Marriage and Marital Disputes in the Old Testament." *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2 (July 2018): 183.

⁹² Roman Janiec. "The Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Catholic Church’s Teachings Concerning Marriage." *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 70, no. 4 (2017), 362.

⁹³ Lyle L. (Lyle Lloyd) Vander Werff. "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1, January 1975, 3.

Although the creation of marriage is initially observed in Genesis and later in Matthew, the foundation of marriage is acknowledged in different Scriptures. Countless layers of fact are examined throughout the scriptures. God's creation and order for males and females to be married solicit that no person or object cause disruption in what God has placed together (Matthew 19:3-6).⁹⁴ When a man leaves his mother and father, the male and the female joined shall become one body⁹⁵ functioning collectively according to the teachings of Christ. Ephesians 5:31 repeats the charge of a man leaving his father and mother and holding fast to his wife becoming one flesh. Being one also supports the intent for sex in marriage. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that if one joins with a prostitute, "the two shall become one flesh."⁹⁶ The sexual union is not contingent on the physical act of sex alone, it embodies total intimacy in relationship aspects and emotional coherence.

Marriage and human sexuality cannot be understood simply as the result of physical drives, rational formulations, social imposition, or religious moralism. While marital union is not in the realm of things commanded (as are fellowship with God and his people), it is a divine gift not to be profaned. The intimacy of marriage gives expression to the human desire for relatedness. The relationship of husband and wife is often compared to the reciprocal relationship of God and his people and is described in the language of the covenant (Isa. 5:1ff; 61:10; Hosea; Jn. 3:29; Eph. 2:21-33). Marriage provides opportunity for mature love so vital to the wholeness of persons. (Gen. 24:67; Prov. 5: 15-19; Song of Sol. 1:1ff; 2:16; 8:of; Eph. 5:21-33; I-II Jn.)⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Kurt K. Hendel. "Marriage Matters." In *Johannes Bugenhagen: Selected Writings, Volume 1 and Volume II*, 1105-158. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2015, 1120.

⁹⁵ Roman Janiec. "The Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Catholic Church's Teachings Concerning Marriage." *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 70, no. 4 (2017), 362.

⁹⁶I Corinthians 6:16, New International Version.

⁹⁷ Lyle L. (Lyle Lloyd) Vander Werff. "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975):3.

Genuine covenant and commitment build the foundation for intimacy⁹⁸ and the deeper one-flesh union is exemplified in physical intimacy for a greater purpose.⁹⁹ It is through the implementation of true intimate deeds where spouses find themselves in a place of growth spiritually. The reason that Satan fights marriages so hard is because he knows the ultimate power that marriages possess when God shows honor to ordained covenants. The devil seeks to falsify the image of God by contradicting God's design for family and matrimony¹⁰⁰ which is why Satan would love for more people to get divorces and become participants in non-traditional marriages and families. Satan despises the glory that marriages bring to the Father because marriages reflect the relationship of Christ to the church.¹⁰¹

Another foundational aspect of marriage is the dependency of God to be the foundation of the marital union. When God is not at the center of the marriage, it runs the risk of failing. Ecclesiastes 4:12 declares, "And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." God symbolically and practically represents that third cord and through the submission of the couple to God, His integration in the confines of marriage allows the couple's relationship to be indestructible. Two joined by holy love and fellowship are connected by His Spirit just as the two disciples going to Emmaus and the cord is never broken.¹⁰² Uniting as one flesh allows couples to unite as one spirit with the Lord as written in I

⁹⁸ Julie Hanlon Rubio. "Family: What Does It Mean to Be Promarriage?" In *Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church*, 85-124. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016, 90.

⁹⁹ Dale Johnson. "Marriage: A Portrait of the Gospel from the Beginning." *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1 (April 1, 2016): 28.

¹⁰⁰ R. A. Mohler. "God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (03, 2007): 170.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 170.

¹⁰² Matthew Henry, *Ecclesiastes*. Blue Letter Bible Commentaries, 2020.

Corinthians 6:17. The honorable relationship of marriage meets great opposition when faced with sin which further supports the significance of two flesh becoming one (Jn. 17; 21-22) only in the confines of a sacred traditional marriage.¹⁰³

Jesus Christ's Relationship with the Church

In Ephesians 5:25-35, marriage compares to Christ's relationship to the church charging spouses to love using the model of Christ's love for the church with the love being just as strong as Christ's love when He gave up His own life for the world.¹⁰⁴ The bride of Christ receives spousal love from Christ through celebration and that love is extended to the church on earth with Christ being the head¹⁰⁵. Through Christ's spousal love, the church is united, and the visible church possesses power.¹⁰⁶ Since Christ is the head of the church and the members of the Bible, glory is demonstrated through the head. The bridegroom and the bride speak in one united voice remaining on one accord.¹⁰⁷ The church should echo and speak what Jesus Christ desires just like the relationship between husband and wife.

Further observation of biblical theology reveals the entire passage of Ephesians 5:22-35 is one enormous simile that demonstrates the relationship between husband and wife is like the Christ and the church. The relationship and the interactions, therein, compare at a greater level

¹⁰³ Matthew Henry, *I Corinthians*. Blue Letter Bible Commentaries, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Roman Janiec. "The Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Catholic Church's Teachings Concerning Marriage." *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 70, no. 4, 2017, 264.

¹⁰⁵ James K. Lee "The Church as the Bride of Christ." *In Augustine and the Mystery of the Church*, 57-74. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2017, 73.

¹⁰⁶Ibid, 70.

¹⁰⁷ James K. Lee "The Church as the Bride of Christ." *In Augustine and the Mystery of the Church*, 57-74. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2017, 57.

than just looking at the actual persons in the relationship.¹⁰⁸ The entire text teaches spouses how to be effective in a relationship. Ephesians 5:22 begins by employing the act of submission by the wife to the husband. “As unto the Lord” further dictates the significance of submission by the wife. The passage moves to explain “how the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body” which reveals the comparison of marriage to the relational unit of Christ and the church. Verse 24 continues by stating “as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” with verse 25 further giving instructions to husbands to love their wives just like Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

Correlations of Christ to His earthly bride “emphasized and thematically outlined” prophetic literature.¹⁰⁹ Identified as a prophetic establishment, marriage brings to bring light to a dark work so that others can be witnessed to through the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁰ The gospel centers on Jesus Christ laying down His life for the world which is another reason why marriage is so vital in the world. God gave his only begotten Son to save people from their sins (John 3:16). Christ is known as the Lamb and the protector and purchaser of His bride.¹¹¹ When husbands love their wives in the manner that Christ loves the church, he sanctifies his wife cleansing her “by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and

¹⁰⁸ Osiek, Carolyn. "The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): a problematic wedding." *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2002, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Danijel Berković. “Marriage and Marital Disputes in the Old Testament.” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2, July 2018, 181.

¹¹⁰ W. R. Blackburn. 2018, “Model marriage: an appeal to the churches concerning marriage vows”, *Touchstone*, vol. 31, no. 1, 47.

¹¹¹ Dale Johnson. “Marriage: A Portrait of the Gospel from the Beginning.” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1, April 1, 2016, 29.

without blemish.”¹¹² God’s ideal desire is for the church to be cleansed from sin without blemish. Marriage depicts the gospel of Jesus Christ, therefore, when the traditional design of marriage and family is endangered, revelations related to the gospel and marriage is jeopardized.¹¹³ The mystery of the gospel is further “unveiled” in the association between the bridegroom and the bride within the natural boundary of heterosexual marriage and unnatural matrimonyes that are entered willingly and voluntarily reject God’s natural order.¹¹⁴ Actions against God’s natural orders result in sin and His wrath. Romans 1:18 warns against the wrath of God, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”¹¹⁵

Ephesians 5:25-33 is embedded with aspects of love which is the basis of why God gave His only son for the sins of the world. Love proves to be the driving component behind every essential relationship particularly in matrimonial affairs. I Corinthians 13 gives an accurate depiction of what agape love is and what love is not. Eros love and agape love must be operational in the confines of marriage and work collectively to form the ultimate depiction of a healthy marriage.

Although characteristics written in I Corinthians 13 are qualities of agape love, they still represent unconditional love and if those aspects are not followed in a marriage as it relates to love, then it can be assumed that couples are not truly operating in what God deems as unconditional love. Agape love endures all actions of unconditional love that prevent couples

¹¹² W.R. Blackburn. 2018, “Model marriage: an appeal to the churches concerning marriage vows”, *Touchstone*, vol. 31, no. 1, 45.

¹¹³ Dale Johnson. “Marriage : A Portrait of the Gospel from the Beginning.” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1, April 1, 2016, 31.

¹¹⁴ Jim Brooks. “Satan’s War on Marriage.” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 20 (2): 2015. 38.

¹¹⁵Romans 1:18, NRSV.

from quitting the marriage when times get difficult, thus, marriage without agape and eros love cannot succeed; it is just a public contract between two people.¹¹⁶ Unpretentious love means that each couple gives of themselves to each other. The commands for love found in I Corinthians 13 allows couples to withstand trials and tribulations. The excellence of love demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 13 “transforms Christian marriage as well as the rest of life”¹¹⁷ and is “the key to right-relatedness, the end for which men and women were created.”¹¹⁸ The capability to love is a gift from God and not man and the human capacity to love will not be satisfied until God’s love is exemplified in all relationships¹¹⁹ with the marital union being of utmost importance.

Throughout the Bible, additional approaches interrelated to marriage are revealed and essential to this thesis project. The bigger picture of the creation of marriage is intertwined with the crucial task to treat people properly and effectively live in the world abiding by God’s law. The next few paragraphs will examine other foundational aspects of marriage warranted for portions of this thesis project.

Appropriate and effective communication is obligatory in any relationship, specifically marriage. When communicating with others, “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”¹²⁰ Proverbs 18:13 describes answering before listening as silliness and shameful. Listening before talking is deemed as being wise and referenced in Proverbs 10:19 and Proverbs 17:27. Since communication proves to be a major hindrance in marriage, improving communication skills is

¹¹⁶ Ruth Towns and Elmer L. Towns. *How to Build a Lasting Marriage: Lessons from Bible Couples*. Shippensburg, Pa: Destiny Image, Inc, 2009, Chapter 1.

¹¹⁷ Lyle L. (Lyle Lloyd) Vander Werff. “Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage.” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 7, no. 1 (January 1975): 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹¹⁹Ibid, 12.

¹²⁰ James 1:19, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

key to combatting marital issues before marriage and during marriage. Further instructions urge believers to watch over what they say (Psalm 141:3) because “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). There is no denying the power in the tongue and it shall never be used as a deadly weapon.

Humbleness is a necessity for a relationship to succeed. The art of submission referenced in Ephesians 5:22 displays an example of humbleness. Christ giving up His life for the world (Ephesians 5:25) proves to be another ultimate example of humbleness. Therefore, humbleness works both ways with the husband and the wife partaking in acts of being humble. With that same sense, humility presents the instructions that authority extends to everything in the relationship that is lawful and favorable with loyalty to God.¹²¹

Theoretical Foundations

This section explores theoretical models and theories related to marriage and marriage counseling. It also discusses their strengths, weaknesses, and history. Many of the theories presented in this section relate to one or more aspects of the theological principles of healthy biblically based matrimonial relationships.

Marriage counseling that hope-focused and comprised of different theories to meet the needs of married couples correlates with preventing divorce. Traditional marriage counseling tends to be less focused while hope-focused interventions address more issues and goals.¹²² Not only is hope-focused marriage counseling consistent with Scriptures,¹²³ the main goal is to

¹²¹ Matthew Henry, Ephesians, Blue Letter Bible Commentaries, 2020.

¹²² Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 25.

¹²³ Ibid, 24.

strengthen marriage and reduce divorce.¹²⁴ The hope-focused model of marriage counseling has proven to be successful because of its ability to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce. It is worthy to be noted in this research because of how it correlates to several Scriptures and biblical references. A list of Scriptures and goals interconnected to the Hope-Focused Counseling model according to Worthington are directly listed.¹²⁵

- It focuses on love, faith, and work (Galatians 6:5).
- It promotes marital commitment, which is important because the marital bond is used as a metaphor for our relationship with Christ (Jeremiah 31:32, Hosea 2:16;3;1, I Corinthians 6;16-17, Ephesians 5:25-33).
- It promotes harmony and reconciliation between people who are in conflict (Matthew 5:9).
- It promotes love between Christians (Romans 12:9-21; I Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4:22-5:2).
- It uses methods of harmonious relationships that are emphasized throughout Scripture, in such books as Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Songs, and by such people as Jesus, Paul, Peter, and others.
- It promotes covenantal commitment: the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15:9-11, 17-18), the new covenant in Jesus' blood (Luke 22:20), and the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14; Matthew 19:4-6).

¹²⁴ Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 18.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 24, *List of hope marriage counseling consistent with Scripture.*

Hope should be at the center of each intervention, strategy, and session. It is not permissible for the counselor or leader to lose hope so that the client will not lose hope. When more couples have hope at the center of everything they do, it is more likely for their marriages to move into healthier positions. Worthington mirrors scriptural foundation in both, physical and verbal interventions.¹²⁶ Even in troubled times, the role of couples must be consistent with interventions that bring solutions in harsh times which is why it is necessary to note that counseling has to be correlated to Scriptures.¹²⁷ With the Word of God being a support to hope-focused therapy, it allows for the counseling to be favorable with the original intention of God's plans for married couples.

Worthington's blend of HFMC mixes with BCT, EFCT, and SFT (explained later in this section) with the goal of providing marriage counseling saturated with strategies intertwined with scripture. Strengths of HFMC include the focus on the Christian perspective of hope, an easily remembered definition of love, the focus on faith and spirituality, the assessment at the initiation of counseling, motivation to get couples to participate in homework, separation of different areas of marriage, and the importance on the emotional bond between couples. More advances have proved to be effective in the enrichment and prevention categories of HFMC.

Bridge to Recovery uses an adapted model of HFMC to teach couples effective reconciliation¹²⁸ to restore the bond of trust between couples. This adapted model emphasizes the need for couples to feel more secure in their relationship as it progresses. Worthington's theory is built on the statement "marriage is a shadow of the relationship that we are expected to have with

¹²⁶ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 266.

¹²⁷Ibid, 24.

¹²⁸ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 125.

Jesus-permanent, loving, committed (Eph 5:32).”¹²⁹ When this is the basis of a marriage, the marriage is successful. Not only does this theory relate back to the thesis statement of this project, but it furthers supports the benefits of maintaining a marriage that is comparative to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hope, revealed as the strengthening component, works to keep the marriage together and healthy. Since most married couples enter marriage counseling not exactly motivated,¹³⁰ the wise counselor initially works to instill the sense of hope before proceeding with advance directives. This component makes couples more willing to be active participants. Brief counseling can be highly effective, but for most couples, they need more than five to eight sessions.¹³¹ Surprisingly, brief marital counseling proves that marriages that are more troubled benefit quicker than less troubled marriages.¹³² Hope and willingness are avid components that yield successful outcomes.

Other components of HFMC differ from traditional counseling which yields better results. Those different components directly from Worthington include:¹³³

- The relationship between counselors and clients is vital. A relationship is at the center of the Godhead in the Trinity. People were created to live in relationships (Gen 2:18). Problems occur in relationships (Jas 5:14). Relationships provide a powerful mechanism for the healing of problems (Jas 5:16; Heb 10:25). In hope-focused marriage counseling, a strong relationship between counselor and couple must be

¹²⁹ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intersivity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 17.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 21.

¹³¹ Ibid, 21.

¹³² Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intersivity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 22.

¹³³ Ibid, 24-25.

formed within the first session to maximize change. In traditional counseling, the demands for quick relationship development are not as stringent.

