

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Pastoral Counseling Marriage Ministry

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

by

Chris Schroeder

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Ron Hughes, Ed.D., D.Min.

Dwight Rice, D.Min., Ph.D

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Chris Schroeder

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, March 24, 2022

Mentor: Dr. Ron Hughes

Marriage ministry is the topic for this thesis project. Several aspects of marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana were evaluated. First, a young single adult group at the church participated in a curriculum for dating before marriage. After being taught the reasons for marriage and dating, the class filled out a survey to evaluate the class' effectiveness. Next, the pre-marriage counseling at FBC Texarkana was evaluated for effectiveness. Third, crisis marriage counseling at FBC Texarkana was evaluated by the writer to determine if marriages were finding healing. Fourth, a marriage class was offered at FBC Texarkana for a ten-week time frame. At the conclusion of the class, the class was evaluated for effectiveness in couples growing in love. Fifth, Ron L. Deal came to FBC Texarkana to conduct a marriage conference targeted specifically to couples in a blended family. A survey was completed by the participants at the end of the conference to evaluate the success of the conference. Finally, a new program of marriage mentoring was started at FBC Texarkana. At the conclusion of six months, a survey was completed by the mentors and mentees to determine if the marriage mentoring program should be expanded to more of the church for participation.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
SYMBIS	<i>Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

The ministry context for this thesis project is First Baptist Church of Texarkana, a large church in the Southern Baptist denomination. Texarkana is a city in East Texas on the border of Arkansas and Louisiana. The problem is that, currently, the church does not have a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry. The church has many marriage ministry programs but not any that can be strategically executed and evaluated for success in helping marriages. A strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry would have several components to strengthen couples before and during the marriage. A healthy marriage has the characteristics of solid love in commitment, intimacy, and passion.

Ministry Context

First Baptist Church of Texarkana is located in Texarkana, Texas. Texarkana is located geographically on the Texas-Arkansas border, directly above Louisiana.¹ For centuries, the Caddo Indians of the Nortenos stock lived in this area.² Their occupation of the Texarkana land became the main line of travel from the Mississippi River country to the South and West, known as the Great Southwest Trail.³

The Baptist General Convention of Texas provided a report from the Census 2000 indicating a population of 78,930 lived within a five-mile radius of First Baptist Church of Texarkana. This number increased 2.5 percent in 2018. This demographic study identified that

¹ The Handbook of Texas Online, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texarkana-tx> (accessed October 29, 2020).

² Robert Baker, *Her Walls Before Thee Stand: Centennial Story First Baptist Church Texarkana, Texas 1877-1977* (Texarkana: First Baptist Church, 1977), 2.

³ The Handbook of Texas Online.

64.8 percent of the population was White, 31.8 percent were Black, and less than 1 percent were other races. The male and female populations were relatively equal, with women having a slight edge of 2.3 percent. Children under eighteen years old compromised 25.7 percent of the population, while 50.8 percent were eighteen to fifty-four years old. This data indicated many families in the five-mile radius, mostly since only 33 percent of the population was non-family households. The number of people, 83 percent, without a college degree, provided an interesting insight into the community's makeup that rises 7 percent above the national average. The number of households not involved in a church ran at 26 percent, which is 9 percent below the national average, and 43 percent of the population indicated being strongly involved. Surprisingly, the population study revealed a high receptivity to faith, a somewhat traditional church style, a strong preference for spiritual development, and an extremely high preference for Baptist churches. Due to the slow projected growth pattern, no serious changes in the numbers are expected.⁴

Texarkana became a city on December 8, 1873.⁵ Texas granted a charter of incorporations in 1876, and the state of Arkansas followed in 1880, granting Texarkana incorporation to the Arkansas side of this city.⁶ The two cities quickly became a key center of railroad travel. On January 15, 1874, The Cairo and Fulton Railroad Company connected their railroad tracks with the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company at the state line of Arkansas and Texas, leading to significant population growth and offering employment opportunities through

⁴ Jeff Schreve, "A Case Study of the Growth Trend from 2003-2013 at First Baptist Church of Texarkana to Identify the Key Components of Growth" (DMin project, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), Appendix D.

⁵ The Handbook of Texas Online.

⁶ The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net>. (accessed October 29, 2020).

the associated businesses of the cities. The two cities built a main street, called State Line Avenue, connecting a carefully planned road constructed between Texas and Arkansas. State Line Avenue immediately became the main street in town and housed the only post office in the US standing in two states, later becoming a unique tourist attraction for the cities.⁷

As Texarkana began to establish itself as a legitimate city, the need for churches quickly began to surface. Both the First United Methodist Church and Sacred Heart Catholic Church constructed buildings in 1874.⁸ The Presbyterian Church began in 1875, and St. James Episcopal Church in 1877. A group of Baptists met in 1877 to establish First Baptist Church of Texarkana, a church that would play a significant role in years to come “as a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19).

On Saturday night, August 4, 1877, members of the Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church of Mt. Pisgah, Texas, assembled to send fifteen church members to establish a new church in Texarkana.⁹ The first church service was conducted in the summer of 1877.¹⁰ Soon after the church’s establishment, First Baptist Church of Texarkana became affiliated with the Texarkana Baptist Association and the Baptist General Association of Texas and renamed at a later time the Baptist General Convention of Texas.¹¹

During the first year of existence, the church reported a membership of thirty-four people. Two years later, the numbers had risen slightly to forty members. The slow growth was partly due to the church’s penchant to practice a vigorous and aggressive church discipline form.

⁷ The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture.

⁸ Baker, *Her Walls Before Thee Stand*, 14.

⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., 35

¹¹ Ibid., 41.

For example, in 1879, the church reported one person had joined by baptism, three persons by letter, and ten persons were “dismissed.”¹²

In 1889, Evangelist W. E. Penn came to First Baptist Church of Texarkana to hold a revival meeting. The revival brought an additional fifty members to the church. Other revivals followed, and the church began to grow and flourish.¹³ Some of this church growth complemented the city’s growth experienced in the last decade of the 1800s. The city’s population nearly doubled in size, increasing from 6,380 to 10,170.¹⁴ With an increasing city population, the church had more significant opportunities to reach people for Jesus Christ.

First Baptist Church of Texarkana would be considered a healthy church today. The church has transitioned from a reputation as an elitist-type church to a church open to all people regardless of economic status, professional position, race, or past sins. The people in the community recognize First Baptist Church of Texarkana as a place for hurting people needing to find healing in the Lord’s grace. Unfortunately, this church transformation did not occur without substantial difficulty, pain, and loss of long-term staff members and church members.

Dr. Jeff Schreve became the senior pastor at First Baptist Church of Texarkana in 2003, and the church has experienced the most significant amount of numerical growth in this time. The preaching ministry continues to be a focal point in the church, drawing people into the church’s worship services. In addition, the church’s regional television ministry continues to touch lives for Christ and brings new people to the church. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average Sunday morning attendance for worship services was 1,700 people. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, an average Sunday morning worship service had 900

¹² Ibid., 45.

¹³ Baker, *Her Walls Before Thee Stand*, 67.

¹⁴ Ibid., 63.

people in attendance. The church now has over 5,000 church members. In 2019, the church celebrated 122 baptisms. The annual income of the church has increased from 2.9 million in 2003 to 6.4 million in 2020.

On Sunday afternoon, March 8, 2020, a staff member on the media team noticed a fire in the church building's second story. Minutes later, the Texarkana Fire Department arrived on the scene. Hours later, the fire was contained and put out. No individuals were injured in the enormous fire, but the church building, mainly the sanctuary, had massive soot damage. It took one year for the sanctuary to be rebuilt, and worship services did not continue in the sanctuary until Easter Sunday, April 2021. Fortunately, the twenty-three-million-dollar project to restore the sanctuary and clean all the soot damage was covered by church insurance.

The week after the fire in the building, the coronavirus infections began to spike worldwide. A committee of key staff members and local medical doctors met together and decided on the church's safety protocol in surviving the pandemic. The church did live stream worship services for several weeks before finally meeting together again in person. The sanctuary was still unrepaired, so church attendees met in the gym and other rooms across the campus. The sanctuary can seat up to 2,300 people. The pandemic and fire caused the church to conduct two Sunday morning worship services where people were socially distanced in several rooms on campus. Only about 900 people were able to come to church at that time. Financial giving from church members remained strong, and the church continued to be in good financial standing. Now, back in the sanctuary, the average church attendance is at about 1,400 per Sunday morning.

The church staff exhibits a unified spirit with a solid commitment to reaching the lost and discipling the saved. All have a desire to grow in holiness, revealing that desire in their service

and relationships. Staff meetings have become great times of encouragement, sharing, discovery, and ministry focus. The group enjoys one another's company when working and playing together. The staff has excellent ministry potential through the church and in the community because they enjoy unity.

First Baptist Church of Texarkana has a sizeable senior staff including Senior Pastor – Jeff Schreve, Associate Pastor – Larry Sims, Worship Pastor - Quinn Stanfill, Discipleship Pastor – Bryan Bixler, Worship Associate – Robin Thomas, Student Pastor – Ben Hill, College Pastor – Cross Bright, Director of Women's Ministry – Debbie Schreve, Minister to Children – Stephanie Bright, Minister of Preschool Education – Grace Graham, Facilities Manager – Olin Owens, Church Administrator – Vicky Hagar, Director of Media – Jay Budzilowski, and Pastoral Counselor – Chris Schroeder.

Primarily, the marriage ministry comes under the responsibility of the counselor at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. In 1995, Dr. Harold Hime became a part-time counselor. He was a retired pastor who had previously served as a senior pastor at a Southern Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska. He pastored local churches in an interim role and only did marriage counseling in the church part-time. The church was deeply saddened when Hime died suddenly after five years of service at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

In 2002, Ada Ferguson became a part-time counselor and women's ministry director. Eventually, Ada gave up her women's ministry director position to focus only on the counseling ministry. She was a beloved and influential leader in the church and community. Unfortunately, after a valiantly fought long battle with pancreatic cancer, she passed away in 2016.

Chris Schroeder came to First Baptist Church of Texarkana in January of 2018 to become a full-time pastoral counselor. Chris previously served as a senior pastor at churches in Missouri

and California. Before coming to Texarkana, Chris had recently completed a Masters in Pastoral Counseling from Liberty University Online. As the pastoral counselor, he has many duties, including; counseling appointments, crisis counseling, teaching marriage classes, teaching a Sunday School class, back-up preaching, leading Celebrate Recovery, Divorce Care, Grief Share, and other responsibilities as a full-time staff member. In addition, Chris conducts marriage counseling and teaches marriage classes with his wife, Rochelle. The counseling ministry at the church has an annual budget of \$4,950.

First Baptist Church of Texarkana has a counseling office in the church building. The pastoral counselor has a full-time assistant in charge of answering incoming phone calls and setting appointments for the pastoral counselor. She helps to direct people with church counseling needs. She has a counseling degree and can help people through crisis counseling. The pastoral counselor is also in charge of the leaders in Celebrate Recovery and Divorce Care and Grief Share teachers. In addition, the pastoral counselor is in senior leadership in the church and participates in deacon and staff meetings.

Members of First Baptist Church of Texarkana can make appointments with the pastoral counselor by calling the church office. The pastoral counselor also takes appointments with individuals and couples who are not church members but have a church leader's reference. The pastoral counselor sees an average of 43 counselees a month. At the end of October 2020, the pastoral counselor had 432 counseling sessions in 2020. Out of those 432 sessions, 218 were marriage-related issues. Marriage counseling includes crisis marriage counseling, individual marriage issues, and pre-marriage counseling. In the city of Texarkana, First Baptist is the only church with a pastoral counselor on staff. The other churches in Texarkana refer their church members needing counseling to Licensed Professional Counselors in the community.

The church's lay leadership functions as servants, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and committee members. The leaders do not see themselves in charge of the church but as servants working with the staff and supporting them to fulfill its mission. These leaders stress and celebrate unity in the church to carry out God's mission for First Baptist Church of Texarkana. Numerically and financially, the church has experienced tremendous growth in the past ten years.

The FBC Texarkana church staff experienced two tragic losses in 2021. First, on Sunday morning, March 21, Associate Pastor Larry Sims did not show up to church. Church leaders then discovered that Pastor Larry had experienced a significant stroke the night before. Since that tragic event, Pastor Larry has made significant strides in recovery in his mobility and speech. Unfortunately, he has not been able to return to work at the church. After over forty years of service, he is deciding if he will retire from church ministry. He has been beloved for all his years of ministry by the church family.

On Monday, September 27, Vicky Hagar suddenly and tragically passed away while working at the church that morning. Vicky had worked at the church for over 30 years, and she was also greatly beloved by the church family. The church has started the process of looking to hire a new Church Administrator. She had many essential responsibilities in the church, and she will be difficult to replace. Her loss caused enormous grief for the rest of the church staff.

On June 1, 2021, Rochelle was hired by the church to serve part-time as women's counselor. Chris and Rochelle Schroeder are now able to conduct marriage counseling together. The marriage counseling is effective because Chris and Rochelle are able to give empathy to the individuals in a marriage from the perspective of each gender. Rochelle helping with the counseling also allows Chris Schroeder to have the time to help Pastor Jeff Schreve with

Associate Pastor responsibilities. A long-term plan has not yet been made for replacing the Associate Pastor. The church leadership will give Larry Sims the time he needs to recover and then decide his own future in pastoral ministry at FBC Texarkana. Larry was nearing retirement even before he suffered a severe stroke.

Problem Presented

The problem is that First Baptist Church of Texarkana does not have a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry. The church currently offers pre-marriage counseling and crisis marriage counseling for church members through the pastoral counseling office. A couple outside of the church can also receive marriage counseling from the pastoral counselor if they have a reference from a ministry leader in the church. The philosophy is that pastoral counseling is most effective when it serves as an avenue to connect counselees to their ministries. The pastoral marriage counseling occurs at the church, but it has not been evaluated and researched for more effectiveness.

The church also offers marriage classes during Sunday School and through an annual connection class. First Baptist Church of Texarkana currently has thirty-four total Sunday School classes. A small percentage of these Sunday School classes specifically address marriage issues for the participants. In addition, elective connection classes are offered two to three times per year in the fall, spring, and summer. In each of those sessions, a marriage connection class is provided. People in the church and community participate in these connection classes that generally last for five to ten weeks. The classes specific to marriage have not been evaluated and researched for effectiveness.

Periodically, the senior pastor and church leaders have taught the church members the biblical marriage principles. At least twice per year, Senior Pastor Jeff Schreve and his wife, Debbie, share a message on Sunday morning on the topic of marriage. Pastor Jeff and Debbie have a passion for helping to strengthen marriages in the church and community. They speak two to three times per year at marriage conferences for Family Life.

The pastoral counselor, Chris Schroeder, occasionally preaches a message on marriage during the Sunday morning service or the Wednesday night service. In addition, Pastor Chris and his wife, Rochelle, have recently started conducting church marriage conferences. Under Jeff and Debbie's mentorship, Chris and Rochelle have a passion for helping to strengthen marriages. Chris had previously been through a difficult divorce, and he brought a daughter into his marriage with Rochelle. Chris and Rochelle then had two daughters together. This experience allows Chris and Rochelle to have the wisdom and credibility to minister to blended families.

Annually, the church will bring a guest speaker to the church for a marriage conference. In addition, the church is willing to budget and schedule high-profile speakers on marriage to come to the church. For example, Ron Deal will be conducting a blended family conference at the church in August of 2021. Deal is a leading expert on blending families. In addition, experts such as Tim Kimmel and Tim Clinton have also led marriage and family conferences at the church. The problem is that these marriage conferences have not been evaluated to see if it is strengthening marriages at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis is to develop a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The systematic pastoral

counseling marriage ministry would have several different components to helping marriages. The counseling sessions would begin with an opening inventory and then conclude with a survey to determine effectiveness. Each component of marriage ministry and counseling will be evaluated in order to determine effectiveness.

First, single young adults will learn about the importance of dating and then marrying the right person for them. Then, the leader of this young adult ministry, Jacob Bain, will take the group called Crossroads through a dating curriculum. The teaching will take place during the church's Sunday School hour. The pastoral counselor will teach the last class session and then evaluate the teaching.

Second, the ministry will have an opportunity for engaged couples to receive pre-marriage counseling. Solid pre-marriage counseling will help the couple have a healthy start to their marriage. Any couple desiring to use the facilities at First Baptist Church of Texarkana for the wedding ceremony or wishing to use a pastoral staff member to officiate the wedding ceremony must participate in pre-marriage counseling through the office of the pastoral counselor. The couple will need to complete an online SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) Assessment before counseling sessions begin. In the first session with the, the SYMBIS Assessment results will be reviewed alone, and then the counselor will go over the results with the couple. Then, the couple will proceed to participate in the pre-marriage counseling sessions. SYMBIS has seven sessions with a workbook for discussion and homework assignments.

Next, the ministry will provide short-term crisis counseling for those who are struggling in marriage. This counseling is made by appointment through the pastoral counseling office at church. The married couple must complete the only SYMBIS Plus assessment before the first counseling session in a crisis. The SYMBIS Plus assessment results and the first counseling

session will help the writer assess the most pressing need of the crisis couple and choose what curriculum and direction to take the counseling. The marriage crisis pastoral counseling will be for a short term of six to eight weeks. The writer will determine the best curriculum and plan of action during the first session of counseling. The goal of marriage crisis pastoral counseling is for the couple to grow in their marriage with a more profound commitment, intimacy, and passion.

Fourth, the ministry will offer a younger married couple the possibility to be in a mentor relationship with an older married couple in the church. For example, a current Sunday School class of older church members at First Baptist Church of Texarkana is interested in mentoring younger married couples. The writer will help to direct a new marriage mentoring program at the church where both younger and older couples are strengthened in their marriages by learning valuable marriage lessons from one another.

Fifth, discipleship opportunities for marriage will be offered in different forms throughout the year. Marriage lessons will be taught in Sunday worship time, Sunday School classes, and connection classes. Pastor Jeff Schreve and his wife will preach a message on biblical marriage twice throughout the year. Sunday School teachers will be trained on strengthening the marriages of those participating in their Sunday School classes. Chris Schroeder and women's counselor Rochelle Schroeder will teach a Connection Class about marriage two to three times per year.

Finally, marriage events will be offered throughout the year to strengthen marriages. First Baptist Church of Texarkana has the financial resources to bring prominent Christian marriage teachers to the church to conduct marriage conferences. These conferences would need to be affordable and available for church members and people in the Texarkana community. The

marriage conference can coincide with a holiday such as Valentine's Day. The conference would require comprehensive planning and advertisement in order to be considered a successful event.

Basic Assumptions

Certain assumptions underscore the direction of the project and the choice of delimitations. The researcher believes the selected leaders can provide the insights necessary to bring balance and effectiveness to the project. An assumption is that the researcher will work with the same number of monthly counselees for marriage issues moving forward. Also, an assumption is made that marriage counselees and marriage course attendees will be honest and open in sharing opinions because of the sensitive nature of counseling issues. The researcher assumes that the marriages will be strengthened through a more systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The researcher also assumes that couples will participate in this thesis project.

Definitions

The researcher uses several key terms throughout this project that require definition. *Love* is a key term in this work. Love is difficult to reduce to a simple phrase that couples can take away from their counseling sessions. The word *love* is often misunderstood and misused. The word *love* is defined as "being willing to value the other person and unwilling to devalue that person."¹⁵ *Love* springs from a caring, other-focused heart. This understanding of *love* is helpful for couples and easy for the pastoral counselor to teach.

¹⁵ Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), xxix.

Cherish is another keyword that the researcher uses and requires a definition. The word *cherish* is defined, “to hold dear. That means one thinks about it, and when one does, one feels great pleasure. One has great affection for it. If one cherishes something, one goes out of one’s way to show it is important to one, and thus one showcases it.”¹⁶

The researcher will evaluate and describe the triangle of love and define the three terms of *passion*, *intimacy*, and *commitment*. *Passion* is the biological side of love. The word *passion* is defined, “sensual and sexual, characterized by psychological arousal and an intense desire for physical affection.”¹⁷ *Intimacy* is the emotional side of love. The word *intimacy* is defined as really knowing and accepting another person. Finally, *commitment* is the cognitive side of love. The word *commitment* in marriage is defined as making a promise to be with one another until death.