- Hope-focused marriage counseling needs to employ a strategy (faith, work, and love) that is repeated frequently enough so that couples can learn easily.
- The emphasis is on rekindled hope rather than feeling perfectly happy now. That implies that the counselor assumes throughout counseling that the couple will continue to change their behavior even after counseling has ended. Homework is emphasized, which implies that the counselor is not the main change agent. Rather, God helps the couple change more at home than within sessions.
- Interventions should be focused and choreographed toward promoting the strategy of faith working through love. Every intervention should promote that strategy.
- Every intervention should promote hope in the couple. In traditional marital counseling, interventions are less focused and address more objectives. There is more tolerance for getting off track.
- Interventions should be active and involve observable behavior, emotion, or effects. This emphasis on concrete observable interventions promotes powerful lasting change. In traditional marital counseling, fewer techniques must be active and observable. Not every intervention in traditional marital counseling needs to make quite the impact of an intervention in hope-focused marriage counseling.
- Couples need to understand how interventions affect their love, faith, work, and hope. Couples should not simply be manipulated into changing. The knowledge of the broader base behind change will affect the client's motivation to apply the change efforts after counseling has terminated. In some traditional marital counseling

approaches, many interventions (for example, reframing or paradoxical interventions) may be made without the clients' understanding of the reason for the intervention. Overall, clients cooperate better if they understand how interventions contribute to their goals.

Worthington supported traditional marriage counseling but changed his perspective after merging other theories and approaches producing HFMC which proved to be a quicker, intervention covering more areas of marriage. Traditional marriage counseling consists of professional therapists who have been taught scripted techniques¹³⁴ to help couples which is a weakness of traditional counseling. As a result, traditional forms of counseling, at times, forsake foundational morals or values of biblical doctrine. Another issue is the exploitation that is associated with secular marriage counselors¹³⁵ who have no real vested interest in the successful outcome of the marriages.

When Worthington moved his support from traditional marriage counseling to Christian marriage counseling to hope-focused marriage counseling, he outlined many critical points. The following table reveals differences found by Worthington as it relates to traditional Christian marriage counseling and HFMC.

¹³⁴ Charles Owu-Ewie. "Proverbs in Marriage: Counselling Role and Implications." *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30, no. 1 (2019): 25.

¹³⁵ Charles Owu-Ewie. "Proverbs in Marriage: Counselling Role and Implications." *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30, no. 1 (2019): 25.

Table 1

*Comparisons of Marriage Counseling and Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*¹³⁶

Area	Marriage Counseling: A Christian Approach	Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling
Theory	Eclectic: heavily influenced by cognitive-behavioral marital therapy, developmental life transition theory	Eclectic: more integrated but less comprehensive; emphasizes a goal of producing hope and a strategy of increasing love, work and faith
Areas of marriage	intimacy communication conflict management hurt-blame-sin	core vision central values confession and forgiveness communication conflict resolution cognition closeness complicating problems commitment
Durations	2 assessment, 1 feedback, 6-12 interventions	1 assessment, 5-8 interventions
Assessment	2 assessment sessions, 1 feedback session	1 assessment session not as thorough as the two sessions could be
Interventions	Over 50, worked into the text within chapters on the areas of marriage that interventions address	Over 100, little overlap with the previous book; structured according to which of the areas of marriage it addresses; tied to producing hope and to which portion of the strategy it addresses
Analysis of other marital approaches	50-page appendix summarizing and critiquing major approaches to marital counseling	Minimal
Objective	Change within the sessions; maintenance terminates change	Initiate a fundamental change in direction in marriage, which will continue to improve
Target counselors	Professional therapists, therapists in training	Professional therapists, counselors, pastoral counselors, pastors who counsel, counselors in training, researchers

A proven study of HFMC¹³⁷ after 156 couples initially participated in free nine-hour sessions utilized questionnaires and saliva samples to look at stress hormone cortisol.

¹³⁶ Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy IVP* Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005, 26.

¹³⁷ Everett L. Worthington Jr. (2005). *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy IVP* Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL.

Discussions and sessions were videotaped, transcribed, and recorded. The results proved to show tremendous gains in intimacy, satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution at the climax of the sessions. Modest results revealed small gains in other couples as it related to intimacy satisfaction, communication, and forgiveness, but substantial gains rendered positive results for couples who continued to implement learned strategies after the nine months to a year follow-up thereby preventing divorce and restoring the marriage to healthier satisfaction levels. The couples who did not receive consultations experienced a steady decline in intimacy, satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Worthington's study and theories have continued to be consistent with a more favorable study in 2016¹³⁸ when Lisa Doot Abinoja writes about how hope-focused approaches utilize clear intervention explicitly tailored to Christians. She does reference modifications for non-believers who consent to participate in the approach and even with modifications, the approach still proved to be effective.

Discernment counseling differs from traditional marriage counseling as well. "The goal of discernment is to help couples arrive at greater clarity and confidence in their decision making about the future of their marriage based on a deeper understanding of the problems in the marriage and each person's contributions to them."¹³⁹ This type of counseling is not always favorable because it analyzes whether the couple should stay in the marriage or not. Leaving a marriage rejects the Biblical principle that divorce is not an option which is an extremely weak area of discernment counseling. A strength of discernment counseling reveals that it does allow the couples to gain precision and assurance in decision making about the future of their

¹³⁸Lisa Doot Abinoja M.A. L.C.S.W. (2016). Couple Therapy: A New Hope-Focused Approach. *Social Work and Christianity*, 43(2), 250.

¹³⁹William J. Doherty and Steven M. Harris, and American Psychological Association. (2017). *Helping Couples on the Brink of Divorce: Discernment Counseling for Troubled Relationships*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 49.

matrimonial covenant.¹⁴⁰ The negative aspect is that this method can backfire on the counselor if the couple does not truly reflect on the necessary areas to get them to decide to save their marriage. Consequently, another strength of discernment counseling is most times couples choose to save their marriage after participating in the safety screening questions and the intake assessment.¹⁴¹ The counselor's discernment is needed further to determine the implementation of discernment counseling.

When dealing with marriage counseling, marriage counseling theories combined with the basis of biblical principles must be considered. Counseling methods must be equipped with multiplicities of theories, activities, and Biblical wisdom to extend the contents of their background to be effective with every client. The Akans of Ghana utilize the book of Proverbs as a basis for counseling to instill the importance of being faithful and truthful within the confines of the marriage.¹⁴² Not only do they use it for faithfulness and trust, but they utilize the book of Proverbs as a way to intervene in all areas of the marriage and it proves to make for more successful, healthy, marriages in their culture.¹⁴³

Behavioral Couples Therapy (BCT) and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) improve relations between spouses. BCT, founded around 1960, focuses on the principles of shaping, rehearsing, and accepting the behavior of the individual as well as teaches couples new

¹⁴⁰ William J. Doherty and Steven M. Harris, and American Psychological Association. (2017). *Helping Couples on the Brink of Divorce: Discernment Counseling for Troubled Relationships*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 44.

¹⁴¹ William J. Doherty and Steven M. Harris, and American Psychological Association. (2017). *Helping Couples on the Brink of Divorce: Discernment Counseling for Troubled Relationships*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 51-52.

¹⁴² Charles Owu-Ewie. (2019). Proverbs in Marriage: Counselling Role and Implications. *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30(1): 36.

¹⁴³Ibid, 36.

styles of conflict resolution.¹⁴⁴ EFCT, meta-analyzed and reevaluated in 1999, proves to effectively treat marital satisfaction by improving the results of couples improving their satisfaction while being married and sustaining that improvement through other measures of follow-up.¹⁴⁵ Both therapies analyze the relation of couples' distress to the conflict patterns that exist in the relationship. It allows for the counselor to get to the underlying root of the issue. When both therapies are accurately implemented, the tensions of the couples can be alleviated. The principal objective of BCT is "to increase positive, relationship-supporting interactions between partners using behavioral techniques."¹⁴⁶ BCT also focuses on the positive aspects of helping the spouses identify "relationship-reinforcing events" while aiming communication to simplify the manifestation of aforesaid methods.¹⁴⁷ Based on a 2019 study, EFCT is effective in treating couples in distress,¹⁴⁸ because it moves couples to a place of safety in their relationship and deescalates their negative interactions. With that being said, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher support the necessity of forgiveness as an integral part of positive emotional health¹⁴⁹ in a healthy marriage. If a spouse looks at their partner with a negative viewpoint, then the two will never forgive, love, and move forward. Often, many couples remain stagnated in places of

¹⁴⁴ Daniel J. Fischer, and Brandi C Fink. "Clinical processes in behavioral couples therapy." *Psychotherapy (Chicago, Ill.)* vol. 51,1 (2014):11.

¹⁴⁵ Candice C. Beasley & Richard Ager (2019) *Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy: A Systematic Review of Its Effectiveness over the past 19 Years*, *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 16:2, 144.

¹⁴⁶ Maren Rathgeber, Paul-Christian Bürkner, Eva-Maria Schiller, and Heinz Holling. "The Efficacy of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy and Behavioral Couples Therapy: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 45, no. 3 (July 2019): 448.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 449.

¹⁴⁸ Tim S. Welch, E. Megan Lachmar, Silvia G. Leija, Trisha Easley, Adrian J. Blow, and Andrea K. Wittenborn. "Establishing Safety in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: A Single-Case Process Study." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 45, no. 4 (2019): 621.

¹⁴⁹Linda J.Waite & Maggie Gallagher. *A Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier and Better off Financially*. Broadway Books: New York, NY. 2000, 47.

unforgiveness for years which led to divorce because issues were never concluded. After couples travel through the identification of patterns, therapists aid clients in grasping and reflecting on their cognitions and performances. An overview of Cognitive Behavior Therapy is warranted at this point for everyone in the relationship.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy stems from combining behavior and cognitive. Behavioral therapy was founded by B. F. Skinner. Beck, in 1976, proposed a new phenomenon that aimed to change the thought pattern of a patient's cognitions. It revealed in being evidence-based, producing common logic sense, and clear principles. Criticisms that stem from traditional cognitive behavioral therapy is that it is "too mechanistic and fails to address the concerns of the 'whole' patient."¹⁵⁰ Others criticize there is a lack of neuroscience and have failed to make predictions related to inconsistent attitudes and treatment. Currently, cognitive behavior has developed widely throughout the world and even new trends of online cognitive behavior therapy have emerged. Just like the other theories, the cognitive-behavioral theory has strengths and weaknesses. Strengths will be examined first. Cognitive behavioral therapy is just as effective as medicine for mental health issues. It is not a lengthy treatment process. It takes on different formats and addresses different types of therapy. Another strength is that it is a collaborative effort and skills that are learned can be applied to real-life situations. Several weaknesses exist such as positive results depend on the participation of the client, extra time can be allotted for extra work, specific learning difficulties are a barrier, complex mental issues are not favorable, some clients feel worse after therapy than before, current trends only address some causes, and the focus is on the individual's capacity to change has a lot to do with positive results. For married couples, it may be crucial for therapists to host individualized sessions based

¹⁵⁰ B.A. Gaudiano (2008). "Cognitive-behavioral therapies: achievements and challenges evidence-based mental health," 11(1), 5-7.

on CBT to get to the roots of issues individually, so couples can truly resolve conflict collectively.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has some controversial aspects, but those aspects do not take away from proven interventions. One of the most beneficial techniques is to track thoughts on a thought record and then move to invent a healthier thought process. This type of exposure assignment technique allows people to systemically face their fears, dreams, and anxieties. Developing a positive thinking pattern sets the foundation for behavior to change. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is not that effective with mental health patients because most mental health patients benefit from therapies that deal with self-actualizations like psychodynamic or humanistic-existential. Activity scheduling is another technique that identifies meditating, walking exercises, and working on a project. It causes clients to participate in rewarding activities. All parts of cognitive-behavioral therapy are not biblical. There is a strategy called mindfulness that Buddhists practice, but it will not be a part of the strategies used in this study. “Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective in working with families, adolescents, children, groups, couples, and individuals with depression and anxiety disorders.”¹⁵¹ Using cognitive – behavioral therapy, Christian counselors will align biblical foundation with proven strategies to reach ultimate success. Romans 7:18-20 declares, “for I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” Paul already understood how man’s nature is sinful and that the worth of a man cannot be determined by his sinful state. Furthermore, the sinful state of a man does not change their deep

¹⁵¹ Dr. Tim Clinton & Dr. Ron Hawkins. (2011). *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: an indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.

desire to want to do well. It is the purpose of the Christian counselor to help the client embrace deeper understanding as it relates to being redeemed from the sinful state and to continually keep your mind reliant on Him. God's purpose for His people reveals in coming to terms with new life and not staying in an old way of thinking. Coming to grasp with a new pattern of thinking allows clients to develop an accurate thought process that is biblically accepted. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). For married couples, deeper self-reflection proves necessary, because individuals in the confines of a relationship do not always internalize their flaws.

This thesis project focuses on following Ephesians 5:25-33, which is a biblical passage that presents biblical principles that can be applied in marriage counseling methods through the implementation of strategic solutions so married couples would move to what God envisions for marriage partaking in healthier relationships. BCT, EFCT, and HFMC combined with biblical doctrine allow couples to complete interventions successfully. For individual sessions, CBT is effective for allowing participants to use their cognition to promote behavioral changes. Aspects taken from each therapy prove to be instrumental for this study with a strong basis being in HFMC. BCT and EFCT were utilized according to client needs after interview components, while HFMC and CBT are the major components linked to the major methodology of the project.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter looks at the methodology used in solving the problem of preventing divorce by producing healthy marriages based on the biblical model of marriage in Demonstration Church. After the study of several theoretical aspects and pertinent biblical passages, this study seeks to determine positive solutions to address the problem with the concept of producing healthy marriages thereby preventing divorce.

Research Design Rationale

Russell Moore reflects on how “marriage is in a state of disarray and chaos challenging readers to revisit the linkage between the Gospel and marriage.”¹⁵² While the concept for this project emerged from the researcher’s own experience with her marriage and counseling couples, many aspects of healthy marriage building have become learned concepts based on the foundation of building a biblical based marriage with the researcher’s spouse. Over the course of the marriage, experience has been an instrumental teacher in showing other couples the benefits of having a healthier marriage based on the Bible. Through the counseling component, the researcher has discovered that many couples lack foundational elements, strategies, and interventions to truly have the marriage desired by God. Experience has also proven that many couples prove to be ignorant of what it means to produce a healthy, biblically based model of marriage founded on the principles of Ephesians 5:25-33. After scrutiny of different studies, books, and journals, the researcher determined the need to help couples build healthier marriages based on biblical principles. “There is a significant gap between the experience of marriage and the discussion of marriage which is just one reason why America desperately needs to revisit the

¹⁵²Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker. *The Gospel & Marriage*. Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2018, 2-3.

foundation, principles, and true institution of marriage.”¹⁵³ Other observations prove that many couples have been critical of marriage counseling in the past in many churches in Louisiana and nationwide. To maximize the impact of this study, it relied on data from other ministers and couples.

Marriage counseling takes on different forms and implementations depending on the backgrounds, demographics, and cultures of the individuals. The focus of this study stands on how HFMC combined with other methods, when necessary, works together to prevent divorce. As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to provide marriages in Demonstration Church future strategies and interventions with counseling that is integrated with the biblical principles of marriage found in Ephesians 5:25-33 to maintain healthy marriages thereby preventing divorce. While there is an excess of literature linking the Gospel of Jesus, the Bible, and marriage, the need lies in creating more interventions and literature showing couples how to apply the principles found in the Bible. “Interpretation about the family and Bible is very relevant for current times and the role of Ephesians 5 in recognizing the parallelism of Christ and the Church is even more significant for married couples.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the methodology was created to correlate directly to the purpose.