Pastoral counseling and *hope-focused marriage counseling* are terms the researcher will frequently use throughout the study. *Pastoral counseling* is defined as “a helping relationship that intentionally incorporates people’s oneness to religion and spirituality for the purpose of clients flourishing in their emotional and psychological domains.”¹⁸ *Integration counseling* is defined as an approach to counseling that encourages the convergence of scientific and theological knowledge. Finally, *hope-focused marriage counseling* is defined as “an attempt to show troubled couples their love for each other – concretely, in ways they cannot deny – until hope is rekindled.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Gary Thomas, *Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 18.

¹⁷ Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott. *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 37-38.

¹⁸ Loren Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 65.

¹⁹ Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 52.

Limitations

The limitations of the project form the beginning parameters of the project. These parameters limit the research with factors beyond the control of the researcher. The project will focus on the pastoral counseling ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. Such a focus reflects the researcher's desire to deal specifically with this church where the marriage counseling and ministry will occur. The study will be limited by only being able to evaluate those who come for counseling. Many marriages struggle and end in divorce without ever receiving pastoral counseling.

Delimitations

The researcher set the delimitations of the project. The delimitations serve as the fence around the project. The researcher will study the effectiveness of the pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana in a time of one full year. Therefore, the time chosen only represents the current and upcoming year of ministry for the pastoral counselor.

This study will be delimited to couples who come into counseling together for multiple sessions. Therefore, the researcher will not factor into the project individuals who come into marriage counseling without their spouse. The researcher will also not factor into the couples who come to pastoral marriage counseling for only one session. Participation in multiple counseling sessions shows a satisfactory amount of commitment on the couple's part to find help and healing in their marriage.

The study will be delimited to couples who are members or participating in a ministry of First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The pastoral counseling ministry is set up for church members, and members of the church fund it. Referrals by ministry leaders of the church for

marriage counseling are allowed for non-members of the church. However, an ingredient for successful pastoral counseling is church engagement. Therefore, couples who are not church members or engaged in the church's ministries will not be factored into this research project.

There are specific ways the researcher has decided not to delimit this study. First, the research will not be delimited to couples who were married in the church. Thus, couples with different marriage experiences will be able to participate in the study. Second, the study will not be delimited to couples in a first marriage. Couples who have been in multiple marriages will be able to participate. Finally, the study will not be delimited to couples who have children and are blending a family.

Thesis Statement

Marriages will be strengthened if a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry is developed at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. A healthy marriage has the characteristics of solid love in commitment, intimacy, and passion. In addition, healthy marriages strengthen families, churches, and communities.

In a healthy marriage, a couple has a solid commitment to love one another unconditionally. A married couple's commitment to one another is a willful decision to love one another for a lifetime. The commitment is to love one another through all seasons of good and bad times. Emotional feelings do not determine the decision to stay committed or not.

Also, the married couple has a true friendship because of close intimacy with one another. A loving married couple has a deep friendship where all things are shared. This kind of intimacy draws the couple into a deeper connection with one another in marriage.

Finally, the married couple has a passionate and romantic love for one another. Romantic love can only be shared between a married couple. A sexual connection has a ripple effect of closeness for the married couple. Sexual love in marriage has not been correctly taught outside of the church. A pastoral counseling marriage ministry in a church has an excellent opportunity to teach and counsel principles from God's Word.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Chapter two begins with a literature review of the resources used for the thesis project. The majority of the literature used for the project will be on the theme of marriage ministry. The themes included are marriage ministry in the church, marriage mentoring, and marriage counseling. Next, chapter two gives a theological context and theoretical foundation for a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

Literature Review

The literature chosen is for a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The literature chosen includes various books from experts on marriage leadership, teaching, counseling, and marriage mentoring in the church. The literature chosen can be read for marriage ministry expertise and recommended for married couples in the church to read.

Marriage Ministry in Church

Ted Lowe and Doug Fields contribute a practical study on the importance of marriage ministry in a church. Lowe and Fields both have experience in starting and leading a marriage ministry in large church settings. They argue that strengthening marriages in the church will contribute to growth in tithing, attendance, and volunteerism.²⁰ They believe that strong, healthy marriages in the church benefit the couples involved and give an attractive example to outsiders

²⁰ Ted Lowe and Doug Fields, *Married People: How Your Church Can Build Marriages That Last* (Cumming, GA: Orange, 2014), 9.

because it presents a genuinely healthy and godly marriage up close.²¹ One of the many beautiful things about marriage ministry is that a marriage program can greatly equalize and draw in those outside the church. Having a ministry for strengthening married couples affects kids, affects how people view the church, affects people spiritually, and impacts culture positively.²² The church can be the hero for marriages by giving people what they want and need.

Reasons for Marriage

Francis Chan is an influential leader and spokesman in the Christian church. He believes that marriage is the first place people will look to see if Christians believe what they say they believe. “Christ-likeness may be especially important in marriages because marriage is such a powerful way to display the gospel and glory of God.”²³ Someone may speak dynamically, give generously, or appear to know Scripture well, but it raises questions if they have a terrible marriage.²⁴ Many marriages portray the gospel in a bad light because if the Spirit of God is inside us, His power will be evident in our marriages.²⁵

God gives each individual the choice of whom they will marry. Gary Thomas believes that the reward of making a wise marital choice is tremendous, and the consequences of making a foolish marriage choice can be so painful. Therefore, Thomas believes it is crucial to be cautious and discerning in making such an important decision.²⁶ How a person approaches the

²¹ Lowe and Fields, *Married People*, 18.

²² Ibid., 22.

²³ Francis Chan and Lisa Chan, *You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity* (San Francisco, CA: Claire Love Publishing 2014), 34.

²⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁵ Ibid., 35.

²⁶ Gary Thomas, *The Sacred Search: What if It's Not About Who You Marry, But Why?* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 58.

decision of whom they will marry determines how likely they are to have a soul-building marriage.

Henry Cloud and John Townsend believe dating is biblical and essential with several benefits. First, dating gives people the opportunity to learn about themselves, others, and relationships in a safe context. Second, dating provides a context to work through issues. Third, dating helps build relationship skills. Fourth, dating can heal and repair. Fifth, dating is relational and has value in and of itself. Sixth, dating lets someone learn about what he or she likes in the opposite sex. Finally, dating gives a context to learn sexual self-control and another delay of gratification.²⁷

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher believe it is a myth that divorce is the best answer for the kids when a marriage becomes unhappy.²⁸ “More than 70 percent of adult Americans believe that marriage is a lifelong commitment that should not be ended under any circumstances.”²⁹ Additionally, 81 percent of divorced and separated couples in America believe that marriage should be for life.³⁰

Marriage and family are great gifts to humanity from God. The Bible gives a blueprint for marriage, but it is often neglected and even rejected. Our culture often treats the Bible's marriage principles with ignorance, apathy, and antagonism. The words marriage and family need to be redefined. The attack on the institution of marriage is a deep-seated spiritual crisis in our culture.

²⁷ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Dating: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Relationships* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2000), 17-21.

²⁸ Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

In his work, Andreas Köstenberger provides a “comprehensive and thorough biblical analysis of issues related to marriage.”³¹

Pre-Marriage Counseling

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott have a pragmatic approach to preparing engaged couples for marriage. “Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts” will be the curriculum used for pre-marriage counseling in the pastoral counseling marriage ministry. The SYMBIS program allows the pastoral counselor to begin counseling after the couple has taken an online assessment for marriage compatibility. After reviewing the couple's assessment results, the pastoral counselor will take the couple through a seven-week marriage curriculum from SYMBIS. This curriculum includes workbook discussion and works to be completed at home by the engaged couple.

Tools for Crisis Counseling

Everett Worthington Jr. has a great strategy that will work for pastoral marriage counseling because it is short-term, solution-focused, and hope-focused. Worthington Jr. plans to meet with a couple in critical condition for a maximum of ten sessions. This marriage counseling is not intended to be long-term therapy for a couple. Instead, he emphasizes building hope throughout the counseling. He believes that hope is promoted more by showing the couple that change is possible than telling them to have hope.³² The relationship is the key to successful hope-focused marriage counseling. He believes that “promoting hope in couples and teaching the

³¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 11.

³² Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 38.

strategy of faith working through love will repair the root causes of marital problems.”³³ Love, faith, and work in the marriage build hope.³⁴

John Gottman is the marriage research expert that many marriage counselors go to in order to gain expertise. He is a proponent of the marriage counselor helping the couple in crisis gain positive momentum. His research shows that feelings of fondness and admiration are the perfect antidote to contempt. Gottman’s research proves that criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling are the most dangerous emotions to express in marriage.³⁵ His research shows that “continually replaying negative thoughts about one’s partner can contribute to a downward spiral of distance and isolation in a marriage.”³⁶ He gives proven, practical, and time-tested ways to help couples solve marriage problems in a healthy way.

Seasons of Marriage

Gary Chapman writes about the essential nature of marriage. The essential components of the marriage are that they are committed, united, intimate, purposeful, and complimentary.³⁷ Marriage relationships are constantly changing, and the couple must adapt to changing seasons. Chapman writes about the changes of marriage using the analogy of the changing seasons of winter, spring, summer, and fall.³⁸

³³ Ibid., 24

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ John Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, and Joan DeClaire, *10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage* (New York: Harmony, 2006), 60.

³⁶ Ibid., 117.

³⁷ Gary Chapman, *The Four Seasons of Marriage: Understanding and Talking About the Every-Changing Cycles of Marriage* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 5.

³⁸ Ibid., 7.

Marriage as a Safe Place

Archibald Hart and Sharon May believe that creating and sustaining an emotional connection with one's spouse should be the most crucial goal for any marriage.³⁹ The most important aspect of marriage is that each spouse wants to be fully understood, accepted, and valued by their mate. Distressed marriages are those where spouses are no longer emotionally connected securely and lovingly. Emotional disconnection is a more significant predictor of divorce than fighting.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the married couple wants the marriage to be a safe place to share and discuss life's emotions. Hart and May talk about steps the couple can take in the process of having a happy marriage. They focus on the importance of the couple building trust in the relationship.

Leslie Vernick believes that an emotionally abusive relationship has the destructive pattern of being reactive, controlling, deceitful, dependent, and indifferent.⁴¹ In reactive abuse, the spouse cannot manage negative emotions, and therefore the stress causes an eruption. A controlling spouse uses threats and force to make the other spouse give in. Deceit is a form of emotional abuse because it breaks trust in the marriage. The Lord created human beings to be dependent on Him and not on each other. When dependence is searched for in a spouse, it can lead to a pattern of emotional abuse. Finally, indifference is the opposite of love. Indifference is a way for one spouse to communicate a message that they are replaceable to the other spouse.