This chapter provides information related to the researcher’s role in the study, the research design, intervention, implementation, ethical consideration, and further rationale that supports the research design. This thesis project utilized the action research method combined with qualitative research approaches. Qualitative methods analyze the quality of the participants’ marriages during the research testing window. “The presentation of rigor in quantitative studies

¹⁵³ Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker. *The Gospel & Marriage*. Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2018, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen C. Barton. “Marriage, family, the Bible and the gospel.” *Theology*. 2016;119(3):164.

are less pertinent to qualitative studies because quantitative studies mainly focus on measurement and adequacy while qualitative measures allow more rigor to be demonstrated in the research design.”¹⁵⁵

Intervention Design

Currently, based on the observations of the spiritual leaders, many marriages in Demonstration Church and around the area of Shreveport, Louisiana do not truly abide by the principles in Ephesians 5:25-33. “Louisiana is one of the top four states in the top third of the nation’s highest divorce rates citing relationship quality and satisfaction as a connection to social, financial, and other stressors.”¹⁵⁶ In consideration of the 2020 pandemic, many news outlets report the increase in divorce rates according to the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. One Shreveport, Louisiana news station reportedly ran a news story referencing “COVID-19 stressors as reasons for divorce with additional support for a psychiatrist from Ohio State University’s Medical Center, Dr. K. Luan Phan saying that people are fighting their families as enemies.”¹⁵⁷ In that same article, a professional counselor discusses how nobody was prepared for this kind of stress.”¹⁵⁸ The concept of how spouses should love each other based on the parallelism to the bride of Christ to Jesus Christ is not taking place in Demonstration Church. More observations have been made among younger couples in other ministries as well in the Shreveport area. Some

¹⁵⁵ C. Maher, M. Hadfield, M. Hutchings de Eyto A. “Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Data Analysis: A Design Research Approach to Coding Combining NVivo with Traditional Material Methods.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. December 2018.

¹⁵⁶Harris, Victor W., Brian Visconti, Charles B. Sewell, Randall Cantrell, Jon Anderson, and Emily M. Davison. "Southern Romance: Relationship Quality, Consensus, and Context among Cohabiting Couples in the Gulf States." *Marriage & Family Review* 56, no. 2 (2020): 109-143.

¹⁵⁷ Nate Fluharty. “Divorce rates on the rise as a result of COVID-19 pressure.” Nov. 12, 2020. Accessed Nov. 23, 2020. https://www.ktbs.com/news/divorce-rates-on-the-rise-as-a-result-of-covid-19-pressure/article_97cbf45c-24e9-11eb-81ee-33ddcf34988b.html

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

participants, who are not actual members of the church, engage in events, seminars, and workshops as it relates to marriage. Those individuals make up the rest of the population for the study. When that parallelism fails to exist, marriages run the risk of ending in divorce because “the covenant exists before the union and you cannot unite together without the covenant relationship of Christ and the church being displayed in the marriage.”¹⁵⁹ Failure to demonstrate that type of love and grace among spouses causes frictions between couples that render unhealthy marital unions. Several local churches have marriage programs designed to keep couples married, but there are still a lot of churches not focused on true effective means of marriage counseling. As the twenty-first century emerged, observations were made that not all marriage counselors were effective in their strategies.¹⁶⁰ This statement relates to this study because some married couples attend counseling sessions, but they do not always leave with the right tools to maintain their marriages. No couple should partake in marriage counseling and their marriage still end in divorce. If divorce still happens in the confines of that marriage, a clear evaluation of the failure of the counseling sessions is warranted. Therefore, adjustments are necessary to modern marriage counseling sessions and tactics.

The intervention plan is based on hope-focused marriage counseling techniques by Everett Worthington which correlate with scriptures, more specifically Ephesians 5:25-33 and other references in the Bible that represent God’s ideal design of marriage. These techniques are suggested because of the noticeable alignment to elements of biblical scriptures. It also covers the ground for couples that other counselors could have missed or eliminated unknowingly. With

¹⁵⁹Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker. *The Gospel & Marriage*. Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2018, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Dowbiggin. “Review of Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States, and: More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss.” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66, no. 2 (2011): 265.

the combination of modern techniques and aspects of guidelines from the Bible, it allows for more common issues to be addressed and resolved. This project sought to take those strategies combined with a scriptural foundation to produce healthier marriages.

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis project was to provide and implement biblically-based foundations for building healthy marriages within Demonstration Church and Shreveport, Louisiana area. The major constructs of the study focus on how Ephesians 5:25-33 can work with hope-focused marriage counseling to prevent divorce being that “hope-focused marriage enrichments increase negative interaction qualities in the areas of communication, forgiveness, intimacy, and centered on empathy.”¹⁶¹ As divorces increases and many couples fail to marry in modern times, this study works to bring research, methods, and strategies that can help marriages maintain healthy maintenance so couples can have reliable interventions to help them through common marital issues. By studying married couples and ministers, it provides an accurate perspective from both sides that were analyzed to produce methodology specifically designed for couples and plans for ministerial leaders to help couples. Those methods will be favorable in preventing future divorces. The foundation for how couples treat each other does not consistently mirror the example found in Ephesians 5:25-33 because traditional marriage counseling does not always take into context the Biblical principles of marriage.¹⁶² Forsaking the model of marriage in the Bible results in unhealthy marriages leads to higher divorce rates. Every marriage requires maintenance. Interventions built on the biblical model of marriage allows

¹⁶¹ Jennifer S. Ripley & Everett L. Worthington, Jr. “Hope-Focused and Forgiveness-Based Group Interventions to Promote Marital Enrichment.” *Journal of Counseling & Development*. December 23, 2011. 452-463.

¹⁶²Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* IVP Academic Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005.

couples to refrain from divorcing during critical moments in marriage. This allows married couples to reach God's plan for marriage.

The Research Groundwork

The first task included securing approval from the DMIN program at Liberty University, assigning a mentor, and approval from IRB before embarking on the necessary steps of the implementation of an intervention. In August 2020, the researcher began making copies and creating documents based on interventions in Everett Worthington's book. The researcher also set up a Zoom account and purchased a video camera. Copies were made in the home of the researcher for free.

Recruitment did not begin until IRB approves the research. Recruiting took place at Demonstration Church marriage ministry which is hosted on the third Monday of every month. Recruitment flyers were given to associate ministries of Demonstration Church. The recruitment flyer was also posted on private social media sites for Demonstration Church and associate ministries.

Participants were derived from recruitment flyers and social media after the initial participants screening took place. Couples' screening took place through the online Google document for participant recruited through the online flyer and flyer posted in the church and verbally for participants recruited during the in-person meeting. The couples' screening questions are as follows:

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you traditionally, legally married, meaning one spouse born male and the other born female?
- Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ?

- Would you be willing to participate in an interview, survey, and focus group associated with this research study?

Screening questions were designed with the consideration of the biblical basis of the study. Traditional married couples consist of one born male and one born female according to “Genesis 2:24 referencing how a man and woman become one flesh when they leave their parents.”¹⁶³ The Bible speaks very specifically giving wives and husbands instructions for how to act in the confines of the marriage. Non-traditional couples would not apply to this study because those relationships go against biblical principles of how God designed marriage to be. “The proper theology of marriage cannot be neglected because of the foundation of gospel revelation as it relates to marriage.”¹⁶⁴ Being a believer in Jesus Christ is another component of the screening process because the researcher needed to weigh the negative and positive benefits of a non-believer participating in the study. Non-believers could benefit because it could positively affect the marriage, however, friction could occur if biblical doctrine goes against what they believe. Participants needed to be of legal age to prevent any legal issues. In addition, participants should be willing individuals to participate in the project.

The ministers’ screening took place through the online Google document. The ministers’ screening questions were as follows:

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a licensed or ordained minister?
- Are you employed as a minister or retired?

¹⁶³ Matthew Henry Commentary, Genesis, Blue Letter Bible, 2020.

¹⁶⁴Dale Johnson. “Marriage: A Portrait of the Gospel from the Beginning.” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1 (April 1, 2016): 26–31.

- Do you have any experience counseling couples?

Screening questions for ministers were derived based on ministers being the legal age of the state as well as being licensed or ordained which adds to the validity of the process. Knowing if the minister is still ministering or retired adds to the uniqueness of the data gathered because a retired minister may or may not have a different level of knowledge than a current minister. A minister who has had experience counseling couples weighed heavier because they have more experience to bring to the collected data.

The researcher created a list on Microsoft Word in a table format of the contact information of participants. After formatting the contact list, the researcher contacted couples via phone to set a time where couples could sign consent forms and participate in the interview questions. This was completed electronically via google forms as well. Consent forms are documented in Appendices J and K.

The procedures for the action research study were as follows:

Couples:

Week 1 - Interview, 30 minutes followed by the marital satisfaction paper survey, 10 minutes

Week 2 - Recorded group session, 90 minutes

- The interview was audio recorded.
- The group session was video recorded.
- The group session consisted of the 10 couples participating in the study. It included all couples.
- Participants did not review a transcript of the group sessions. The researcher will give verbal and written feedback at the group session.

- Participants did not review a transcript of the interview questions. All transcripts are for the researcher's data analysis.
- The researcher presented a lesson based on Ephesians 5:25-33 prior to asking the group session questions.

Ministers:

Interview - 30 minutes

- The interview will be audio recorded.
- Participants will not review a transcript of the interview.

The research in this study did not begin until approval by IRB had been obtained. To begin the project, volunteers were gaged by generating flyer recruitments posted at the Demonstration Church ministry, but open recruitment via social media for those who had access to the private marriage Facebook group. A verbal announcement was given at the monthly marriage ministry. Flyers and verbal announcements were posted immediately after IRB approval. The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Training). Couples were recruited by posting the recruitment flyer on the church's social media page and throughout the church as well as verbally recruiting couples during an in-person marriage ministry meeting. Ministers were recruited by flyer, email, and follow-up email by posting a recruitment flyer on the church's social media page to recruit ministers from that specific church as well as send an email to ministers known personally by the researcher. The follow-up email was sent one week after initial contact.

Consent forms were not issued for signage until participants were selected for the study after IRB approval. For couples, the consent forms were emailed for those recruited by online flyer or the flyer posted in the church and handed to participants that are recruited in-person.

Couples signed their consent forms in the presence of the researcher at the initial contact. For ministers, the consent forms were sent in a separate email for those recruited by the online flyer and as an email attachment for those recruited by recruitment email. Couples and ministers signed the consent forms and returned them prior to any procedures being completed.

The couple's participant group included adults that were 18-65 years old, traditional legally married couples meaning one born male and born female, and believers in Jesus Christ. It consisted of a variety of ages and races with different economic, demographic, and social backgrounds. Couples included 7 couples of African- American race and 3 Caucasians. The group was assigned on a volunteer basis after the recruitment process. The minister participant group was required to be over 18 years old and licensed/ordained, preferably having experience in counseling couples. It consisted of ministers of different races, denominations, economic, demographic, and social backgrounds with the majority being African American and Caucasian. Ministers' years of work experience varied. The groups were assigned on a volunteer basis after the recruitment process. Persons under the age of 18 were excluded. Non-traditional married couples were excluded. There was a total of 10 minister participants.

Married couples with a variety of age groups allowed for a broader range of perspectives as it relates to the thesis project, therefore, it is necessary to use this age demographic. Ministers of all different ages and backgrounds attribute to the qualitative data needed for the study. The maximum number of participants were 14 couples and 25 ministers

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is defined as the moral principles that guide what is right or wrong. "Professional ethics in research constitutes as an accountability issue."¹⁶⁵ Ethical consents and considerations

¹⁶⁵Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 32.

were considered while data collection is observed during private sessions, group sessions, and interviews. Anonymity is protected by the researcher. Informed consent, before the research, is addressed and implemented through written acknowledgment. “Principles that guide this study include non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice.”¹⁶⁶

Interviews were held in a private office of Demonstration Church. Surveys are stored in a locked cabinet. The group session was held in the meeting fellowship room of Demonstration Church. Data are stored on a password-locked computer that only the researcher has access to. Paper surveys are held in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher has access to the paper surveys. Digital data will be deleted permanently, and paper copies will be shredded.

Approvals that were needed included consents from Demonstration Church and Liberty School of Divinity. Liberty University Institutional Review Board approved the research study before any legal implementation of any live-action tactics. The thesis proposal was approved. The project received approval by email letter citing IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-424. The approval letter from the IRB was forwarded to the faculty mentor and saved to attach to the final thesis dissertation.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher led the couples and facilitated counseling sessions, taught the sessions, and analyzed data. “Hermeneutic theory supports that a researcher examines the meaning behind perspective, a certain position, or situational context whether they are reporting the researcher’s

¹⁶⁶ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 32.

findings or another person's perspective."¹⁶⁷ The researcher also participated in the same routine of activities designed for the study with the participants and her spouse. The researcher serves as one of the spiritual leaders of Demonstration Church. Participants' religious preference is Christian. As a minister of the Gospel, the researcher serves to counsel many other couples offering Christian guidance to lead couples to God-ordained purpose. The researcher and participants form an alliance throughout the confines of the thesis research project. It is the role of the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the identities of the participants especially since the findings in the project renders situations stemming from private life situations. Before the initial interview process, the researcher held face-to-face informed consent of participants to participate in the project. The researcher is also responsible for "collecting information from relevant, up to date resources, development of analytical instruments, building collaborative relationships with participants, collecting data, and assessing the outcome."¹⁶⁸ The role of the researcher is to enable participants to develop their own analysis of their marriages and current marriages today, not to impose a change in the participants, but to stimulate a desire to change. "The goal must be to focus on solutions and human development which positively impacts the success of the project."¹⁶⁹

The researcher and her husband serve as the lead pastors at Demonstration Church. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the researcher verbally made participants aware of the voluntary nature of the study. The disclosure of that information was necessary so participants

¹⁶⁷Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 41.

¹⁶⁸J. W. Creswell, & J. D. Creswell (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

¹⁶⁹Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 42.

would know that the relationships of leaders and members will not be affected because of their willingness to participate or not participate in this study. No action was taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

A reflective journal of the entire project was utilized to serve as a concrete thinking document to work out the biases, but it also allowed the researcher to remain focused allowing adjustments to be analyzed when necessary. It is important to recognize that “researchers are not conditioned to be neutral or unbiased which is why it is significant to mention reflexivity, which is defined as how one’s emotions affect the research process.”¹⁷⁰ Reflection allows the researcher’s emotions to be shaped so that emotions will not guide the thesis project. In reflection, it causes the researcher to look over the reflection as well to further analyze key elements of the study. With that being said, “the researcher is still viewed as the greatest influencer of the project as it relates to projects, instrumentation, data collection, participants, and other factors.”¹⁷¹ The digital reflective journal maintained the central focus of the action research problem and thesis. Notetaking was taken digitally and in the researcher’s binder.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The evaluation used for this project is qualitative. Other protocols were utilized and implemented to grasp accurate amounts of quality data. Comparative analysis was used to document findings through inferential methods. Data triangulation was also used since the project used a combination of interviews, observations, questionnaires, and surveys. The findings had to be carefully examined through a series of comparing the data to analyze the quality of couples’ marriages. A successful outcome means that most couple relationships will be healthier

¹⁷⁰Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 43.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 45.

after undergoing created interventions that align to this project which were assessed by looking at the quality of their answers from surveys and questionnaires and the observations of their session. There should be an obvious change in the rating of marital satisfaction. A change should also be present as it relates to their answers moving from negative and neutral to a more positive. Assumptions included some couples may not have implemented all the strategies with fidelity, which was to be expected which was why it was necessary to assume most couples should change their mindset where a few may not. It was still the intention of the researcher for every couple to achieve improvement in the areas of communication, forgiveness, and intimacy. A survey with numerical measurement of marital satisfaction gages the couples' current satisfaction rate.

Interview Questions for Couples Design

Couples engaged in a total of 14 interview questions with nine of the questions having multiple parts (Appendix A). The latter nine questions consist of multiple parts that sought to evaluate the participants' thoughts about the characteristics of a healthy marriage, qualities of a biblically based marriages, characteristics of being a great communicator in marriage, having a positive prayer life, characteristics of forgiveness, intimacy, conflict resolution, divorce, and ideas about traditional marriage counseling versus counseling guided by biblical standards. All aspects of the interview questions prove to be significant themes when it relates to marriage and divorce. The same significant issues, according to the interview question topics, correlate to marital issues that many couples regularly face. The first five questions on the instrument reference to the couples' own marriages to gauge the statuses of the current state of the participants' marriages and gauges what the couples consider healthy marriages to be. Angela Skurtu urges couples do something different when problems arise and addresses those major

issues such as communication, intimacy forgiveness, and conflict resolution.¹⁷² It is quite possible that couples do not resolve these issues in the correct manner which is why the interview questions request couples to give pertinent examples of each key topic. The researcher further analyzed and assessed those results to see that relation. Asking couples about marriage counseling helps this study to gauge the actual number of participants who had participated in any kind of counseling. Most questions were created as open-ended questions at the suggestion of “Catherine Riessman who acknowledges that open ended questions work to allow the participants to construct the answers without unnecessary prying.”¹⁷³ The major intent of this instrument design was to gauge participants’ perspectives toward major themes and topics in this study for formulation solutions after careful comparative analysis.

Marriage Satisfaction Survey Design

The marriage satisfaction survey (Appendix D) was designed to give the researcher numerical measurements as it relates to the satisfaction level of common marital topics in marriage. The survey provided genuine data completed by each couple but only shared with the researcher so couples could be completely honest on how they felt in each area. A range of topics was selected that dealt with common marital themes as well as Biblical principles in the marriage. Couples had to rate their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being most satisfied and 1 being least satisfied. Combined with the qualitative responses from the interview questions and focus group, the data from the survey provided numerical measurements for the study. While the survey does provide numerical measurements, the measures were used to

¹⁷² Angela Skurtu. *Pre-Marital Counseling: A Guide for Clinicians*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016, 4.

¹⁷³ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 30, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993, 54.

triangulate with the other qualitative instruments.¹⁷⁴ Since the survey was used and interpreted as a qualitative measure, no other statistician was needed. This instrument served as a support to triangulate and analyzed data related to the interviews and focus group.

Interview Questions for Clergy and Ministers Design

Clergy and ministers bring in another warranted perspective of this project. Since the study was based on Ephesians 5:25-33, the experience and insight of a minister shed light on marriage counseling, common issues in marriage, and experience as it relates to couples knowing how to maintain that healthy marriage. The top five questions on the clergy and ministers' interview questions (Appendix B) aligned with those on the couple interview document, but worked to bring cohesion between the current state of marriages, the top three issues in marriages currently, and whether couples truly had healthy solutions of dealing with major issues. The latter nine questions addressed the same common themes in this project, which include characteristics of a healthy marriage, qualities of a biblically-based marriage, being a great communicator in marriage, characteristics of forgiveness in marriage, intimacy, conflict resolution, and divorce. Questions 6-14 weighed heavier for this study because they discussed the characteristics of significant elements that relate to marriage. "The construction of open-ended questions on the majority of the interview questions instruments allows for participants to give direct, concrete answers as well as telling their narrative based on the questions directive."¹⁷⁵ The major intent of this instrument was to gather data from clergy and ministers to analyze the correlation among the answers from the other instruments used in this study.

¹⁷⁴ Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009, 237-73.

¹⁷⁵Richard A. Quantz. "Interpretive Method in Historical Research: Ethnohistory Reconsidered." In *The Teacher's Voice*, edited by R. Altenbaugh, 174-90. Washington, DC: Falmer, 1992, 25.

Focus Group Session Design

The focus group session (Appendix C) was designed in a manner so couples could give necessary feedback on their thoughts of Ephesians 5:25-33. The group session served as a meeting tool to observe whether couples comprehended Ephesians 5:25-33 as it related to the relationship between husband and wife. The data collected predicted to support the need for couples to become more aware of the principles found in the scriptures. The aspect that provided the most weight was the input of the participants when asked the questions that created questions that directly aligned to the biblical passage. A great deal of observation ensued as the researcher presented the lesson and made notes of body language and participant feedback. The intent of this instrument was to gather data about the knowledge of Ephesians 5:25-33 among couples. Focus group interactions related to this particular passage in the Bible allowed the researcher to “gather data from different points of view and elicited a variety of responses.”¹⁷⁶

The researcher taught from the resource (Appendix C) created about Ephesians 5:25-33, asked questions related to the aforementioned scripture, provided the resource of characteristics of a healthy marriage, and asked couples to leave feedback on what they learned.

Data Triangulation

As data triangulation for this project was concerned, the utilization of a collection of interviews, surveys, questions, and focus group (group sessions) were implemented. “Data triangulation uses a variety of data sources to compare and contrast data from observation, documents, and interviews for a deeper analysis of the research.”¹⁷⁷ “Triangulation allowed for observational data to be compared with documented data which is most common in DMIN

¹⁷⁶ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 120.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 73.

research.”¹⁷⁸ Different types of documents captured different aspects of the project through the use of surveys, interview questions, and the focus group. Perspectives derived from the ministers and couples also add to bring validity to the data gathered and analyzed through data triangulation. The survey assessed the level of changes in the marital satisfaction realm. For the teaching from the Bible session, participants partook in noting what they learned and how they will apply it to their marriage. The researcher collected written feedback for her records and analysis after the focus group session. The collection of data had to be scrutinized to be considered accurate triangulation. Since triangulation does include the comparison of observational data to interview data, the researcher had to be efficient in taking notes about observations noticed while the interview process continued.

Observation and Interview Protocol

Practical tools included a video camera, Zoom account, copy paper, better printer, and tape recorder device. Observation protocol was noted. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic for 2020, Zoom was prepared for utilization for any participants not feeling comfortable enough to meet in person. While making observations, the researcher took notes on paper that utilized an observation protocol chart. “The observation protocol takes into considerations 6 major categories which include appearance, verbal behavior/interaction, physical behavior/gestures, personal space, human traffic, and interviewees who may generally stand out.”¹⁷⁹ Human traffic was not a factor since the location of the interviews were in the office. The researcher used this as a guiding factor when observing participants in the procedures in the study. As far as

¹⁷⁸Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 71-72.

¹⁷⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 97.

recording exact quotes from the participants, the video recorder and camera recorded as well as the researcher. The researcher found it extremely helpful to write a few of the quotes down as the couples and ministers interviewed. The researcher mostly used “Sensing’s suggestions for taking notes which included using a date, time, place, type of data collected, taking notes strategically, using shorthand, covering a range of observations, and adding a second column to record initial interpretations.”¹⁸⁰ Ethnography is “the study of living human beings in their social and cultural contexts”¹⁸¹ so participant observation was a definite tool when analyzing the data.

All interviews were structured, but in the couple sessions, unstructured interviewing was also utilized while the researcher facilitated the session especially since most couples were very talkative and cooperative thus producing a semi-structured atmosphere. The ministers proved to be very talkative as well, so the structure of the interview became unstructured at times. The standard interview protocol included the researcher giving opening statements, key research topics being asked, welcoming the participants, identifying the researcher’s role and purpose, the researcher’s note-taking procedure, acquiring permission to talk with people and record information, ways to check times and negotiate alternative times in case extended time is warranted, voluntary nature of answering any question, rules for recordings, and the review of confidentiality (Appendices J and K). The researcher’s personal computer and research binder were utilized for all sessions. Interviews were scheduled at least one week in advance. For interviews, participants were asked to give short answers so that their responses can be quoted,

¹⁸⁰Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011,185.

¹⁸¹Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011, 93.

however, many of the participants gave lengthy responses which allowed for the researcher to gauge a deeper analysis of different situations with the couples' and ministers' perspectives.

Data Analysis

A combination of using themes, slippage, and silences allowed for this research project to effectively use triangulation. The insider's (couples), the outsider's (ministers), and the researcher's own perspectives allowed different views to be assessed, compared, and contrasted. "Studying the overlap in themes, the areas of disagreement (slippages), and the realities not acknowledged in the study (silences) proved to be key in organizing the data."¹⁸² "Data that are converged leads to classification and categorization that leads to effective data analysis."¹⁸³ As data are converged in this thesis project through data triangulation of different data collection instruments, the results will be more valid and reliable. As the data were organized, the purpose of the project proved to remain the focal point in reflecting on the categories created. If the categories proved to be irrelevant to the purpose, then those categories were eliminated. Finding themes in this study included using the following approaches from Max Van Manen; "find the phrase that communicates the fundamental meaning of the text, select essential statements that reveal the described phenomenon, and examine every sentence's contribution to the described phenomenon."¹⁸⁴ The major outlined themes proved to be pivotal in the data analysis, especially since the quality of the participants' responses weighs so heavily in this research. The researcher acknowledged any omissions of topics as silences because gaps in the interviews can register as significant especially because many of the silences were mentioned in Chapter 2 of this project.

¹⁸²Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011,197.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 197.

¹⁸⁴ Max Van Manen. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990,79.

Multiple tables were created to summarize findings and will be reported through implementing tables and narrative reporting in the results chapter. Triangulation in the project ensures the findings are credible and trustworthy. “Triangulation is a method-appropriate strategy of founding credibility and trustworthiness, but not necessarily validity.”¹⁸⁵ Thick descriptions in the data reporting issues with the validity of the data. Acknowledging any biases in previous statements helped to clarified assumptions and orientations.

¹⁸⁵Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Eugene, OR. Wipf and Stock. 2011,220.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter outlines the results gleaned from the data collected from couples and ministers along with the focus group for this thesis study project. Having gained 10 couples and 10 ministers compared to the maximum of 14 couples and 25 sought, a comparative analysis was completed to discover trends, patterns, commonalities, and common marital issues. Focus group data also increased the validity and reliability of the study. Results address areas of need for marriages to move to healthier statuses based on the biblical principles of marriage found in Ephesians 5:25-33.

Results prove that biblical implementation of Ephesians 5:21-33 combined with HFMC, will improve the quality of married couples' relationships with access to more intentional strategies and solutions. Results from data collection also show, although most couples have contemplated divorce before, couples would rather not endure the hardship and pain of a divorce. Prayerfully, couples will begin to recognize their need for counseling and biblically based counseling conducive to the model found in the Bible. In addition, more ministers will be able to recognize the strength of biblically based counseling and HFMC.

While many couples understand the need for marriage counseling, they do not understand the complete mission in how it provides maintenance throughout the course of the marriage and not just for one season. The recognition for couples to seek counsel will become a priority for the sustainability of a marriage. Not only will couples seek counseling, but they will seek counseling related to biblical principles and marriage counseling. Divorces will be prevented because common marital issues will be prevented because of the implementation of strategies based on

HFMC and biblical principles. The combination of HFMC and biblically based principles is a warranted solution to get marriages to the pinnacle of what God envisioned.

The purpose of the intervention center on the prevention of divorce by implementing steps correlated with the principles of Ephesians 5:25-33 to render effective results producing healthier marriages. Other elements observed included the severity of common marital issues such as intimacy, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness observed by the participants.

Marital Satisfaction Survey Results

Ten couples participated in the marital satisfaction survey to gauge a pulse on the level of satisfaction that existed in the marriage as it related to each topic. Couples did not see the scores of their mate so that couples would feel free to be honest about the quality of their satisfaction level in the marriage. Ten couples participated in the survey, so you see a total of 20 individuals who partook.

Table 2

Marital Satisfaction Survey Results

	5 Mostly Satisfied	4	3	2	1 Least Satisfied	0
Demonstrating Love to Each Other	12	8				
Communication		4	16			
Intimacy	2	4	10	4		
Spiritual Relationship	4	4	10	2		
Demonstrating Forgiveness	4		14	2		
Conflict Resolution	4	2	14			
Trust	2	2	16			

Sex	12	4	4	
Finances	2	6	12	
Raising the Children	4	4	12	
Submission within in marriage	4	4	4	10
Prayer life withing in the marriage	2		10	8
Application of marital Biblical principles	2	6	4	8

Surprisingly enough, couples proved to be mostly satisfied with ‘demonstrating love to each other’ and ‘sex.’ Top issues that scored a 3 or less prove to be communication and trust. It appears that couples struggle in being satisfied as it relates to communication and trust in the marriages. Only four people which represents 20% of individuals surveyed were satisfied with communication while 10% percent were satisfied with trust. That data leaves a high percentage of individuals proving not to be satisfied in the marriage where communication and trust is concerned. Eighteen people rated ‘prayer life within the marriage’ as 3 or less signifying that couples are neither satisfied nor less than satisfied with it representing 90% of the survey sample. Conflict resolution, demonstrating forgiveness, intimacy, and spiritual relationship also represented high percentages of dissatisfaction among couples. Seventy percent (70%) of individuals rated a score of 3 or less for conflict resolution leaving only 30% of couples being satisfied. In the area of demonstrating forgiveness, 80% of individuals scored the topic 3 or less towards being dissatisfied. For intimacy, 70% of individuals rated a score of 3 being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Couples differentiate between ‘sex’ and ‘intimacy’ proving they can be sexually satisfied, but not satisfied with ‘intimacy’ in the relationship. As it relates to spiritual relationships, 60% answered 3 or less on the survey, while 70% ranked ‘submission within in marriage’ 3 or less. In contrast, couples’ ranking of ‘application of marital biblical principles’

appeared to be averagely leveled across the survey satisfaction scoring with 40% being satisfied and 60% being neutral or dissatisfied. Expectations would dictate that the results for ‘spiritual relationship’ would align to the results for ‘application of marital biblical principles’ and ‘prayer life within the marriage.’ In the area of ‘finances’ and ‘raising the children,’ 60% answered neutrally.

Interview Questions Results

The data presented in this section were gathered from the couples, ministers, and clergy interview questions. This section breaks down thematic topics referenced in Chapter 3 of this study as well as other topics and issues outlined in the theological and theoretical foundations. Themes discussed in this section include the current state of marriage, characteristics of a healthy marriage, biblically-based marriage, communication, prayer life, forgiveness, intimacy, conflict resolution, divorce, and traditional marriage counseling versus marriage counseling guided by biblical principles which are all major components that drive this study. The tables for the couple responses represent the 10 couple participants which equals 20 individuals while the minister responses’ tables represent the 10 ministerial participants. It is important to note that each spouse did not necessarily give simultaneous responses with their mate. Answers differ based on each spouse’s perspective of their marriage.

The Current State of Marriage

This section reveals data about the current state of marriage. It is separated by giving the couple responses first and then the minister’s responses right afterward. Table 3 reveals the perspective of couples towards their own marriages being healthy. When couples were asked to describe the statuses of their marriage, a few of the responses were as follows:

- “full of blessings” (husband, African American, mid-twenties)

- “unstable, whole, growing, fussing over prayer” (husband, African American)
- “good, room for improvement” (wife, African American)
- “surviving” (wife, Caucasian)
- “healthy, whole, productive” (wife, African American, minister)
- “productive, whole, biblically-based, regular ups & downs” (husband, African American, minister)
- “moving, constantly evolving, but staying the course” (husband, Caucasian)

Table 3

Couples Interview Question 2

Q2. Do you consider your marriage to be healthy?	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	13	65%
No	7	35%
Total	20	100%

Considering the data, most couples from the church really feel like their marriages are healthy based on the 65% of couples who say their marriage is healthy. The other 35% appear to have other major issues that prevent their marriages from being healthy that are related to some of the top issues given in responses by the couples. The couples were asked what they considered the top three issues in marriage and the responses were as follows:

- “trust, sex, communication” (12 respondents)
- “communication, sex, finances” (husband, African American)
- “infidelity, intimacy, trust” (wife, African- American)
- “trust, sex, raising kids” (wife, Caucasian)

Many respondents answered “trust, sex, and communication” as being the top issues in marriages. This appears to be recurring issues among couples and supports numerical measurements found in the marital satisfaction survey as well.