Gary Chapman seeks to give hope to a spouse attempting to deal with a spouse who is “irresponsible or a workaholic; a spouse who is controlling, uncommunicative; verbally,

³⁹ Archibald D. Hart and Sharon May, *Safe Haven Marriage: Building a Relationship You Want to Come Home To* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003), 24.

⁴⁰ Hart and May, *Safe Haven Marriage*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

physically, or sexually abusive; unfaithful or depressed; a spouse who is an alcoholic or drug abuser.”⁴² All of these situations have solutions that can preserve the marriage. Chapman lays out four myths and six realities for a spouse in a troubled marriage.⁴³

Love in Marriage

Bob Lepine understands how to get to the heart of a marriage that honors God. He believes that the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church at Corinth for a reason. First Corinthians 13 communicates two themes. First, “love is at the center of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁴ A faithful Christian cannot be loveless. Second, Paul has a different understanding of love than most people.⁴⁵ Lepine dissects the kind of love Paul refers to and applies it to the marriage relationship.

Gary Chapman teaches the “five love languages” useful for the pastoral counselor in marriage counseling. He believes that every individual has one of five ways that speaks love most strongly to them – time, touch, words of affirmation, acts of service, and giving gifts.⁴⁶ For some, a spouse can show love the most by spending time with his or her spouse. For some, affection is the best way to show love. For some, speaking encouraging words of affirmation can most please the other. For some, generous acts of service are the best way to express love. Finally, for some, the thought of buying and giving a unique gift best shows love.

⁴² Gary Chapman, *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away: Real Help for Desperate Hearts in Difficult Marriages*, (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2018), 17.

⁴³ Ibid., 10-21; 26-36.

⁴⁴ Bob Lepine, *Love Like You Mean It: The Heart of a Marriage That Honors God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁶ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2010), 36.

Husbands and Wives

The best part of John Gray's work for pastoral marriage counseling is how he can clarify the emotional differences between men and women. He says that men's "sense of self is defined through their ability to achieve results."⁴⁷ A women's sense of self is exemplified "through her feelings and the quality of her relationships."⁴⁸ Men are the most motivated and empowered when they feel needed. A woman has to be warned that offering a man unsolicited advice is to presume he does not know what to do or cannot do it on his own.⁴⁹ Women are most motivated when they feel cherished.

William Harley does an excellent job of distinguishing the different needs of men and women. Predominately, affection and intimate conversation are essential needs of a woman.⁵⁰ Predominately, sexual intimacy and recreational companionship are essential needs of a man.⁵¹ The spouse has a low amount in the "love bank" when his or her needs are not met. A spouse needs to make deposits in the "love bank" of the other spouse before making other withdraws. Harley gives the pastoral counselor a great practical resource for marriage counseling by looking at basic needs.

Dr. Gary Smalley gives husbands a valuable guide for knowing, understanding, and loving his wife. Smalley believes that marriages fail because of unrealistic expectations and limited training.⁵² Men do not know how to win their wives back or even keep from losing them.

⁴⁷ John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰ Willard F. Harley Jr., *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2011), 40, 90.

⁵¹ Ibid., 89.

⁵² Gary Smalley, *If Only He Knew: A Valuable Guide to Knowing, Understanding, and Loving Your Wife* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 17.

A man needs to know how to win her affection, respect, love, and cooperation.⁵³ Unfortunately, most men do not even know how to begin.

Smalley breaks down the fundamental emotional differences between men and women. First, women are more personal than men.⁵⁴ Women have a deeper interest in people and feelings than men. Second, “women become an intimate part of their surroundings.”⁵⁵ Women find their identity through close relationships. Third, “women often need more time to adjust to change.”⁵⁶ Adjusting to change is challenging to her because of her finding identity in close relationships. Finally, women tend to express their hostility more verbally than physically like men.⁵⁷

Gary Thomas gives wives practical advice on how to love and influence their husbands. Thomas encourages wives to appreciate their husband even though he is flawed.⁵⁸ Every man has strengths and weaknesses. Every wife is married to an imperfect man and will experience legitimate disappointments in her marriage.⁵⁹ She must decide not to define her husband by these disappointments. She also must pray that God will open her eyes to her husband's blessings instead of focusing on the negatives.⁶⁰

Grace in Marriage

Tim Kimmel puts his emphasis on the importance of displaying grace in marriage. He believes that marriages struggle from a lack of grace more than a lack of love. Therefore, grace is

⁵³ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Gary Thomas, *Loving Him Well: Practical Advice on Influencing Your Husband* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 72.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁰ Gary Thomas, *Loving Him Well*, 73-74.

a crucial ingredient for marriage to thrive. His message for marriage is more about Jesus than just trying harder.⁶¹ Grace is healthy in marriage because it makes people feel more confident and more inclined to work together for unity.⁶² Also, grace-filled couples focus on the most important things and do not make moral issues out of nonmoral things. Finally, a grace-filled marriage allows for a commitment to sacrificial change.

Cherish

Gary Thomas believes the key ingredient to healing marriages is to teach couples to cherish each other, which everyone can learn to do. Cherishing one's spouse is a spiritual and relational practice that can generate a strong feeling of love.⁶³ It takes intention and practice. He believes an attitude of cherishing one's spouse will elevate the marriage relationally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.⁶⁴ Cherishing the spouse is one of the best ways to help someone be better and succeed in marriage.

Biblical Marriage

Jimmy Evans brings a spiritual depth to his theories on marriage. He believes that the most significant way to eliminate divorce and satisfy marriage relationships is to follow God's plan.⁶⁵ He believes marriage will work wonderfully if we prioritize God and marriage in our lives. God is the priority, and marriage is the second priority.⁶⁶ Marriage is impressive because it

⁶¹ Tim Kimmel, *Grace Filled Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Worthy Books, 2013), 3-10.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶³ Gary Thomas, *Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁵ Jimmy Evans, *Marriage on the Rock* (Dallas, TX: XO Publishing, 2012), 15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

makes us vulnerable like nothing else in our body, soul, and spirit. A marriage can be strong when the couple can be completely vulnerable in every area without shame or fear.

Jay Adams writes about marriage issues from a strictly biblical perspective. Jay Adams was a prominent leader in the Biblical Counseling movement. He believes that marriage struggles can mainly be attributed to an individual's history of neglecting fellowship with God's people.⁶⁷ He blames the church for the damaging influence of humanism on marriage. Therefore, the pastoral counselor should determine what negative influences are damaging the marriage and then challenge the counselee to withdraw from those relationships immediately. He believes the central factor in all marriage problems is self-centeredness. The counselor must discuss the sin issues of anger, lying, put-off, and put-on dynamics.⁶⁸

Chip Ingram teaches about marriage with an exposition of Ephesians 5:21-33. First, Ingram teaches that God is in charge of marriage and that it should reflect his love, concern, and radical sacrifice.⁶⁹ Marriage requires the couple to be selfless because God is selfless. It is more about fulfilling one spouse's needs than one's own needs. Second, Ingram teaches that marriage will not work unless one learns how to love one's spouse, not as one defines love, but as God defines love. Husbands are called to love their wives as sacrificially as Jesus loved the church. Wives are called to devote themselves fully to their husbands. Third, Ingram teaches that marriage has a greater purpose than just our happiness. Marriage allows a couple to demonstrate God's love.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 83.

⁶⁸ Jay E. Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems*, 43.

⁶⁹ Chip Ingram, *Marriage That Works: God's Way of Becoming Spiritual Soul Mate, Best Friends, and Passionate Lovers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Jonathan Holmes advises marriage counseling from a Biblical perspective. He believes that one of the most significant marriage counseling issues is getting the couple to live out their theology.⁷¹ Therefore, his initial session agenda is to communicate care, the gospel, the big picture, hope, and what will happen next. A couple does not want to come in for marriage counseling and hear words of condemnation and critique. First, they need to hear words of hope and life.⁷² This type of communicating sets up a healthy, biblical, and Christ-centered counseling relationship.

Paul David Tripp believes that Christians have a problem in how they view the Bible. He believes that it is more of a theologically annotated story than an encyclopedia.⁷³ He does not believe we can understand what the Bible says about marriage by looking only at marriage passages. There is a vast amount of information about marriage not found in the marriage passages. A biblical understanding of marriage is the best way to have three realistic expectations in marriage. First, the couple is conducting their marriage in a fallen world. Second, the person is a sinner married to a sinner. Third, God is faithful, powerful, and willing.⁷⁴

A gospel-centered marriage will allow the Christian to make six commitments in marriage. First, a Christian gives themselves to a regular lifestyle of confession and forgiveness. Second, we will grow and change our daily agenda. Third, we will work together to build a sturdy bond of trust. Fourth, we will commit to building a relationship of love. Fifth, we will deal with our differences with appreciation and grace. Sixth, we will work to protect our marriage.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Jonathan D. Holmes, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 91.

⁷² Ibid., 101-102.

⁷³ Paul David Tripp *Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 17.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21-26.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

Pornography

Heath Lambert helps men to fight for purity with the power of grace.⁷⁶ He believes that men can find freedom from pornography. He writes about forgiving grace, transforming grace, repentance, and hope.⁷⁷ God's powerful grace offers men the forgiveness they need from the use of pornography. This grace from God also gives men the ability to live in new ways. Repentance is the way men can receive forgiveness and transformation from God. God's grace then gives birth to hope.

Biblical accountability is crucial for recovery from infidelity and pornography. Holmes believes that the pastoral counselor's role in marriage counseling is to help the husband develop biblical and Christ-centered friendships where accountability can be cultivated. A wife should not be accountability for the husband.⁷⁸ Instead, the pastoral counselor helps the couple to live out a new story and identity. Trust is something that can take years to rebuild. Honesty and vulnerability are the keys to building trust back in the relationship.

Infidelity

In his studies, Dave Carder concludes that extramarital affairs seem to run in families, so each spouse should know their history.⁷⁹ However, anyone can break the cycle because that sin is not predetermined. Recovery is possible if the spouse responds in a humble spirit. Carder believes that grieving is the first step in the healing process.⁸⁰ Carder's work on helping couples to deal with infidelity in marriage is a great resource.

⁷⁶ Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-27.

⁷⁸ Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 137.

⁷⁹ Dave Carder and Duncan Jaenicke, *Torn Asunder: Recovering from an Extramarital Affair* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 99.

⁸⁰ Carder and Jaenicke, *Torn Asunder*, 197.

Marriage Mentoring

An aspect of the pastoral counseling marriage ministry will be marriage mentorship. Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott have written a reliable resource for marriage mentorship in the church. Mentoring couples from a good to a great relationship is a process where lasting change happens slowly. Rapport in a marriage mentorship relationship is established and sustained by trust, harmony, and affinity. The mentorship couple must identify with the couple, build credibility, and monitor their interest in them.⁸¹

Blending a Family in Marriage

Every family is founded on the marital relationship, including the stepfamily.⁸² Ron Deal writes about the tremendous challenge of building a healthy marriage in a stepfamily situation. Deal shares how the marriage divorce rate is higher in second marriages than in first marriages.⁸³ His writing focuses on the critical barriers to marital oneness in stepfamily marriages. The most significant barrier to the marital relationship in a stepfamily is the allegiance between parents and children.⁸⁴ The other barrier to a marital relationship in a stepfamily is the relationship of the current spouse with the previous spouse.⁸⁵

Theological Foundations

The Bible shows that God designed marriage to meet human's most essential needs. God designed specific roles for men and women to fulfill as husbands and wives in marriage to meet

⁸¹ Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 99-102.

⁸² Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily: 7 Steps to a Healthy Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2014), 101.

⁸³ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁴ Ron Deal, *The Smart Stepfamily*, 104.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 113.

these needs. The goal of marriage is for the husband and wife to become united as one. Human sin nature challenges the goal and design of marriage. God's purposes for marriage are found in the Old and New Testaments.

Marriage in the Old Testament

Genesis 1-3 is the foundational narrative for marriage in the Old Testament. There are three important principles about marriage that people learn in the Old Testament. First, both men and women are created in the likeness and image of their Creator in intelligence, will, and emotions (Gen 1:27).⁸⁶ The first man and the first woman were then charged with procreation (Gen 1:28). Second, together, man and woman are called to subdue the earth. The man's responsibility then was to provide for his wife and children. The woman's responsibility is to care for and nurture her family.

The second principle in the Old Testament is that man was created first, and then woman was created for the man (1 Cor 11:9; Gen 2:18, 20).⁸⁷ God made only one suitable helper, and His creation of Eve demonstrates His plan for Adam's marriage. God designed marriage to be a monogamous heterosexual relationship. God made only one "suitable helper" for Adam, and she was female. Eve fulfilled Adam's need for companionship (Gen 2:18) and the couple to become one flesh (Gen 2:24).

The third principle about marriage in the Old Testament is that the fall of humanity has consequences for husbands and wives.⁸⁸ Man and woman share in each other's culpability, and

⁸⁶ Köstenberger and Jones. *God, Marriage and Family*, 23.

⁸⁷ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

they both are expelled from the garden (Gen 3:24). The original sin has affected marriages from that time until forever on earth.

A wife who needs a thorough description of the characteristics of a virtuous woman can look at Proverbs 31. First, this kind of woman has “incomparable value because she completes her husband.”⁸⁹ Second, she is cherished because she contributes to her husband’s success. Next, she has creative energy and uses every opportunity to its fullest potential.⁹⁰ Fourth, she is not lazy and does not waste time. Third, she speaks wisdom and acts with compassion to those in need.⁹¹ Her lack of selfishness serves her husband and marriage well. Fourth, she does everything with excellence.⁹² Her many outstanding characteristics give her husband genuine reasons to praise her. Fifth, her most significant characteristic is her beauty.⁹³ The kind of beauty this woman displays is more about her internal character than exterior looks. A woman with these outstanding qualities makes her an excellent wife to her husband.

Marriage in the New Testament

The New Testament reveals that Jesus considered marriage to be a sacred bond between a man and a woman, entered into before God (Matt 19:6). Peter’s general rule for marriage was submission (1 Pt 3:1). Timothy gives a strong reaffirmation of the centrality of marriage (1 Tim 4:1-4). Finally, Paul writes the most detailed treatment of marriage in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33).

⁸⁹ James T. Draper, Jr., *Proverbs: The Secret of Beautiful Living* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977, 147.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 148-149,

⁹² *Ibid.*, 149-150.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

One of the clearest pictures in marriage is found in Ephesians 5:21-33. This Scripture passage tells about the role of a husband and a wife and how they should relate to each other. The passage starts with the importance of mutual submission because that is the only way a marriage can work.⁹⁴ Marriage is about honoring God, and it should reflect His nature of love, concern, and sacrifice. A husband is called to sacrifice for his wife just as Christ did the church. The wife is called to devote herself entirely to her husband by serving and encouraging him.

Gary Thomas writes that marriage has a greater purpose than happiness.⁹⁵ Marriage is a sacred institution with the purpose of glorifying God. Thomas believes that marriage allows the couple to demonstrate the reality of God in one's life.⁹⁶ Marriage is also the holy place where God's love can be proclaimed to the world. Marriage can be seen as a word picture of the divine relationship between God and His people.

The family is the most sacred institution on earth. The health of a family dictates the health of the church, nation, and society. The ultimate responsibility of the household comes under the leadership of the husband. The wife then has the duty of obeying her husband. This obedience is voluntary submission to only her husband. Ephesians 5:23 says that the husband is to be the head of the wife. A household without a leader results in chaos.⁹⁷ Therefore, the husband should exercise his leadership, but never in a domineering manner. Paul's point is that the wife should submit to her husband. Therefore, God appoints him as the head.

⁹⁴ Ingram, *Marriage That Works*, 16.

⁹⁵ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 13.

⁹⁶ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 30.

⁹⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 248.

Verse 24 says that wives should be subject to their husbands in everything, just as the church is subject to Christ. This submission is voluntary, wholehearted, sincere, and enthusiastic.⁹⁸ This kind of submission is only possible for the wife and the church with full conviction. God demands this conviction.

Then the admonition to husbands begins in verse 25. Husbands are called to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Husbands are willing to die for their wives just as Christ died for the church. This kind of love requires deep commitment, not just emotions. A wife can easily be obedient to the kind of husband who is willing to die for her.

Verses 26-27 say that the result of this kind of sacrifice from the husband to the wife will lead to sanctifying and purifying her. Verses 28-30 then says that husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. The implication is that no one ever hated his own body, but he loves and cares for it. “There is never a moment when Christ does not watch over His body, the church.”⁹⁹ Similarly, the husband is called to watch over his wife.

Verses 31-32 say that a man is called to cleave to his wife after leaving his mother and father. Just as in Genesis 2:23, the husband and wife are called to leave their parents and become one flesh. This means the husband and wife have oneness in mind, heart, and purpose. Sexual union is where the two are most like one flesh. A Christian marriage touches every phase of life, even sex.¹⁰⁰ It is all a great mystery, but Paul is making the comparison to Christ and the church. Verse 33 finalizes the point that a husband is called to love his wife, and a wife is called to respect her husband.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 255.

¹⁰⁰ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians and Ephesians*, 256.

Similar to the marriage passage in Ephesians 5, Paul centers his teaching in Colossians 3:18-21 on marriage and family. In this passage, Paul elevates women and children to a level of equality with men.¹⁰¹ Again, these verses emphasize the value of persons. A family is a place for an individual to find deep caring.

Peter writes about the subject of being a good wife in 1 Peter 3:1-6. Verses 1-2 describe the behavior which is most pleasing to God. This behavior is more important than words and has an influence on the husband. Christian wives can live so that unbelieving husbands can be won over by the behavior of their wives. People are not argued into the Christian faith but influenced by holy living. This type of holy and Godly living does not involve any compromise.¹⁰² The Holy Spirit can then minister and lead people to Christ.

Verses 3-4 describe the second attribute of a good Christian wife. Women can have outward beauty with hair, jewelry, makeup, and fine clothing. Peter does not believe these things are wrong, but he challenges Christian women to recognize more important beauty. Peter believes a much deeper and higher priority is the hidden person of the heart.¹⁰³ The inner beauty is described as a gentle and quiet spirit. This is a spiritual beauty that never fades.

Verses 5-6 of 1 Peter 3 describes the third attribute of submission. Submission is not a popular subject for women to hear about because every person has a sinful nature. The sinful nature everyone has means everyone desires to go their own way, do their own thing, and be the

¹⁰¹ Maxie D. Dunnam, *The Communicator's Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 393.

¹⁰² Paul A. Cedar *The Communicator's Commentary: James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*. ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 154.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 155.

ruler of their own life.¹⁰⁴ However, the only way anyone can come to God is by submitting to Him.

The biblical understanding of submission has to do with love.¹⁰⁵ Jesus submitted to His Father and went to the cross because of his deep love for us. A Christian marriage is called to have that same kind of love. Submission is a matter of love more than that a woman is superior or inferior to a man. A wife can submit to her husband because she “loves Christ, she loves her husband, and because she is obeying the Word of the Lord.”¹⁰⁶

An example of how Christian wives should submit to their husbands is the way Sarah was to Abraham. The wife lives this out by doing what is right to keep the commandments of the Lord. Also, she should not give way to fear.¹⁰⁷ First John 4:18 says that the antidote to fear is perfect love. It is much more challenging for the wife to submit to a sinful husband than to a perfect God.

In verse 7, Peter also gives helpful and practical advice for how husbands should live in relationship with their wives. First, husbands should live with understanding toward their wives.¹⁰⁸ Understanding comes when the husband knows his wife. A key to a healthy marriage is to understand each other deeply. The husband knows his wife when there is honesty, patience, sensitivity, and love. Also, husbands should be giving honor and respect to their wives.¹⁰⁹ A wife should be treated by her husband as precious and highly esteemed.

¹⁰⁴ Paul A. Cedar *The Communicator's Commentary: James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

The Greek language has many different words for love, while the English language has many different meanings. “*Eros* is the word Greeks used for love when it defines intense physical desire. Neither the verb nor the noun form of *eros* is found in the New Testament.”¹¹⁰ *Phelos* is the Greek word for brotherly love. Paul uses the word *agape* quite frequently in the New Testament books. The greatest demonstration of *agape* love was God’s action in sending Jesus Christ into the world (Jn 3:16). *Agape* is the kind of love that reaches out to those who do not deserve it. It is the kind of love that puts the interest of others first. It is also a kind of love that is sacrificial and forgiving toward others (1 Cor 13).¹¹¹

First Corinthians 13 is often used as a scriptural text for marriage ministry. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul argues the necessity of love. In marriage and church controversies, it is love that often leaves first.¹¹² Paul argues that love, more than tongues or prophecy, is the most important gift for the Christian. “The absence of love negates the other gifts.”¹¹³ Spouses can do a lot of right things but without a heart of love.