When ministers and clergy were asked to describe the current status of marriage (Question 1), two ministers answered as follows:

- “I think it depends on which demographic you’re looking at. I am seeing a lot of African American culture sticking with it and giving birth and we’re hanging in there. A lot of our grandparents didn’t hang in there. A lot of us these days do not want to give up. We have to fight for our relationships. People are bringing respect back to the marriage.”
(woman, pastor)
- “It’s in trouble just because they didn’t know what they were getting into. People get married because they think it is a great thing to do. To actually be happy in a marriage though, you generally have to like each other.” (male, pastor)

Table 4

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 2

Q2. Do you consider most current marriages to be in a healthy state?	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	7	70%
Depends on different factors	3	30%
Total	10	100%

Table 4 also reveals minister opinions of current marriage statuses. Based on the ministers of the clergy, their perspectives contrast with the couples because none of the ministers could really answer “yes” to question 2. Most ministers felt as though marriages were not in a healthy state and engaged in conversation that supported their responses. Other ministers cited other factors that must be considered when looking at those couples who do have healthy

marriages. One of the factors to be considered is whether that couple is active in a church. Another factor to be considered was the variations in backgrounds in which the spouses were raised. One of the female, African-American ministers said that “people who are not in church do not have what they need to strengthen their marriage and we are not taught how to be in a relationship with each other. It needs to be a part of the conversation very often.” When ministers were asked about the top issues in marriage, the consensus proved to be communication, sex, finances, raising kids, infidelity, intimacy, and understanding the roles in the marriage.

Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage

The following data shows responses based on the ministers, clergy, and couples’ perspectives as it relates to those characteristics and examples of a healthy marriage. The data are separated by showing the couple’s responses first and then the minister’s responses. When couples were asked to give characteristics of a healthy marriage, the following responses were recorded:

- “honesty, transparency” (wife, African American)
- “understanding” (male, African American)
- “trust” (male, African American)
- “humility, patience, wisdom” (male, African American)
- “selflessness, humility, love” (wife, African American)
- “spending quality time, good communication, be forgiving” (wife, Caucasian)
- “love, patience, understanding” (male, Caucasian)

One minister cited “mutual respect for differing perspectives and individuality and on-going communication in every aspect of the relationship” as being characteristics of a healthy marriage which continues to support one of the recurring themes of communication being key.

About 67% of the ministers cited the importance of being friends and having that relationship. “Friendship is the platform that allows couples to get to intimacy” (female, pastor). A male pastor said “you got to marry people that you like. We base our partnership on superficial reasons and that just does not work in marriage.”

In further conversation, couples revealed that many of them needed major help in the area of communication. The response that the wife gave about being honest and transparent as a characteristic was also an eye-opener, but it revealed an important foundation of how they stayed married for 20 years. Couples also revealed other examples that relate to having a healthy marriage that included loving, forgiving, romancing each other, providing, showing affection, and self-evaluation.

Table 5 reveals individual spousal responses where they had to self-evaluate their own faults. This table also reveals how most spouses are opened to confessing they are not always effective in addressing and fixing their weak areas.

Table 5

Couples Interview Question 6b

Q6b. Do you consider yourself to be an effective spouse in the areas where you have common or constant issues?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	3	15%
No	12	60%
Sometimes	5	25%
Total	20	100

Table 6

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 6b

Q6b. Do you consider most spouses to be effective in dealing with common or constant issues?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	3	30%
Depends on certain factors	7	70%
Total	10	100%

Table 6 reveals a similar comparison to the couple responses in recognizing that many people are not effective in dealing with their own issues. The data in Tables 6 and 7 also goes to support that couples do need help when it comes to outlining what is healthy and how to make those healthier changes. It is important to note there is a great benefit in most couples knowing they are not effective in dealing with common issues because this means they would be more open in listening to a solution. Positive characteristics discussed by at least 74% of the ministers that led to fixing solutions in a healthy manner included “spiritual connectivity (to guide the process), compromise (to allow for agreement), and tenacity (to make it work).”

Tables 7 and 8 correlates with the previous tables by showing the relationship to how spouses do not always effectively make the necessary changes needed in marriage. Based on the ministers’ perspectives, the data shows 50% of ministers observing the same thing when counseling couples.

Table 7

Couples Interview Question 6d

Q6d. Do you think that you and your spouse effectively make changes when situations warrant one spouse to change?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	2	10%
No	14	70%
Sometimes	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Table 8

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 6d

Q6d. Do you think that spouses effectively make changes when situations warrant one spouse to change?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	5	50%
Depends on other factors	5	50%
Total	10	100%

Qualities of a Biblically Based Marriage

When couples were asked about the qualities that make up a biblically based marriage, the consensus of about 82% mentioned a positive spiritual relationship, a consistent prayer life, submission, respect, monogamy, having God at the center of the marriage, and the constant application of the Word of God. Ministers and clergy referenced sacrifice, submission, mercy, forgiveness, selflessness, and agape love. One male minister quoted specifically that “many couples do not know how to express true agape love in the confines of marriage.” When asked about giving practical examples of these characteristics, respondents answered as follows:

- “Treat each other as you want to be treated.” (husband)

- “Have integrity in every situation.” (husband)
- “Be submission and respectful, especially when in public.” (wife)
- “Intentionally give up self for the other person.” (minister, male)
- “When you see your brethren overtaken with a fault, we are not good at restoring each other all the time, we are so busy attacking the person who may not be 100 percent spiritual, and we have to cover one another -that’s how mercy comes into play. This has to be utilized in marriage” (male, pastor).
- “When one person is up, the other person may be down. When we look at what God did for us, there was a sacrifice there (John 3:16). We think our love is without sacrifice and that is just not the case. Sometimes you are the one who has to give up something for the sake of the marriage. We need to serve each other and not focused on the needs of our own. If we are busy serving each other, then we both get it right. It has to be served both ways. Submission one to another and submitting to the covenant of the marriage is key. It is bigger than you and I. We both have to be submitted to one each other for the sake of marriage. I honor my husband as the covenant. I submit to my husband because I understand covenant and it’s bigger than feelings.” (female, pastor)

Table 9 shows responses related to the effectiveness of characteristics of a biblically based marriage being displayed. Of the 10 couples, 40% of spouses say they are effective in that area which compares to the 0% given by ministers in Table 10. Many ministers said it depends on certain factors on whether the couples are effective in displaying those characteristics. Ministers discussed that different factors that affect the effectiveness of displaying those biblically based characteristics include being active in ministry, well-versed in the knowledge of marital biblical principles, and willingness to apply. Couples who fall in those categories succeed

in displaying biblically based characteristics effectively. Tables 11 and 12 further shows most couples really feel like they have a completely accurate understanding of biblical characteristics while ministers disagree saying that most couples do not have a totally accurate understanding of those characteristics. Once again 60% of ministers agreed that couples who succeed in this have the foundation of being active in ministry, knowledgeable of biblical principles, and having a willing heart.

Table 9

Couples Interview Question 7b

Q7b. Do you consider yourself to be effective in displaying the characteristics of a biblically based marriage?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	8	40%
No	12	60%
Total	20	100%

Table 10

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7b

Q7b. Do you consider most spouses to be effective in displaying the characteristics of a biblically based marriage?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	4	40%
Depends on certain factors	6	60%
Total	10	100%

Table 11

Couples Interview Question 7e

Q7e. Do you think that you have an accurate understanding of how to have a biblically based marriage?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Table 12

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7e

Q7e. Do you think that spouses have an accurate understanding of how to have a biblically based marriage?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	10	100%
Total	10	100%

All couples and ministers agree that modeling marriage after the model of Jesus Christ and the church's relationship is extremely important. One female minister respondent said that "it is the blueprint for longevity and marriage survival." Another male minister responded "it's very key because you have to love people beyond their faults. It encourages an unbeliever to see what love looks like. I think that the enemy fights marriage so hard because he does not want people to see the example of real love. Those of us who are called to marriage allows us to reflect and exemplify the role that we have in the body of the church." He also alluded to the example of Hosea and Homer as support. Most couples did not give extended responses on this answer, nevertheless, 85% of couples believe their marriages model the parallelism of Christ and the church. Ministers mostly disagree or believe that certain factors play a role.

Table 13

Couples Interview Question 7h

Q7h. Do you think that your marriage has modeled the parallelism of Christ and the church?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	17	85%
No	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Table 14

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 7h

Q7h. Do you think that most marriages have modeled the parallelism of Christ and the church?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	3	30%
Some, depends on certain factors	7	70%
Total	10	100%

Surprisingly, most ministers and couples never think to go back and be consistent in revisiting or referencing Ephesians 5:25-33 to save their marriage, but one male pastor who is also married mentioned “we may not quote the verse itself, but the time spent with the couples are spent fleshing out that scripture with practical examples based on that scripture. Most couples don’t know how and need those practical examples.”

Communication in Marriage

Based on the sample results, communication has proven to be one of the biggest issues in marriages. In Table 15, 45% said they were good communicators. Of those nine, only 20% of them were male and the rest were females. The 35% that said ‘sometimes’ were comprised of males and females. When couples were asked what some characteristics were of being a good

communicator, most of the answers included ‘being a good listener’ and ‘being honest.’ Couples gave practical examples of being a good communication citing the following:

- knowing when it is a good time to talk
- showing humility in conversation
- being a better active listener

One husband urged that wives “listen and not just hear and we are made in His likeness, so we have to teach each other. Listening allows us to focus on her needs and wants.” Another husband said his wife made him a better communicator and he had to learn how based on how he was raised. One of his weaknesses was he just did not want to talk sometimes. He also added if he had continued in that manner, they would not have made it. Another male participant said that “ignoring the conversation does not help” while another female participant compared to that statement in her interview by saying “refusal to acknowledge my concerns in conversation makes me feel small and angry.” Table 15 reflects these responses.

Table 15

Couples Interview Question 8b

Q8b. Do you consider yourself to be effective in communication with your spouse?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	9	45%
No	4	20%
Sometimes	7	35%
Total	20	100%

Table 16 reveals minister responses based on their interactions with couples. One of the major counseling issues that arise in a private setting is communication. Most couples do not know how to communicate which is the perspective of the ministers from Table 16. See a few

extended responses from minister and clergy leaders that correlate to percentages found in Table 16.

- “Understand that you are on the same team, we talk to couples a lot about fighting fair, so you have to put your guards down even when you feel like you need to. You have different backgrounds and experiences. Disagreements do not mean that your marriage is messed up. Take the pressure off. Watch what you say when you are angry with each other because it matters. Couples should not want to tear their own spouse down.”
(female, pastor)
- “Speak in a way your partner hears. Men don’t hear when someone is yelling for him. If it’s attacking him, he is going to shut off because that relates back to the male-ego. Men don’t connect things to their ego in a different manner. It all blurs together.” (male, pastor)
- “Having a willingness to listen and a desire to engage in informal and casual conversation are great examples to move to being a better communicator.” (female, pastor)
- “Most couples are just not effective in communication with their spouse because they didn’t learn proper communication strategies growing up. (male, pastor)
- “I’ve discovered that couples who constantly seek counseling in hard seasons of the marriage have better communication strategies.” (male, minister)

Table 16

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 8b

Q8b. Do you consider most couples to be effective in communicating with their spouse?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	6	6%
Sometimes, depends on different factors	4	4%
Total	10	100%

Table 17

Couples Interview Question 8e

Q8e. Do you think you have a great understanding of how to be an effective communicator in marriage?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	16	80%
No	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Table 18

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 8e

Q8e. Do you think couples have an accurate understanding of how to effectively communicate?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	3	30%
No	7	70%
Total	10	100%

Table 19

Couples Interview Question 8f

Q8f. Do you consider your marriage to be effective in communication skills?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	7	35%
No	13	65%
Total	20	100%

The correlation between Tables 16, 17, 18, and 19 proves some interesting points. Eighty percent (80%) of couples feel like they have an accurate understanding of what it means to be a good communicator, while only 35% feel like they are effective in communication skills in the marriage (Table 19). Seventy percent (70%) of ministers reveal they do not feel couples truly have an accurate understanding of how to effectively communicate.

Based on the comparative analysis of the ministers' extended responses, they advise couples to never stop trying to communicate after one miscommunication and to keep being consistent in their trying of communication. One male pastor who is married said:

“Couples who struggle to communicate stop trying. When we first got married, we had different communication styles from previous marriages. We both need to see each other’s points of view even when we do not agree with it. Unify even when we disagree. Absolute disagreement is not always a solution. We usually listen to respond and not listen to understand. We have to be open to listening to understand at all times.”

Prayer Life in Marriage

Most couples agreed that having a prayer life in marriage as a couple was extremely important. Seventy percent (70%) of couples also admitted it was a struggle for them to be consistent and their prayer life could be way better. One male commented and said, “marriage is a spiritual unit, so prayer has to be a major factor in the marriage.”

Table 20

Couples Interview Question 9b

Q9b. Do you think you have an effective prayer life as a married couple?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	6	30%
No	14	70%
Total	20	100%

All ministers agreed on the extreme importance of having a successful prayer life in the marriage. Ministers gave practical examples of having a successful prayer life which included setting aside a time to pray together and individually, without ceasing. Other relevant responses from ministers and couples about prayer in the marriage included:

- “Couples have to take stuff to God in prayer and stop using our mouth. Most of the changes I see in my husband came out of an answered prayer. Take it to God. That’s the beauty of being married to someone saved. You can just tell God to ‘get your boy’ or ‘work on me.’ Go to God on their behalf. There are some days that I just can’t reach Him. There is a difference when the relationship is based on prayer. You get frustrated when you are in your strength.” (female, minister, also married)
- “When your horizontal relationship is struggling, your vertical relationship is going to be struggling. When there is an absence of peace, there is an absence of a relationship with the Father. We have to flesh out something with the father so that we can fix it without going off on our spouse. Go spend time with the Father so you can reason with someone. We learned over the years that we’ve got to pray. Let me go read a scripture. I don’t want to blow up. There is a disconnect with the Father when there is absence of peace.” (male, pastor)

- “We have to revolve our marriage around God and not God around our marriage.” (male, minister)
- “We have to stop just praying when the storm come. We need to pray all the time.” (husband and wife)
- “Over the years, men have become so comfortable with their women leading in prayer. Not saying that they shouldn’t pray, but men need to get back in their position of prayer too. The enemy attacks while we are sleep sometimes and we aren’t strong enough because we are out of position.” (male, couples)
- “Evil spirits and flesh are overpowering couples. That’s what I feel like is one of my problems and I don’t pray enough.” (male, couples)

Forgiveness in Marriage

Table 21 shows that 45% of couples do not forgive effectively while 25% said sometimes and 30% said they do. All agree that forgiveness was extremely, but exceedingly difficult at times, especially when emotions run high. One couple shared their struggle to forgive rest in an unstable foundation of infidelity and trust. For the wife, she has built up a guard to prevent her from forgiving and trusting. For the husband, he feels like she should just forgive and forget quickly.

Table 21

Couples Interview Question 10b

Q10b. Do you think that you effectively forgive each other when issues arise?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	6	30%
No	9	45%
Sometimes	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Table 22

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 10b

Q10b. Do you think that spouses effectively forgive each other when issues arise?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	0%
No	4	40%
Sometimes (in certain instances)	6	60%
Total	10	100%

After acknowledging the couples’ responses, ministers felt couples do not forgive each other effectively in Table 22 and tend to hold grudges in different situations. See the following statements from a few of the spiritual leaders interviewed.