In verse 4, Paul says that love is patient with people and slow to anger. Love is also kind in that it is actively doing good to others. It is not jealous of other people’s spiritual gifts. It does not portray itself as superior to others. A person who shows this love has a humble, not an inflated, view of one’s importance.

Verse 5 says that love is polite. Love is more concerned about the needs of others than the needs of self. It does not keep a record of being wronged. It is a dangerous trend in marriages

¹¹⁰ Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 160-161.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 160-161.

¹¹² Ibid., 161.

¹¹³ Ibid., 162.

when spouses remember all the wrongs done to them. The willingness to forgive is of enormous importance for the health of a marriage. Forgiveness is also vital for individual healthiness.

Verse 6 says that love rejoices when this is spoken and lived out. Love is honest. The spouse in a healthy marriage is not afraid to speak necessary truths. This kind of love is never happy with covering up truth. Couples should love in a way that gives the benefit of the doubt in all situations.

Verse 7 says that love “believes all things.” This does not mean that love is gullible or unrealistic.¹¹⁴ However, this kind of love does require the spouse to give the other spouse the benefit of the doubt and offer trust to the other one. This kind of love can think positively about the future, even when things are not looking good. True love can help the married couple from being discouraged because they know they can “endure all things.” Love is a powerful force that can help a couple to endure all circumstances.

The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 is an excellent barometer to evaluate the marriage relationship. The fruit of the Spirit is impossible to display without the work of Christ in the spouse’s life.¹¹⁵ The fruit of the Spirit indicates an individual living in the new nature instead of the old nature. The fruit grows by the power of God.

The fruit of “love” means the spouse is looking to give something instead of to get something. “Joy” is an excellent fruit in marriage because it means the spouse can feel great inside even when circumstances are not great outside. “Longsuffering” will allow the couple to persevere through difficult seasons, which are sure to come. “Gentleness” is a good way for one spouse to calm down heated arguments. “Peace” means the marriage is free of quarreling and strife. “Goodness” is an action more than just words in marriage. A couple can always hold on to

¹¹⁴ Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, 165.

¹¹⁵ Manford G. Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 142.

“faith” no matter the circumstances. “Meekness” will be valuable in a marriage because it will allow the spouse not to retaliate when treated unfairly by the other.

God’s Design in Marriage

Genesis 1:26-31 mentions four times that people were made in God’s image. Therefore, the primary purpose for people is to be an image-bearer of a triune God. This means that people have a built-in capacity for relationships.¹¹⁶ This also means that people have been created with a responsibility to work.¹¹⁷ Genesis 2:15 says that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and care for it. Finally, this means people are not just responsible for themselves; they are responsible to Someone.¹¹⁸ People were created for God.

Genesis 2:24 identifies the goal of marriage as oneness and intimacy. Oneness is a basic human desire to connect with another in spirit, soul, and body. The spiritual aspect is the most significant and most foundational part of marriage. Spiritual oneness with God and each other is foundational.¹¹⁹ God also wants each spouse to be connected with their spouse as best friends. God wants mates to pursue life together. Finally, God designed men and women to bond in the sexual experience.

The four basic needs that motivate all human beings are acceptance, identity, security, and purpose.¹²⁰ Acceptance is the need to be loved and accepted by others. Identity is the need to be known as significant and special. Security is the need to be provided for and well protected. Purpose is the need to have a reason for living. God created us to do good work (Eph 2:10).

¹¹⁶ Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 42.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁹ Ingram, *Marriage That Works*, 20.

¹²⁰ Jimmy Evans, *Marriage on the Rock* (Dallas, TX: XO Publishing, 2012), 3.

Christians know that God has a unique plan for their lives. People seek to fulfill their deepest needs in many areas: ourselves, spouses, friends, children, careers, churches, parents, money, or God. However, only God can satisfy a Christian's deepest thirst. A Christian is blessed when they hunger and thirst for righteousness, and God promises they will be satisfied (Matt 5:6).

Negative results occur when one trusts in people or things over God. The resources to meet one's needs are limited when one's inner security depends on someone or something. A person's ability to give is dependent on one's ability to get from others. One's life is filled with disappointment and frustration. A person's unrealistic expectations cause tension and drive other people away.¹²¹

Positive results occur when one trusts in God more than people or things. A person receives inner security and strength from He, who is faithful and who has unlimited resources. One can give more because giving flows from an internal resource. A person's life is filled with blessing, satisfaction, and optimism. One's realistic expectations of others draw one closer to them.¹²²

Hebrews 13:4 tells the purpose of marriage and the honor given to the marriage bed. "Marriage is honorable among all." The word "honorable" is translated as "highly valued, precious, costly, or dear."¹²³ Marriage is complex, and it takes work. However, it also has the capacity to be tremendously rewarding. Marriage is costly because of the covenant nature, and it requires risking rejection.¹²⁴ Marriage is also costly because of the intimacy it demands. Marriage requires time, communication, sharing dreams, pains, and struggles.¹²⁵ The covenant of

¹²¹ Ibid., 9.

¹²² Ibid., 9.

¹²³ Louis H. Evans, Jr., *The Communicator's Commentary: Hebrews*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 242.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 242.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 243.

marriage also requires forgiveness. There are times when a marriage has to persevere when the old covenant has been broken.

Sin in Marriage

Counselors often say they cannot change sinful living patterns, but the Bible teaches that change is possible in a struggling marriage, and no pattern is irrevocable. Communication breakdown is a problem that the apostle Paul addresses in Ephesians 4:25-32.¹²⁶ Jesus handles the issue of self-centeredness in Matthew 16:25 and Luke 9:23.¹²⁷ The problem of blame-shifting was a pattern displayed in the beginning when Adam and Eve blamed each other. The problem of a couple having wrong priorities is addressed in Ephesians and Colossians.

First Corinthians 7 is about marriage and singleness. Apostle Paul believed that “celibacy was superior, but the marriage was allowable.”¹²⁸ He viewed marriage as a necessary alternative to sexual immorality. He saw celibacy as something from God that not all believers have as a gift. Paul affirms three teachings about marriage. First, marriage must be monogamous, with one husband and one wife. Second, premarital and extramarital sex violates God’s laws for marriage. Third, the sexual expectations for husbands and wives are the same.¹²⁹

God is interested in holy living in every area of people’s lives, including marriage. First, Paul writes that a spouse’s faith in Christ should strengthen the marriage and not cause more unhealthy tension.¹³⁰ Second, the Christian has received love and forgiveness. This love and

¹²⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹²⁸ Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 88.

¹²⁹ Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, 89.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 91.

forgiveness should be a resource for dealing with the problems with the unbelieving spouse. Paul's second principle is that a Christian should stay in the marriage even if the spouse is not a Christian.¹³¹ Becoming a Christian is never a ground for divorce. Except in extreme cases, separation should be initiated by the unbeliever and not the new Christian. Hopefully, a Christian spouse's example will lead to the conversion of the unbelieving spouse.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation allows for a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry. Marriage ministry is a crucial component of a healthy church because it strengthens families and glorifies God. The marriage ministry includes mentoring and counseling. The pastoral counseling for marriage in a church includes pre-marriage counseling and troubled marriage counseling.

Reasons for Marriage

According to Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, getting married is a way for an individual to build better emotional and mental health.¹³² Married people consistently experience improved mental health than people who remain or become single. For example, they experience less depression and anxiety than single, divorced, or widowed people.¹³³ In addition, the love of their spouse helps them weather the storms of life.

There are also many poor reasons for marriage. First, some couples get married because of a pregnancy, and this is not a good reason. Next, a rebound is not a reason for marriage. A

¹³¹ Ibid., 93.

¹³² Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 67.

¹³³ Ibid., 67.

rebound relationship is when a new relationship begins quickly after a broken one. Another wrong reason is that some couples get married because of rebellion toward their parents. Some people want to get married because they are lonely. Finally, some couples get married because of social pressure from friends or family members. Guilt and pity may motivate a person to marry someone when they feel sorry for him or her. These are all not good reasons for a couple to get married.¹³⁴

An individual needs to be wise in choosing a spouse. The desire is that couples will have a spiritually enriching marriage.¹³⁵ A good marriage lasts a lifetime with vibrancy and intimacy. An intimate marriage with best friends is such a fantastic gift from God. This kind of marriage is the reward for making a wise marital choice. It is crucial to be cautious and discerning in making such an important decision.

Marriage can be an intentional pursuit.¹³⁶ First, an individual can go out and find a godly mate instead of waiting for God to bring that perfect mate. Second, an individual can put themselves in the right social situations for finding the right marriage partner. Third, an individual should focus on their personal growth in character. Fourth, and individuals can make themselves more attractive as a marriage partner. “Pursuing marriage is a good and holy pursuit, but it should not be the primary pursuit.”¹³⁷ As Christians, we are always called to seek God first.

¹³⁴ H. Norman Wright, *Premarital Counseling: A Guidebook for the Counselor* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 20-21.

¹³⁵ Thomas, *The Sacred Search*, 18.

¹³⁶ Thomas, *The Sacred Search*, 81.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

Pre-Marriage Counseling

An important component of pre-marriage counseling is helping couples to face the myths of marriage with honesty. The first myth is that couples expect the same things from marriage.¹³⁸ False expectations occur because of unspoken rules and unconscious roles. The second myth is that everything good in the relationship will get better.¹³⁹ Marriage means coming to terms with unexpected inconveniences. The third myth is that everything bad in life will disappear after marriage.¹⁴⁰ Getting married does not instantly cure all ills. The fourth myth is that one's spouse will make one whole.¹⁴¹ This myth causes couples to become dependent on their spouse in an unhealthy way.

Love has three sides: passion, intimacy, and commitment.¹⁴² Passion is the biological side of love that moves a couple towards romance. Intimacy is the emotional side of love that moves a couple toward a more profound friendship with one another. Finally, commitment is the cognitive side of love that secures the marriage when passion burns low under challenging times. Passion, intimacy, and commitment are all needed in a healthy marriage.

A significant component of a happy marriage is attitude. A couple must choose happiness, knowing that attitude is more important to the marriage than any adverse circumstance. The couple must be aware that marriage will never be perfect because life is not perfect. The poisons to a happy marriage are self-pity, blame, and resentment.

Communication is also a significant component of a happy marriage. Communication involves using speaking and listening skills. Four styles of miscommunication are placating,

¹³⁸ Parrott and Parrott, *SYMBIS*, 21.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

blaming, computing, and distracting.¹⁴³ Communication is not what the spouse says but what the other spouse understands is being said. Three qualities of communication are warmth, genuineness, and empathy.¹⁴⁴

A marriage succeeds when couples can bridge the gender gap between men and women. Men and women have different biological, psychological, and professional realities. A woman's basic needs in marriage are to be cherished, known, and respected.¹⁴⁵ A man's basic needs in marriage are to be admired, have autonomy, and enjoy shared activity.¹⁴⁶ If a husband and wife both work to meet each other's needs, they will conversely have their own needs met.

It is essential for a married couple to learn to handle a fight because misunderstanding is a natural part of marriage. All couples will eventually have conflict. Knowing how to fight fair is critical to the survival of a happy couple. Unfortunately, many couples confuse calm and quiet for marital harmony and smooth things over without resolving issues. The four disastrous ways of interaction that will sabotage a couple's ability to have conflict resolution are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.¹⁴⁷ Successful couples learn how to resolve conflict in a healthy way.

Marriage Ministry in Church

A strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry in the church is critical for several reasons. First, marriage ministry is essential because it strengthens the family and gives children the stability to thrive. A marriage ministry helps families minimize economic hardship, abuse,

¹⁴³ Parrott and Parrott, *SYMBIS*, 92.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 94.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹⁴⁷ Parrott and Parrott, *SYMBIS*, 138.

neglect, infidelity, and addiction.¹⁴⁸ Second, marriage ministry is important because it is an illustration of Jesus and His church.¹⁴⁹ Healthy marriages benefit the couples involved and present an attractive example to people outside the church who have never seen a healthy marriage. Third, marriage ministry is vital for the church because it is a spiritual issue.¹⁵⁰ A struggling marriage robs a couple of a strong relationship with God. Marriage is the most significant relationship God uses to make us more like Him.

Marriage Mentoring

Marriage mentoring in the church can serve to prepare engaged couples, maximize other couples from a good to great status and help repair couples in distress. Many facets of marriage that an engaged couple needs to be mentored in include; roles in marriage, managing conflict, handling money, enjoying physical intimacy, and dealing with in-laws.¹⁵¹ Many couples in the church appear to be neglected because they are “doing just fine.” These couples can still use mentoring, and their marriages can improve in purpose, communication, service, and parenting. Throughout a marriage, couples can use a mentor couple to help them go through marriage crises such as battling addictions, surviving infidelity, coping with infertility, and dealing with loss.

Marriages in Crisis

Sometimes only one spouse will come to the pastoral counseling office for marriage counseling. Only one spouse chooses to come to marriage counseling for various reasons. The

¹⁴⁸ Ted Lowe and Doug Fields, *Married People: How Your Church Can Build Marriages That Last* (Cumming, GA: Orange, 2014), 16-17.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵¹ Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring*, 60-66.

other spouse is frequently apathetic, abusive, or disconnected. In every troubled marriage, one or both spouses can take positive steps to change the emotional climate in the marriage. There is hope for troubled marriages. Every spouse in a troubled marriage has a choice to believe in myths or realities.

Gary Chapman says there are four myths that a spouse can believe in a troubled marriage. The first myth a spouse can believe is that one's environment determines one's state of mind.¹⁵² Therefore, no one is a victim of their environment. The second myth a spouse can believe is that people cannot change.¹⁵³ Accepting this myth can cause feelings of futility and hopelessness. The third myth is that a troubled marriage only has two options – a life of misery or getting out of the marriage.¹⁵⁴ Believing this myth of two equally devastating alternatives makes the spouse a prisoner of that choice. The fourth myth is that the marriage situation is hopeless. This kind of thinking can lead to depression and even suicide.¹⁵⁵

There are also six realities that can help to pull a spouse out of hopelessness. First, the spouse is responsible for their attitude.¹⁵⁶ Choosing a positive attitude can help the spouse to focus on the right things. Second, the spouse's attitude affects their actions.¹⁵⁷ A spouse's attitude greatly influences behavior. Third, one spouse cannot change the other spouse, but they can influence the other spouse.¹⁵⁸ A spouse cannot make his or her spouse change behaviors, but they can choose encouraging words for encouraging the other spouse. Fourth, a spouse's

¹⁵² Gary Chapman, *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away: Real Help for Desperate Hearts in Difficult Times* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2018), 18.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵⁵ Gary Chapman, *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away*, 20-21.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 29.

emotions do not have to control their actions.¹⁵⁹ A spouse can acknowledge emotions and not follow them. Fifth, admitting imperfections is not the same as admitting that one is a failure.¹⁶⁰ This is only an admission of a propensity to sin as a human. Finally, love is the most powerful weapon for good in the world.¹⁶¹ Love is more of an attitude demonstrated with appropriate behavior than an emotion.

Everett Worthington believes the primary emphasis in pastoral marriage counseling is building hope in the couple. Building hope comes in a three-part strategy. First, through fostering in the couple a motivation to change. The couple in marriage counseling has to have the willpower to change. Second, pastoral marriage counseling builds hope by showing couples tangible ways to change. The couple in marriage counseling needs to know how to change. Third, pastoral marriage counseling strengthens the couple's resolve to wait on God's work in their marriage. The best strategy for pastoral marriage counseling includes correcting weaknesses in love, faith, and work. Divorce is always considered a failure in pastoral marriage counseling. The goal of pastoral marriage counseling is to strengthen marriages and reduce divorce.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 33

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶² Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 18.

Chapter 3

Methodology

First Baptist Church of Texarkana does not have a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry. A strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry would have several components to strengthen couples before and during the marriage. Chapter three will include a complete description of the intervention design and an accurate narrative of its implementation. The pastoral counseling marriage ministry intervention at First Baptist Texarkana will consist of crisis marriage counseling, pre-marriage counseling, marriage classes, marriage conferences, and marriage mentoring. These marriage ministries will be evaluated through the tools of interviews and surveys.

Intervention Design

First Baptist Church of Texarkana does not currently have a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry in place. Therefore, the actual intervention plan has several steps for success. The researcher will first have to get approval for the intervention plan from key figures in the church, including the senior pastor and the administrative assistant to the pastoral counselor.¹⁶³ These individuals must be supportive and helpful to the writer in establishing the actual intervention plan. Rochelle Schroeder is another crucial figure in the pastoral counseling marriage ministry at FBC Texarkana. She can bring her expertise and woman's perspective as she assists Chris Schroeder in the marriage counseling, teaching, and administration of the marriage ministry.

¹⁶³ See Appendix A.

Intervention for Dating

First Baptist Church of Texarkana has a ministry for single young adults called Crossroads, led by a volunteer teacher named Jacob Bain. The class meets every Sunday morning at 9:00 am. They have their own decorated room on the church campus. They also have fun activities together and meet in homes for other times of Bible Study. Overall, the ministry is a healthy and thriving ministry in the life of the church. The class usually has a total of 15 to 20 young adults in attendance. Jacob often teaches the class in an exegetical style through books of the Bible. For example, Jacob has taught through the Bible books of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Isaiah, John, Philippians, and Colossians in the last few years. Rarely, Jacob teaches topical lessons to the single young adult class.

Sometimes, dating relationships are formed between men and women within the Crossroads group. Sometimes, individuals find a dating relationship from outside of the class. Sometimes, individuals in the Crossroads group remain single and are not in a dating relationship. The individuals in the group are out of college and realistically at an age where they could soon be in a marriage relationship. Therefore, they are in the life stage of dating before marriage.

To enjoy a healthy marriage, the writer believes in the magnitude of the decision to find a suitable mate. Therefore, he discussed an idea with Jacob to teach a series on dating before marriage. They discussed the possibilities of different curriculum to be used for the subject of dating before marriage. Finally, Jacob decided to teach a four-part series on this topic with the curriculum titled “Boundaries in Dating.” The time given to this topic was a more prolonged investment of time than usually spent on a topical issue. After each class session, Jacob will assign reading assignments to the class from the book, *Boundaries in Dating*. The class members

will be strongly encouraged to do the reading so that they can participate in the discussion time every week.

In the first part, Jacob will teach the class about the importance of boundaries in dating. Boundaries are essential for several reasons. First, dating involves risks, and boundaries help the participant to navigate those risks.¹⁶⁴ Second, boundaries can protect the emotions, values, behaviors, and attitudes of the one dating. Third, boundaries are important because they help the one dating to be themselves instead of losing themselves to someone else. Fourth, boundaries help people to take responsibility for their own life. Finally, boundaries can help the person dating to become a better person.

In the second part, Jacob will teach the class about the importance of deciding who to date. He will introduce some important principles about choosing who to date. First, the person dating must remember that no human is perfect, and therefore they will never have the perfect relationship.¹⁶⁵ Second, the person dating should be open to dating people who are outside of their standard preferences. Third, a dating person should learn to deal with minor problems and not allow small things to ruin a relationship. Fourth, a dating person should know what preferences are the most important to him or her and then hold onto those preferences. Finally, a dating person should learn what imperfections have the potential to be destructive.

The third part of “Boundaries in Dating” will teach the participants the importance of correcting self instead of constantly correcting others.¹⁶⁶ A difficult lesson is learning to humbly listen to correction and restrain the urge to react in blame. Blame is a signal for the person dating to see if they are afraid, feel judged, or are sad about a fault. The dating person should be more

¹⁶⁴ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Dating: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Relationships* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), 33.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 215.

concerned about their own soul than of the person they are dating. Ultimately, the dating person should be a forgiver in all relationships.

In the last part of “Boundaries in Dating”, Jacob will teach the young adult class about solving dating problems. In a dating relationship, you will get whatever you tolerate.¹⁶⁷ The individual cannot confront everything that happens because that will make them quarrelsome and challenging to be around. Although, it is essential to confront the things that have the most important value. Confrontation should be done quickly and with love and honesty. The right kind of confrontation will show self-respect, which demands respect from others. The principles Jacob will teach the class will hopefully save them from dating bad people.