- “Marriage does not work unless you forgive. You have to forgive the big and little stuff. Some of us are more easily offended. Many people are married and think that the other person is out to get them. If you cannot forgive, you cannot last. Heavy stuff takes time to get over. It’s a difference between forgiving and preparing the relationship. There are trying to do practical repairing without the forgiveness part. Forgiveness is a decision.” (female, pastor)
- “We decided early on that stuff would not become the replacement for the word. There are no expenditures for the word of God. We will not create a petty cash stash for our unwillingness to forgive. Forgive quickly and affirm to the partner that you’re forgiven. (hug it out)” (male, pastor)
- “There’s not a time limit on forgiveness. There is a time limit on walking out. These are practical steps that repair the relationship. The man who keeps cheating needs to find out why does he keep doing this repeatedly. Is it because of a past rejection? And then why does he want to be married?” (female, pastor)

Intimacy in Marriage

Table 23 reveals couples' attitudes toward intimacy level effectiveness in their marriages. Of the 55% that said they were effective, 50% were women. There was one older man in his mid-40s who said he was effective in intimacy, but he too had to grow into it. He is one of the husbands that has been married for 20 years. Another younger male husband answered 'no' because he does not feel like he is always adequate in that area. He said, "I'm constantly working on it to get better because there is room for intimacy to be built. It just takes time." He also said that "intimacy is deeper than affection and romance." Most women supported that all their husbands have "room for improvement" in the department of intimacy.

Table 23

Couples Interview Question 11b

Q11b. Do you think that your intimacy level is effective in your marriage?	Couples Responses Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	11	55%
No	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Table 24 shows the variations of the minister and clergy responses. They were half and half based on what they have observed in counseling sessions. Many ministers noted and offered the following statements as couples and intimacy relates.

- "Intimacy is defined as understanding the other's unspoken likes and desires and sharing non-sexual moments that create continued growth." (female, pastor)
- "Intimacy is very important and based on the wishes of what's agreed to. Everyone has their own agreement as to what they need. Unity and oneness come into play where you are giving your body to each other. Every couples needs to decide on what it looks like. Women don't want to send the man out all thirsty." (male, pastor)

- “We run up against a lot men equates to sex. For women, it’s so much more than that. Women say the same thing. If we can just get men to understand, it’s more than just getting on top of somebody. You just want to make me feel like Ms. Celie on the Color Purple. Men think about the penetration. They have heard it before from the seminar. Their brains don’t work like that. Men just don’t understand. A little goes a long way. Every woman she counsels with says the same thing.” (female, minister)
- “Most people still do not grasp the true meaning of intimacy and confuse this ideal with erotic physicality.” (female, pastor)
- “Intimacy maintains the sensual spark required to maintain marital excitement and interest. While those things spiritual are vital, those things sensual (intimate) help to keep a marriage viable.” (male, pastor)
- “Communication is key in every area of marriage, and intimacy is no different. Spouses must be willing to teach each other their love language, never assume the other should already know, and never tire of providing insight for intimacy. Let your spouse know what works for you.” (male, minister)

Table 24

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 11b

TQ11b. Do you think that most couples’ intimacy level is effective in marriage?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	5	50%
No	5	50%
Total	10	100%

Conflict Resolution in Marriage

Table 25 reveals the thoughts of couples as it relates to conflict resolution being effectively implemented in the marriage. Only four couples, which represents 40% of the sample, cited they believe they effectively implement conflict resolution strategies. The other 60% were not effective. According to the notes taken from extended responses, communication works with conflict resolution so both parties can understand. Since communication is a heavy issue, couples deal with the correlation to conflict resolution is obvious. Couples rendered the following advice.

- “Communicate to understand.” (male)
- “Seek to get an understanding.” (female)
- “Agree to resolve, but that does not mean you will always agree with the resolution.” (female)
- “Don’t go to sleep mad.” (male)
- “Recognize, acknowledge, and understand.” (male)

Table 25

Couples Interview Question 12b

Q12b. Do you think that you and your spouse effectively implement conflict resolution strategies?	Couples Responses Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	8	40%
No	12	60%
Total	20	100%

Table 26 displays the ministers and clergy responses to Q12b. Data shows that 60% of ministers believe some couples implement effective strategies, but not most. The ministers agree that couples are not properly equipped with conflict resolution strategies, which makes it hard to overcome certain issues. One minister noted how important it was to “implement a plan for resolve prior to any conflicting situations arising where both parties should contribute to the

conflict resolution plan and be willing to execute the plan when needed. This may seem rather technical, but marriage is an ongoing process, requiring hands-on work every day.” Another minister mentioned that “acknowledging that things will not always go well and committing to work through these times, no matter what has to be the goal when dealing with conflict.”

Table 26

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 12b

Q12b. Do you think that couples effectively implement conflict resolution strategies?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	0	
No	4	40%
Some, but not most	6	60%
Total	10	100%

Divorce

All couples have contemplated divorce in this study. For 40% of the couples, the contemplation was more serious than others. A few couples cited their contemplation due to not really understanding how to work through issues at the beginning of the relationship, while other couples dealt with more serious issues such as infidelity. In time, 60% were able to grow past the challenges and stay the course.

Table 27

Couples Interview Question 13c

Q13c. Do you feel like you had the means of receiving effective counseling that prevented you from divorcing?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	6	30%
No	12	70%
Total	20	100%

Table 28

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 13c

Q13c. Do you feel like spouses have the means of receiving effective counseling that prevents them from divorcing?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	1	10%
No	3	30%
Some do, but not all	6	60%
Total	10	100%

The 10% who felt like spouses have effective means of counseling available stated “the fields of social services and even spiritual counseling are constantly evolving. Couples today have access to these resources, making them far more fortunate than couples in the past. Unless there is no feasible resolve, divorce should be the absolute last resort.” (female)

Ministers gave practical examples that lead to divorce as being “miscommunication and lack of integrity, which are the actual contributors to financial and intimacy issues.” The consensus of ministers agrees that couples who maintain a willingness to work through any situation, display a personal commitment to Christ, and show a collaborative commitment to each other learn to grow together preventing the defeat of divorce. In addition, a few ministers responded in statements below as it relates to the topic of divorce.

- “Couples get tired of investing and no return on the investment. Couples fail to know when the other person’s needs changed. That’s how people stay together so long and the other person didn’t recognize when their needs change. Be so good at investigating their partners to know when their needs changed. You have to ask questions to your spouse to build data and you got to change the data every few years. My wife kept changing her hair the other year week by week and I had to pay attention. Marriage is a constant

evaluation. Now, I do believe that there's a rhythm you develop, and that change shouldn't be happening like every single year. Give each other the grace to change and evolve." (male, pastor)

- "Couples get tired of investing and no support." (female, minister)
- "Counseling in marriage is very important in preventing divorce and it can be a vital aspect of marriage, should circumstances dictate a more intensive approach or reinforcement." (male, pastor)
- "The only acceptable reason to divorce is as the Word dictates (adultery/infidelity), but personally, any form of abuse can be reason for divorce. Abuse (physical, mental, or verbal) can destroy the fiber of an individual's being, rendering them incapable of maintaining life as a complete and whole person." (female, minister)

Couples' responses reveal that abuse and infidelity were other reasons permissible to seek a divorce.

Traditional Marriage Counseling vs. Marriage Counseling Guided by Biblical Principles

Tables 29 and 30 outline answers revealed about marriage counseling maintenance throughout the course of a marriage. The data in this section also shows other qualitative responses as it relates to marriage counseling and counseling by biblical principles. One-hundred percent (100%) of couples and ministers agree that marriage counseling should be maintained throughout the course of the marriage.

Table 29

Couples Interview Question 14d

Q14d. Do you feel like marriage counseling should be maintained throughout the course of a marriage?	Couples Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Table 30

Clergy and Ministers Interview Question 14d

Q14d. Do you feel like marriage counseling should be maintained throughout the course of a marriage?	Ministers and Clergy Responses	
	Number of Responses	Percentages
Yes	10	100%
No	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Some of the feedback from the sessions with couples and ministers are referenced below as it relates to whether traditional marriage counseling is better than marriage counseling guided by biblical principles. (Q14-Appendices A and B).

- “I don’t feel like traditional marriage counseling is better, but I think both are important in today’s times. Many newer couples would be more receptive and relate better to traditional marriage counseling than counseling guided by biblical principles.” (female, pastor)
- “Some couples will not participate in marriage counseling because they may not see the need. Some may have knowledge of conflict within or the demise of marriages amongst

couples in the church. Thus, couples may feel marriage counseling will make no difference in marriage.” (male, pastor)

- “It’s no difference than the book of Psalms and Proverbs. You need both. Know what you represent as a believer and know how to handle these streets. Be open with your conversation with your spouse. Someone has gifted both to understand the confinements of marriage. It may include one scripture or no scripture. We let all couples know that we counsel that we are giving you wisdom based on experience and our understanding of biblical principles. There are serious issues that do have where you must have a counselor. Honestly, you need Jesus and a counselor.” (male, pastor)
- “If you’re a Christian, I think you need Christian marriage counseling. The best place may not be your pastors. Every pastor may not have certain amount of tools. It is great to get a multitude of counsel. If it is serious, go to a counselor. They almost got divorced after a session with a pastor who did not have the correct tools to counsel. Pastors should not counsel if they are not equipped. There are only so many Bible passages that you can go through.” (female, pastor)

Focus Group Session Results

The data revealed in this section represent feedback derived from participants in the focus group session and their thoughts as it relates to the biblical principles founded in Ephesians 5:25-33. It displays couple responses to the teaching and their discoveries and acknowledgments of the characteristics of a healthy marriage based on the scriptures. See couple’s responses as the researcher and participants engaged in informal conversation after teaching from Ephesians 5:25-33 and giving the characteristics of a healthy marriage resource.

While many husbands and wives could give specific examples of how they show love, respect, and sacrifice for their spouses, many people in the focus group struggled with being able to give all the characteristics observed in Ephesians 5:25-33. Another observation noticed is how those questions (Appendix C) that referenced scripture (Q4, Q6, & Q10) appeared to be more of a complex nature when it came time to discuss those. Those scriptures indicate a significant foundation as it relates to the marital union and correlates to the roles of each spouse. The biggest indicator of success was how the couples were reminded of these characteristics and vowed to implement them more in the confines of their relationship. Most participants agreed they do not regularly revisit this passage of scripture, but it is a necessity to have a healthy relationship. Couple responses from the focus group are as follows:

- “I need to consider reading this passage when I find myself in a place where I don’t want to compromise.” (female)
- “I’m grateful for the teachings and reminders that this session has brought out for me. I” even thinking about the times in which I did not sacrifice myself for my wife as I should have just like Jesus did for the church.” (male)
- “I’m going to work on trying to sacrifice more of how I feel and focus on what she needs.” (male)
- “Learning to focus on his needs and wants will allow me to practice the art of submission more.” (female)
- “I know the pain that I have inflicted upon my spouse is not of the Lord according to this spouse. I really need to work on me.” (male)
- “I haven’t complimented and valued her as I should have.” (male)

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis study reveals the most common marital issues that married couples face that sometimes results in the contemplation of divorce. While some couples can overcome those issues, many couples allow those issues to take root which eventually leads to divorce. It is very vital to create interventions that couples can utilize during their marriage so that marriages can move to healthier statuses and become the perfected vision of God's ideal of marriage. Ephesians 5:25-33 plays an important role in the design of marriage and should be utilized more frequently to teach couples how to function according to its instructions. Every couple deserves to have options that will help them to resolve conflicts in their marriage. Positive interventions, effective tools, and fundamental teachings are necessary elements for marital success.

This chapter provides a summarization of conclusions based on the analysis of the data gathers. This chapter also addresses any research gaps that were identified from the introduction chapter of this project. Furthermore, it addresses specific recommendations to effectively push couples to healthier marriages while building a stronger foundation based on Ephesians 5:25-33. At the conclusion of the study, the purpose and overview will be restated. The conclusion will bring the entire project to a culmination.

Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage

Characteristics of a healthy marriage must be acknowledged so that there is a clear delineation of what foundational elements look like as it relates to a healthy marriage. Although 65% of couples believed their marriage was healthy, 70% of the ministers determined that marriages were not in a current, healthy state based on the interview questions. Based on the data, characteristics of a healthy marriage includes honesty, transparency, trust, humility,

selflessness, wisdom, love, patience, understanding, forgiveness, quality time, great communication, spiritual connectivity, compromise, and tenacity. An analysis of responses from the couples and ministers were taken into consideration when identifying these major characteristics. It is especially important to note that all these characteristics work together to create a healthy foundation for marriage. "Relationship education of these characteristics for ministers, counselors, and couples can work as an asset to promote healthier relationship skills, but there has to be proper acknowledgment of these major characteristics as part of the foundational training."¹⁸⁶ Because there are mixed responses on the couples' answers that describe their current state of marriage, the need to address and recognize the aforementioned characteristics are necessary especially for those couples who rendered answers such as "unstable," "surviving," or "neutral." The implementation of teaching about these characteristics would have a positive effect on the success of their marriages.

Ministers encourage couples to be taught about the characteristics of what a healthy marriage looks like and breaking up the characteristics to be taught different techniques on what its healthy usefulness of each characteristic looks like in the marriage. The practical examples can be simple implementations to help guide the couples.

Qualities of a Biblically Based Marriage

Qualities of biblically-based marriage must be considered to see the comparison to the characteristics of a healthy marriage as well as the correlation to effective marriage counseling. It is also necessary to see the alignment to Ephesians 5:25:33. All of the couples claim to have an accurate understanding of what it means to have a biblically-based marriage, while the ministers

¹⁸⁶Amy Laura Arnold, Evin W. Richardson, and Robyn Cenizal. "Ready or Not: The Influence of Readiness on Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Training Outcomes." *Children and Youth Services Review* 63, (2016): 67-73.

say they do not, or it depends on certain factors. In contrast, only 40% of the couples claim to effectively display those qualities, while 60% of the ministers observed they witnessed those qualities in certain instances depending on certain factors. While most ministers feel that only some marriages model their marriages after the parallelism of Christ and the Church, 85% of the couples say theirs do. Opposite or different views are important because it reveals a gap in what couples' think is actual parallelism of Christ and the church in their relationship. As stated by Barton, "acknowledging the significance of historical reasoning based on the clarification of what the Bible says about marriage ultimately necessitates the application of practical and evangelical measures for accuracy."¹⁸⁷ This supports the mandatory need to identify these qualities of a biblically based marriage.

Qualities of a biblically based marriage, per the data, include treating each other fairly, having integrity, being submissive, being respectful, being intentionally selfless, forgiving quickly, maintaining a spiritual relationship, practicing monogamy, displaying sacrifice and mercy, showing agape love, and having God at the center of the marriage. A major component of a biblically based marriage includes the continuous application of the Word of God in the relationship which is an "important part of the gospel of Jesus Christ because virtues, morals, and skills are learned so individuals are able to have successful relationships with their spouses and their brethren."¹⁸⁸ All these qualities relate to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how individuals should interact with their brethren and especially their spouses.

Ministers urge couples to have practical examples that relate to the biblical principles in Ephesians 5. Couples also agree that it is important for them to have spiritual connections and a

¹⁸⁷ Stephen C. Barton. Marriage, family, the Bible and the gospel. Theology. 2016;119(3):163.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 171.

consistent prayer life if they are going to live together according to the Word of God. Building and teaching upon those biblical principles can be combined with the counseling technique most applicable for couples based on their marital needs.

Common Marital Issues Revealed

This section will address the most common marital issues revealed in Chapter 4 of this thesis project. It will provide relevant conclusions related to communication, prayer life, forgiveness, intimacy, and conflict resolution. Positive implementations of strategies that address these common marital issues can have a tremendous impact on the success of the marriage.

Practical examples as it relates to the common marital issues will be noted in each specific section based on answers given from the couples and ministers. Insight from the couples and ministers agree on the importance of having those practical examples and resources to effectively utilize in the confines of the marriages. Most couples do not truly know how to effectively combat those common marital issues which is why it must be taught. As stated by Chukwuma, “While conflicts prove to be a natural part of human relationships, the Bible does detail many examples, narratives, statements, and strategies that allow for successful resolution.”¹⁸⁹

Communication in Marriage

Communication is a major issue in which couples say they struggle. Communication sets the foundation for other areas of the marriage to be positively influenced so when there are major issues with communication, other areas of the marriage could be affected. In proving that statement, “a study analyzing communication and marriage stability discussed the value of

¹⁸⁹Onyekachi G. Chukwuma, Omaka K. Ngele, Virginus U. Eze, Peace N. Ngwoke, Damian O. Odo, George Asadu, Tobias C. Onah, and Kingsley I. Uwaegbute. "Conflict Resolution between Husband and Wife in the Light of the Hermeneutics of Biblical Proverbs." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): e1-e9.

spouses being able to communicate and how it positively impacts the stability of the union.”¹⁹⁰ There were 45% of couples who said they were effective at communication, while ministers’ perspectives show 60% saying most couples do not have effective communication skills.

Practical implementation of effective communication skills includes being a great active listener, displaying engagement in the conversation, knowing when to engage in a conversation after a disagreement, speaking in respectful tones, and the willingness to reach solutions. These major aspects of being a great communicator do not negate other necessary strategies to be effective, but they lay a strategic foundation for couples to be taught how to communicate. On a positive note, 80% of couples understand the importance of communication in marriage, although they may not know how to effectively take the task on.

Prayer Life in Marriage

Maintaining a prayer life and that spiritual connectivity between spouses proves to be extremely important to couples, but most couples agreed there was room for improvement in this area. For most of them, being consistent was the biggest struggle when it came to maintaining an effective prayer connection with their spouse. This study shows 70% of the couples say they do not have an effective prayer life together. Having that strong prayer life is also another indicator of making sure God is the center of the marriage, which is one of the characteristics outlined in the qualities of a biblically based marriage section. In addition, “the incorporation of having a consistent prayer life positively impacts the marriage, physical body, psychological portion, and more personal benefits.”¹⁹¹ The suggested practical examples include mapping out a prayer time

¹⁹⁰ Annai A. Gonczarowski, Noam Nisan, Rafail Ostrovsky, and Will Rosenbaum. "A Stable Marriage Requires Communication." *Games and Economic Behavior* 118, (2019): 626-647.

¹⁹¹T. G. Hatch, L. D. Marks, E. A. Bitah, M. Lawrence, N. M. Lambert, D. C. Dollahite, and B. P. Hardy. "The Power of Prayer in Transforming Individuals and Marital Relationships: A Qualitative Examination of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Families." *Review of Religious Research* 58, no. 1 (2016): 27.

schedule when no distractions can be allowed and being consistent in adhering to the schedule.

“Additional effects of maintaining that consistent prayer life are that it provides a mechanism for both spouses to change, it accelerates humility and prayer, it enables effective communication and conflict resolution, and it promotes unity.”¹⁹²

Forgiveness in Marriage

“Forgiveness is an important component in a relationship and allows for restoration to occur in feelings, intuitions, and motivations toward the offender.”¹⁹³ While many couples understood the importance of forgiveness in the marriage, only 30% said they were effective in forgiving each other especially when it came to major disagreements. These results compared with the ministers because the ministers note most couples do not know how to forgive effectively so they can move forward. Marriage cannot work when one spouse chooses to walk in unforgiveness, however, it is especially important to acknowledge that even after choosing to forgive, there is a correct way to heal. Healing is not a quick occurrence, especially when dealing with issues like infidelity or broken trust. Learning to forgive quickly while remembering that grace and mercy still must be extended in marriage is the most important practical example given from the ministers’ perspectives. Furthermore, the act of forgiveness has to be intentional on behalf of the person who was offended, because “intentional forgiveness has a positive effect on marital satisfaction while stabilizing the marriage’s foundation.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²T. G. Hatch, L. D. Marks, E. A. Bitah, M. Lawrence, N. M. Lambert, D. C. Dollahite, and B. P. Hardy. "The Power of Prayer in Transforming Individuals and Marital Relationships: A Qualitative Examination of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Families." *Review of Religious Research* 58, no. 1 (2016): 27.

¹⁹³TM, Pronk., Buyukcan-Tetik A, Iliás MMAH, Finkenauer C. “Marriage as a training ground: Examining change in self-control and forgiveness over the first 4 years of marriage.” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. 2019;36(1):111.

¹⁹⁴Soloman A. Agu, & Nwankwo, B. E. (2019). “Influence of Religious Commitment, Intentionality in Marriage and Forgiveness on marital satisfaction among married couples. *Ife Psychologia*, 27(2), 123.

Intimacy in Marriage

Intimacy is much deeper than sexual intercourse. It is the sense of closeness that is not limited to sharing each other's bodies. Sexual relations prove to be more satisfying when couples have a strong intimate basis. Based on the observations from the participants, women and men view intimacy differently, while men must work harder to really understand what women want when it comes to being intimate. Spouses must learn to communicate with each other letting each other know exactly what intimacy looks like for them. Some men are not taught how to be intimate, yet, women feel that men should just know how they feel which further supports the significance of effective communication as well as the linkage between intimacy and communication. Needs and wants must be verbalized to evoke responses. In their extended responses during the interview process, most men acknowledged they were weak in intimacy. The women also acknowledged the struggle and frustration they experienced when trying to get their husbands to recognize what intimacy looks like and what it is not. The best practical solution for effective intimacy is communicating about it and continuing to perfect the task to get better. "Intimacy refers to the pure relationship that is reliant upon shared confession between the two people that share their inner thoughts, feelings, understandings, and emotions."¹⁹⁵

Conflict Resolution in Marriage

Communication serves as the foundation of effective conflict resolution. "There is a definite positive meaningful impact that daily communication and conflict resolution has on marital quality."¹⁹⁶ Communication has to take place on a daily basis because where there is no

¹⁹⁵Thanh Thi Vu. "Love, Affection and Intimacy in Marriage of Young People in Vietnam." *Asian Studies Review* (2020): 1-17.

¹⁹⁶ Xiaomin Li, Hongjian Cao, Nan Zhou, Xiaoyan Ju, Jing Lan, Qinyi Zhu, and Xiaoyi Fang. "Daily Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Marital Quality in Chinese Marriage: A Three-Wave, Cross-Lagged Analysis." *Journal of Family Psychology* 32, no. 6 (2018): 735.

constant routine of interaction, there is a risk of failing to resolve vital aspects of the marriage. Since communication is a major part of conflict resolution and one of the top major issues for couples, effective strategies must be maintained that address both communication and conflict resolution. Failing to resolve any major or minor issues run the risk of resentment, unforgiveness, and grudges ensuring. Couples, 60% of them, acknowledge they are not effective in implementing effective conflict resolution strategies which closing aligns with the perspective of the ministers. None of the ministers agreed that couples have or apply effective means of conflict resolution. Practical solutions from both couples and ministers include couples choosing to engage in marriage counseling that will equip them with the necessary tools to resolve issues.

Divorce

Since all couples have contemplated divorce in this study, it proves even more so the need for couples to get more strategies and interventions to sustain their marriages. In seeing the increasing divorce rates, couples should not just be left privy to allow for time to pass in hopes they will not eventually get a divorce. Strengthening couples mean strengthening their foundation to make sure it sustainable. Seventy percent (70%) of couples agreed they did not have effective counseling to prevent them from a divorce which compares to 90% of ministers who agree. Furthermore, couples do get tired as indicated in the qualitative data, which is why couples end up giving up. Marital satisfaction must increase for couples so they will not turn to divorce. The participants believe infidelity and abuse are acceptable reasons to divorce, which is also an indicator of how the other common marital issues are fixable and they do not have to be the reasons why couples divorce. Couples and ministers also agree the most important practical

example is to get counseling before it gets too rough. In summarization of this section, “the necessity to create interventions for couples that stop and improve marital distress is great.”¹⁹⁷

Theological and Theoretical Practical Implications

This section briefly outlines the perspective of the researcher. When couples model their marriage after what has been outlined in the Bible, more marriages will be successful and not end in divorce. HFMC possesses many different aspects that align with the Word of God. The combination of HFMC and teaching based on the biblical principles will majorly affect marriages in a positive way. There is a significant need to have both and not just one. When theology and theoretical measures meet in a manner to help individuals and believers, it allows couples to get major tools that are necessary to the health of their marriages. Couples must be taught to have healthy marriages and they must be taught the correct implementation of what is needed to go from surviving to thriving. The most important revelation from this study is how the Bible shows couples how to deal with all the most common marital issues while they also correlate to the issues are addressed in different counseling techniques like HFMC, EFCT, and CBT. While there is literature that has been developed on each of these counseling theories and on the biblical principles of marriage, there is a need for the creation of updated approaches that combine the theological and theoretical aspects of bringing couples to healthier states of marriages. The combination of both will prove to be more powerful in preventing couples from divorcing.

Another implication concluded more couples should be taught the characteristics of a healthy marriage as it relates to Ephesians 5:25-33. Although the characteristics are significant in biblical principles, the same characteristics are significant in sustaining longevity in marriage.

¹⁹⁷Aurel Bahnaru, Remus Runcan, and Patricia Runcan. "Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction." *Revista De Asistență Socială* no. 3 (2019): 108.

Based on the focus group feedback, several topics discussed served as new information for couples that caused them to realize and critically think about some things in their marriage. Everyone can benefit from learning those characteristics regardless of race, religion, or demographic.

Future Recommendations

This section addresses future recommendations for couples who desire to have healthier marriages according to Ephesians 5:25-33 and characteristics of having a healthy marriage per the data in this study. These recommendations of interventions, tools, and teachings are designed considering the common marital issues acknowledged in this study.

The data from this study will be used to build future teaching sessions, marriage retreats on healthy marriages, and individualized counseling sessions based on HFMC methods. Ministers will also be able to use the plan to help couples become healthier. In the future, couples should participate in a combination of HFMC and be taught the Biblical principles of marriage based on Ephesians 5:25-33, which demonstrates the characteristics discussed in this study. The following course is designed based on the data analyzed in this study. It can be completed in cohorts of eight couples or completed on an individual basis as needed per couple.

Table 31

Building Healthier Marriages Through HFMC & Biblical Principles

Activity/Event	Description
Initial Marital Satisfaction Survey	Couples participate in the initial marital satisfaction so that there can be a gaging point of how satisfied each person is in common marital issues (Appendix D).
Initial Interview Process for Couples	Couples must participate in the interview process which contains the same questions outlined in this study (Appendix A). This allows for deeper analysis of specified answers that link back to the satisfaction survey.
Biblical Teachings on Ephesians 5:25-33:	Teach on the biblical principles found in Ephesians 5:25-33 detailing the characteristics of a healthy marriage. (Appendix K)
Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage	Couples can also answer questions found in Appendix C to develop accurate reflections of their role in the marriage.
Weekend Marriage Retreat	The weekend marriage retreat, to be created in the future, will be held so that couples can bond through reconnecting and learning strategies that combat common marital issues. The activities below signify interventions that the couples would learn through the weekend. All interventions can be based on models from HFMC, EFCT, and CBT.
	<p>Day 1-Friday evening Conflict Resolution Interventions Group Game Night and Dinner</p>
	<p>Day 2-Saturday Communication Tools Intimacy Role-Playing and Teaching Group Dinner</p>
	<p>Day 3- Sunday Spiritual Reconnecting: Prayer Life, Spiritual Intimacy, and God Working through Forgiveness Free Fun Day Group Dinner</p>
Follow up: Final Marital Satisfaction Survey and Couples' Feedback	Couples participate in the final marital satisfaction survey (Appendix D) in a follow-up meeting 3-4 months after the marriage retreat. Couples can offer feedback on what has worked for them and what has not worked for them while working to gain more interventions to fix any unresolved conflicts.

Final Statement

The purpose of the study was to understand the quality of marriage life among participants in Demonstration Church and other couples who are affiliated. The data collected from this study will be used to influence future publications, interventions, and programs that will positively impact the healthiness of married couples. Not only will couples at Demonstration Church benefit, but other couples and ministers can use the data, perspectives, and suggestions for the purpose of ministry and the Gospel.

For couples to prevent divorce and maintain healthy relationships, this research concludes the following:

- The characteristics of healthy marriages must be taught and instilled in married couples. Teaching from Ephesians 5:25-33 allows couples to get the actual depiction of how marriage should operate. Many individuals are oblivious to healthy marriage characteristics and foundational elements from the Bible which is why most people enter marriage assuming they know exactly what it takes to stay married. Application of the effective use of those characteristics must be continuously practiced.
- Practical strategies and interventions that deal with common marital issues must be taught and implemented in neutral settings.
- The pandemic of 2020 has forced people to be more disconnected which has had a negative impact on marriages. Connection, communication, and intimacy are relatable key factors in maintaining healthy marriages. Continuous reconnection is required in marriages especially when the evolution of the modern world is forcing disconnection of genuine relationships.

- If couples can resolve issues that relate to communication, forgiveness, intimacy, their prayer life, and conflict resolution, their marriages will be strengthened thereby, preventing divorce.
- The combination of recognizing and applying biblical practices combined with proven, effective marriage counseling approaches that are centered on hope, faith, and love is most effective in preventing divorce.
- The institute of marriage is in trouble with the government trying to pass new laws that go against the biblical model of marriage. When couples have effective strategies and interventions so that they do not have to divorce, it serves as a witnessing tool to others that God's design for marriage still works. It also serves as a challenge to leaders, ministers, and couples to do all that they can do to preserve the sacred institute of marriage.
- HFMC and other marriage counseling strategies that are based on faith, love, and hope align directly to Ephesians 5:25-33 and other biblical principles of marriage.

Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Official Approval Notice

August 25, 2020

Aviva Gafford
Ralph Baeza

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-424 The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples

Dear Aviva Gafford, Ralph Baeza:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

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

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications 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

Appendix A

Interview Questions-Couples

This study explores the significance of having a biblical model of marriage so couples can produce healthy marriages thereby preventing divorce in the city of Shreveport, Louisiana. It will report on findings as it relates to marriage counseling perspectives and Ephesians 5:25-33.

The following interview questions are for couples.

1. How would you describe the status of your marriage?
2. Do you consider your marriage to be healthy?
3. What would you consider to be the top three issues in marriage?
4. Do you feel like you and your spouse have effective strategies and solutions for dealing with the major issues in the marriage?
5. Have you and your spouse ever participated in marriage counseling?
6. What characteristics make up a healthy marriage?
 - a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors that make up a healthy marriage?
 - b. Do you consider yourself to be an effective spouse in the areas where you have common or constant issues?
 - c. What positive characteristics do you possess regarding the top issues in the marriage?
 - d. Do you think that you and your spouse effectively make changes when situations warrant one spouse to change?
7. What qualities make up a biblically based marriage?

- a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors in marriage that relate back to the biblical definition of marriage?
 - b. Do you consider yourself to be effective in displaying the characteristics of a biblically based marriage?
 - c. What positive characteristics do you possess that contribute to having a biblically based marriage?
 - d. In which areas do you think you need to improve?
 - e. Do you think you have an accurate understanding of how to have a biblically based marriage?
 - f. Do you consider your marriage to be one based on hope, faith, work, and love?
 - g. How important is it to model your marriage after the model of Jesus Christ and the church's relationship?
 - h. Do you think your marriage has modeled the parallelism of Christ and the church?
 - i. How many times have you revisited or referenced Ephesians 5:25-33 to save your marriage?
8. What are some characteristics of a good communicator in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors in marriage that relate to being a good communicator?
 - b. Do you consider yourself to be effective in communicating with your spouse?
 - c. What positive characteristics do you possess regarding being a good communicator?
 - d. In which areas do you think you need to improve?

- e. Do you think you have a great understanding of how to be an effective communicator in marriage?
 - f. Do you consider your marriage to be effective in communication skills?
9. What does a positive prayer life look like for a married couple?
- a. Can you give practical examples of how you and your spouse maintain your prayer life?
 - b. Do you think you have an effective prayer life as a married couple?
 - c. How important is having a sufficient prayer life to a marriage?
10. What are some characteristics of forgiveness in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what forgiveness looks like in your marriage?
 - b. Do you think that you effectively forgive each other when issues arise?
 - c. How important is forgiveness in marriage?
 - d. What areas of improvement are needed regarding forgiveness in your marriage?
11. What are some characteristics of intimacy in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what intimacy looks like in your marriage?
 - b. Do you think that your intimacy level is effective in your marriage?
 - c. How important is intimacy in marriage?
 - d. What areas of improvement are needed regarding intimacy in your marriage?
12. What are some characteristics of positive conflict resolution?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what conflict resolution looks like in your marriage?
 - b. Do you think that you and your spouse effectively implement conflict resolution strategies?

- c. How important is conflict resolution in marriage?
 - d. Do you feel like you know what effective conflict resolution is?
 - e. What areas of improvement are needed regarding conflict resolution in your marriage?
13. Why do you think couples get divorced?
- a. Have you ever contemplated divorce?
 - b. Can you give some practical examples that led you to contemplate divorce?
 - c. Do you feel like you had the means of receiving effective counseling that prevented you from divorcing? Or, what stopped you from divorcing your spouse?
 - d. How important is counseling in marriage in preventing divorce?
 - e. What do you consider to be an acceptable reason to divorce?
14. Do you feel like traditional marriage counseling is better than marriage counseling guided by biblical principles?
- a. What do you think is the reason(s) why some couples will not participate in marriage counseling?
 - b. Do you feel like effective marriage counseling aids in preventing divorce?
 - c. Do you think there is a maximum amount of time or number of sessions in which couples should engage in marriage counseling?
 - d. Do you feel like marriage counseling should be maintained throughout the course of a marriage?

Appendix B

Interview Questions-Clergy and Ministers

This study explores the significance of having a biblical model of marriage so couples can produce healthy marriages thereby preventing divorce in the city of Shreveport, Louisiana. It will report on findings as it relates to marriage counseling perspectives and Ephesians 5:25-33. The following interview questions are for clergy and ministers.

1. How would you describe the state of marriages that you have observed?
2. Do you consider most current marriages to be in healthy state?
3. What would you consider to be the top three issues in marriage currently?
4. Do you feel couples have effective strategies and solutions for dealing with the major issues in their marriages?
5. Do you feel like most married couples participate in marriage counseling?
6. What characteristics make up a healthy marriage?
 - a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors that make up a healthy marriage?
 - b. Do you consider most spouses to be effective in dealing with common or constant issues?
 - c. What positive characteristics lead to fixing top issues in the marriage?
 - d. Do you think that spouses effectively make changes when situations warrant one spouse to change?
7. What qualities make up a biblically based marriage?
 - a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors in marriage that relate back to the biblical definition of marriage?

- b. Do you consider spouses to be effective in displaying the characteristics of a biblically based marriage?
 - c. What positive characteristics exist in marriages when they are biblically based?
 - d. In which areas do spouses need improvement?
 - e. Do you think spouses have an accurate understanding of how to have a biblically based marriage?
 - f. Do you think that most marriages are based on hope, faith, work, and love?
 - g. How important is it to model marriage after the model of Jesus Christ and the church's relationship?
 - h. Do you think most marriages have modeled the parallelism of Christ and the church?
 - i. Do you think spouses revisit or reference Ephesians 5:25-33 to save their marriage?
8. What are some characteristics of a good communicator in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of specific behaviors in marriage that relate to being a good communicator?
 - b. Do you consider most couples to be effective in communicating with their spouse?
 - c. What positive characteristics do spouses possess regarding being a good communicator? What negative aspects are present?
 - d. In which areas do you think couples need to improve?
 - e. Do you think couples have an accurate understanding of how to effectively communicate?

- f. How important is communication to the marriage?
9. What does a positive prayer life look like for a married couple?
- a. Can you give practical examples of how couples should maintain their prayer life?
 - b. Do you think spouses can have an effective prayer life as a married couple?
 - c. How important is having a sufficient prayer life to a marriage?
10. What are some characteristics of forgiveness in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what forgiveness looks like in marriage?
 - b. Do you think that spouses effectively forgive each other when issues arise?
 - c. How important is forgiveness in marriage?
 - d. What areas of improvement are needed regarding forgiveness in marriage?
11. What are some characteristics of intimacy in marriage?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what intimacy looks like in marriage?
 - b. Do you think that most couples' intimacy level is effective in marriage?
 - c. How important is intimacy in marriage?
 - d. What areas of improvement are needed regarding intimacy in marriage?
12. What are some characteristics of positive conflict resolution?
- a. Can you give practical examples of what conflict resolution looks like in marriage?
 - b. Do you think that couples effectively implement conflict resolution strategies?
 - c. How important is conflict resolution in marriage?
 - d. Do you feel like couples know what effective conflict resolution is?
 - e. What areas of improvement are needed regarding conflict resolution in marriage?
13. Why do you think couples get divorced?

- a. Have you ever contemplated divorce?
 - b. Can you give some practical examples that lead couples to contemplate divorce?
 - c. Do you feel like spouses have the means of receiving effective counseling that prevents them from divorcing? Or, what stops couples from divorcing?
 - d. How important is counseling in marriage in preventing divorce?
 - e. What do you consider to be an acceptable reason to divorce?
14. Do you feel like traditional marriage counseling is better than marriage counseling guided by biblical principles?
- a. What do you think is the reason(s) why some couples will not participate in marriage counseling?
 - b. Do you feel like effective marriage counseling aids in preventing divorce?
 - c. Do you think there is a maximum amount of time or number of sessions in which couples should engage in marriage counseling?
 - d. Do you feel like marriage counseling should be maintained throughout the course of a marriage?

Appendix C

Focus Group Session

Effective Utilization of Ephesians 5:25-33:
The Impact of Intentionally Implementing Strategies to Produce Healthy Marriages
By Aviva Gafford-Williamson

***Begin by reading Ephesians 5:25-33*

1. Husbands, would you describe some ways that you have loved your wife like God loves the church?
2. Wives, would you describe some ways you feel loved by your husband?
3. What main characteristics are observed in Ephesians 5:25-33?
4. Based on your experiences, what does it mean to sanctify and cleanse your wife with the washing of water by the word that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish?
5. Husbands, do you feel like you have totally given yourself for your wife?
6. The scripture dictates, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Would you please describe any issues you’ve noticed in marriages where one spouse has not truly become one flesh with his or her spouse?
7. Wives, would you describe some ways that you respect your husband?
8. Husbands, would you describe what makes you feel respected?
9. Do you feel like you have loved each other to the point where sacrifice is displayed in the relationship?

10. The scripture dictates that “no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” Based on your experiences, how has this been revealed in marriage? Or, do you feel like it has been accurately displayed in your marriage?
11. What does love the wife as the husband loves himself look like?
12. What role do you see Ephesians 5:25-33 playing in keeping marriages healthy?
13. How would marriages benefit from intentionally implementing the characteristics observed in Ephesians 5:25-33?

Appendix D

Marriage Satisfaction Survey

On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most satisfied and 1 being the least satisfied, rate your level of satisfaction as it relates to the topics in your marriage. If a topic does not exist in the marriage, please rate it a “0.”

Demonstrating Love to Each Other	5	4	3	2	1	0
Communication	5	4	3	2	1	0
Intimacy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Spiritual Relationship	5	4	3	2	1	0
Demonstrating Forgiveness	5	4	3	2	1	0
Conflict Resolution	5	4	3	2	1	0
Trust	5	4	3	2	1	0
Sex	5	4	3	2	1	0
Finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
Raising the Children	5	4	3	2	1	0
Submission within the marriage	5	4	3	2	1	0
Prayer life within the marriage	5	4	3	2	1	0
Application of marital biblical principles	5	4	3	2	1	0
Total Points_____ (to be calculated by the Researcher)						

Appendix E

Initial Participant Screening Survey for Couples

The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships
among Couples

Email address

What is your full name?

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes No

Are you traditionally, legally married, meaning one spouse born male and the other born female?

Yes No Unmarried

Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Yes No

Would you be willing to participate in an interview, survey, and focus group associated with this
research study?

Yes No

Please leave your contact number with area code.

Appendix F

Initial Participant Screening Survey for Ministers

The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships
among Couples

Email address

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes No

Are you a licensed or ordained minister?

Licensed Ordained Both Unlicensed

Are you employed as a minister or retired?

Employed as a minister Retired Neither

Do you have any experience counseling couples?

Yes No

Please leave your contact phone number.

Appendix G

Recruitment Flyer for Couples

Research Participants Needed

The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you traditionally, legally married, meaning one spouse born male and the other born female?
 - Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you answered **yes** to all of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a marriage model study.

The purpose of this research study is to attempt to provide and implement strategic Biblical-based foundations for building healthy marriages. Participants will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview, complete a marital satisfaction survey, and participate in a video-recorded focus group session. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, the survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and the focus group will take approximately 90 minutes to complete.

<https://forms.gle/nabceZXxYkhPmDDV7>

If you are accessing this recruitment information online, please click on the link above to complete a screening survey in order to determine your eligibility for the study.

If you are receiving this information during the Marriage Ministry meeting and you are interested in participating, the researcher can screen you for eligibility at this time.

If you are reading this information as a posted flyer in the Marriage Ministry meeting room, please use your phone or computer to go to the link above in order to determine your eligibility. The study is being conducted in Shreveport, Louisiana at Demonstration Church. The researcher will notify participants recruited online of the address and location by phone or email.

Minister Aviva Williamson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study. **Please contact Aviva G. Williamson at (318)-453-3894 or agafford@liberty.edu for more information.**

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

Appendix H

Recruitment Flyer for Ministers

Research Participants Needed

The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a licensed or ordained minister?
- Are you employed as a minister or retired?
- Do you have any experience counseling couples?

If you answered **yes** to all of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a marriage model study.

The purpose of this research study is to attempt to provide and implement strategic Biblical-based foundations for building healthy marriages. Participants will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

<https://forms.gle/kaxnkwYpDBF4uQ3F6>

Please click on the link above to complete a screening survey to determine your eligibility for the study.

The study is being conducted in Shreveport, Louisiana at Demonstration Church. The researcher will notify participants recruited online of the address and location by phone or email.

Minister Aviva Williamson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Aviva G. Williamson at (318)-453-3894 or agafford@liberty.edu for more information.

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

Appendix I

Follow-Up Email for Ministers

August 15, 2020

Dear Potential Minister Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. Last week, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to respond to the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is August 30, 2020.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. The interview should take approximate 30 minutes to complete. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here <https://forms.gle/nabceZXxYkhPmDDV7> to complete the screening survey and return it by hitting the submit and send button.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign and return the consent form to me by email prior to meeting for the interview or in person at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Aviva Williamson
Researcher/Doctor of Ministry Candidate
agafford@liberty.edu
318-453-3894

Appendix J

Consent Form for Ministers

Title of the Project: The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples

Principal Investigator: Mrs. Aviva Williamson, Minister, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, must be licensed or ordained as a minister, must have experience counseling couples, and can either be currently employed as a minister or retired. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research study is to attempt to provide and implement strategic Biblical-based foundations for building healthy marriages. The ideal for how couples treat each other does not consistently mirror the example found in Ephesians 5:25-33. Forsaking the Biblical model of marriage results in unhealthy marriages, which leads to higher divorce rates.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an audio-recorded interview. This task will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the possible decrease of divorce rates.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in

future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer and physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all physical records will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher and her husband serve as ministers at Demonstration Church. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the researcher will verbally make participants aware of the voluntary nature of the study. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Demonstration Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Aviva Williamson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 318-453-3894 or agafford@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ralph Baeza, at rbaeza@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix K

Consent Form for Couples

Title of the Project: The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples

Principal Investigator: Mrs. Aviva Williamson, Minister, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, traditionally, legally married, and a believer in Jesus Christ. In this study, traditional marriage is defined as one spouse being born male and the other born female. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research study is to attempt to provide and implement strategic biblically based foundations for building healthy marriages. The ideal for how couples treat each other does not consistently mirror the example found in Ephesians 5:25-33. Forsaking the biblical model of marriage results in unhealthy marriages, which leads to higher divorce rates.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

2. Participate in an audio-recorded interview. This task will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
3. Complete a marital satisfaction survey. This task should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and will be administered to participants directly after the interview is completed.
4. Participate in a video-recorded focus group. The researcher will present a lesson based on Ephesians 5:25-33 prior to asking the focus group questions. The focus group will take approximately 90 minutes to complete and will take place the week following the interview and survey.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include building a healthy marriage and learning how to deal with common marital issues more effectively.

Benefits to society include the possible decrease of divorce rates and the participants' marriage becoming an effective example of a healthy, Biblical marriage to individuals and married couples.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer and physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all physical records will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet only accessible by the researcher.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher and her husband serve as ministers at Demonstration Church. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the researcher will verbally make participants aware of the voluntary nature of the study. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Demonstration Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected

from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Aviva Williamson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 318-453-3894 or agafford@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ralph Baeza, at rbaeza@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix L

August 20, 2020

Demonstration Church
Jay and Aviva Williamson
6051 Roma Drive #518
Shreveport, LA 71105

Dear Demonstration Church:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling. The title of my research project is *The Biblical Model of Marriage in Preventing Divorce: Maintaining Healthy Relationships among Couples* and the purpose of my research is to provide and implement strategic biblically based foundations for building healthy marriages.

I am writing to request your permission to post your recruitment flyers on the church's social media page, to access the marriage ministry meeting, to post your flyer throughout the church and to recruit members and ministers from Demonstration Church.

Participating couples will be asked to participate in a set of interview questions, one survey, and one focus group session. Participating ministers will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Aviva Williamson
Researcher/Doctor of Ministry Candidate
318-453-3894
agafford@liberty.edu

Appendix M

Resources for Ephesians 5:25-33

Ephesians 5:25-33 King James Version (KJV)

- ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
²⁸ So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.
²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:
³⁰ For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
³³ Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Ephesians 5:25-33 The Message (MSG)

- ²⁵⁻²⁸ Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already "one" in marriage.
²⁹⁻³³ No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh." This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

Characteristics of a Healthy Marriage based on Ephesians 5:25-33

- Husbands, love each other just like Christ loved the church. (Ephesians 5:25)
- Sacrifice for each other by giving and not always looking to receive. (Ephesians 5:25)
- Just as Christ's love makes the church whole, your actions should bring out the best in her. (Ephesians 5:25)

- See your wives as holy, radiant, and beautiful. Compliment her. (Ephesians 5:26-27)
- Do not bring harm to your spouse. Nourish and cherish them. (Ephesians 5:29)
- Be one flesh and cleave to each other. (Ephesians 5:31)
- Respect each other by reverencing them. (Ephesians 5:33)
- Wives, always honor your husbands. (Ephesians 5:33)

***This scripture dictates many instructions to the husband, but the wife is responsible to reciprocate the same things to her husband. Wives should honor their husband.

***If you must question any actions in your marriage, remember to ask yourself “would Christ treat the church that way?”

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