The pastoral counselor and his wife will conclude the series with a final lesson on the topic of dating. In this session, the pastoral counselor and his wife will share their dating testimony. Some people believe an individual should wait until they are at a more mature age before getting married. Other people think an individual should prepare to get married at a younger age. The theory is that the couple who gets married at a young age can then grow up, learn, and mature together.

Chris and Rochelle had very different stories before they came together. They believed that sharing their story could be helpful to the individuals in the young adult group. Individuals could find comfort in relating to aspects of their story. Rochelle did not date through college and then went onto the mission field after graduating. After four years as a missionary in Ukraine, she returned to the United States and worked as an elementary school teacher. At the age of 31, she registered herself on a dating website called e-Harmony.

¹⁶⁷ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Dating*, 237.

Chris's story is very different than Rochelle's story. He dated seriously in college and then was married before even graduating. He was married for fourteen years before going through a divorce due to infidelity. He then registered himself on e-Harmony. Rochelle and Chris dated for one year before getting married. At the time of marriage, Rochelle was 33 years old, and Chris was 39 years old.

Because of life experiences, Chris and Rochelle will be able to teach the class about the pain of loneliness. Rochelle experienced loneliness as a single adult until her 30's. Chris experienced loneliness in a difficult marriage. Therefore, they will teach the class about the importance of always staying connected to Jesus. No other person can bring healing and completeness.

Then they will ask the class to fill out a survey with questions to determine the effectiveness of the dating teaching series.¹⁶⁸ The first question will be, "What lesson from the 'Boundaries in Dating' series was most helpful?" The second question, "How helpful was the 'Boundaries in Dating' series? Third, "Would you recommend the 'Boundaries in Dating' curriculum to a friend? Fourth, "Was there anything that was not covered in the five-week series on dating?"

Intervention for Pre-Marriage Couples

The writer wanted a personal, profound, and accessible system for conducting pre-marriage counseling, so he became certified as a SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) facilitator.¹⁶⁹ Becoming a certified SYMBIS facilitator costs \$200 and takes three hours online to complete. The leadership at First Baptist Church of Texarkana believed SYMBIS

¹⁶⁸ See Appendix C.

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix D.

certification was a worthwhile investment for those conducting pre-marriage counseling. After Chris, then Rochelle Schroeder became certified in SYMBIS. The plan is for Chris and Rochelle to do pre-marriage counseling together. Having Rochelle and Chris in the counseling allows the couple to get the male and female perspective in marriage counseling.

Steve and Sandy Gillespie were also certified in SYMBIS. Steve and Sandy are leaders in the Celebrate Recovery ministry at FBC Texarkana. Celebrate Recovery is a ministry with nearly 200 people in attendance every week. Many of those in attendance at Celebrate Recovery are members of a different church than FBC Texarkana. Steve and Sandy can be helpful as they have counseling education and are able to assist the pastoral counselor with individuals and couples in the Celebrate Recovery ministry who need counseling. SYMBIS is now a tool they can use in pre-marriage counseling as well.

The pastoral counselor's office will receive incoming calls and set pastoral pre-marriage counseling appointments for members of FBC Texarkana. Non-church members who have a referral from a church member are also able to set appointments with the writer's office. In addition, different pastoral staff members can officiate the occasional wedding ceremonies held in the church. However, Senior Pastor Jeff Schreve made a rule for the staff at FBC Texarkana that those who plan to be married on the church campus must undergo pre-marriage counseling from the pastoral counselor. At the conclusion of the pre-marriage counseling, the pastoral counselor will give approval to the pastor in the church who will be officiating the ceremony.

Before the first session, the pre-married couple will be set up online through an email to complete a marriage assessment called "Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts". The couple will not meet with the pastoral counselor until the SYMBIS assessment is completed online. The online assessment takes about twenty minutes to complete individually. The pastoral counselor

will receive and review the SYMBIS results before the first session. The pastoral counselor will have a hard copy of the SYMBIS assessment for himself and the engaged couple. The pastoral counselor will review the SYMBIS assessment results with the couple for the first session.

The SYMBIS assessment has many different components that are concluded from the twenty-minute test. The first section of the assessment is “mindset”. The possible mindsets include resolute, rational, romantic, restless, and reluctant. The assessment results will then conclude with a section explaining how the two different mindsets will mesh with each other. Each mindset combination has different strengths and weaknesses to consider.

The next section of the assessment determines the individual wellbeing of each person by giving a percentage score for each. The components of wellbeing include self-concept, maturity, independence, and caution flags. A description is provided for each component. Also, the amount of caution flags are numbered and listed. At the bottom of the wellbeing section, the couple is given an overall percentage score for relationship wellbeing. The couple’s longevity, stability, and similarity are referenced.

The third section of the assessment is the area of social support. In this part, the couple is assessed on four different areas for compatibility. The first is the support of friends and family for the relationship. The second is the relationship with in-laws. The third is the network of mutual friends that they both enjoy. The final part is the social support received from their faith community.

The fourth section of the assessment is the area of finances. An individual fiancé is determined to have a money style of either a spender or a saver. The assessment then determines the budget skills of each fiancé. Some live by a budget religiously, and some do not. Next, the assessment determines the financial fears of each fiancé. People can have financial concerns due

to a lack of influence, security, respect, or not realizing dreams. The last section in finances is about having debt. The SYMBIS assessment uncovers whether a fiancé has financial debt or not.

The fifth section of the assessment is the area of expectations. This is an important area because unrealistic expectations can cause disappointments down the road in a marriage relationship. SYMBIS believes that spouses unconsciously learn roles from their family of origin. The expectations in this section have to do with how things get completed around the house. In the assessment, some areas both agree on doing certain things. Then other areas still need to be decided on.

Dynamics is the sixth section of the SYMBIS assessment. SYMBIS lists eight spouse personality types. The Achieving Spouse is fact-based, efficient, and logical. The Pioneering Spouse is results-oriented, bold, and innovative. The Energizing Spouse is persuasive, outgoing, and enthusiastic. The Affirming Spouse is optimistic, encouraging, and verbal. The Cooperating Spouse is service-oriented, peacekeeper, and patient. The Unwavering Spouse is loyal, sincere, and diligent. The Deliberating Spouse is devoted, accurate, and disciplined. The Analyzing Spouse is orderly, conscientious, and careful. Each spouse has a unique personality type. SYMBIS does not believe that there is a right or perfect combination. The key is understanding and appreciating the differences in each other. The SYMBIS report assesses the dynamics of the two personality types. Each personality type brings different strengths to the relationship.

The next section of the SYMBIS assessment is about love and sex. This section of the report helps each fiancé to see how the other defines love. SYMBIS understands that each person is hardwired uniquely for giving and receiving love. It also allows each fiancé to see the other one's desire and frequency expectations for sex in the marriage.

The dynamic of attitude is the next section of the report. The SYMBIS assessment defines attitude as the ability to adjust to things out of one's control. In the assessment, each fiancé is given a percentage score in the area of attitude. Then, each personality type is given a description of how they face challenges. Finally, each personality type is given descriptive words of how they are perceived under stress by the other fiancé.

The dynamic of communication is assessed in the next section of the SYMBIS report. Communication is key to a relationship because the more understanding each partner feels means the stronger the marriage. Each personality type has a different communication style. This section of the assessment teaches each fiancé the best way to communicate with their partner. It also highlights the communication skills that each fiancé would like to improve upon to become a better communicator.

The dynamic of the two different genders is the next section assessed by SYMBIS. It is important to understand that men and women are very different and therefore have different needs. SYMBIS teaches that, in general, husbands need more shared activity and wives need to be cherished. In this section of the assessment, each fiancé is able to list five words that best describe their top five needs.

Conflict is the next dynamic evaluated in the SYMBIS Assessment. SYMBIS understands that conflict is inevitable and is the price to pay for a deeper level of intimacy in marriage. The communication style of each personality type is listed under each specific fiancé. Each personality type also has personal conflict challenges that are listed. Finally, the potential list of hot topics for each personality type is in the assessment. Hot topics are those areas that can cause the most conflict in a particular marriage.

The dynamic of spirituality is the last section in the SYMBIS Assessment. The assessment shows what each fiancé does to feel closest to God. There are many vital areas of spirituality for an engaged couple to discuss before marriage. Some of these areas include theology, church attendance, discussing spiritual issues, tithing, prayer, communion, serving together, and Bible reading.

Following the first session, where the SYMBIS Assessment is reviewed, the pastoral counselor will lead the pre-married couple through seven additional sessions. The SYMBIS curriculum includes a video teaching by the authors Les and Leslie Parrot. Instead of watching the video sessions with the couple each time, the pastoral counselor will adapt the teaching from the video into his own teaching time. The live teaching and discussion will be more personal than just watching a video together. The pastoral counselor will ask the pre-married couple seven questions in preparation for marriage in the seven pre-marriage counseling sessions. This will make for one main question per session.

In the first session, the pastoral counselor will ask the engaged couple if they have faced the myths of marriage with honesty. The pastoral counselor will read and discuss Ephesians 5:21-33. Then, the pastoral counselor will discuss the four myths that couples can have about marriage. The first myth is that both the man and the woman expect the same things from marriage. Every individual comes into the marriage with unspoken rules and unconscious roles. The second myth is that everything good in the relationship will get better. The third myth is that everything bad will disappear. The fourth myth is that getting married will make both people whole. The pastoral counselor will say, “If you try to build intimacy with another person before getting whole on your own, all your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself.” No one person is designed to make up for all that one person is lacking. The pastoral counselor will

teach the engaged couple to have an interdependent relationship instead of a codependent or independent relationship. Finally, the pastoral counselor will ask the couple about any other possible myths they may be bringing into the marriage relationship.

In the second session, the pastoral counselor will ask the engaged couple if they can identify their love style. The pastoral counselor will read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 with the couple. In this session, the pastoral counselor will discuss the three components of love. Passion is the biological component of love. Intimacy is the emotional component of love. Commitment is the willful component of love. The couple will be asked which of the three components seem most powerful in their relationship and which is the weakest component. Passion is most cultivated in women with tender touches. Intimacy is best cultivated in men through shared activity. The engaged couple will be reminded that love is constantly changing and growing.

“Have you developed the habit of happiness?” This will be the question that the pastoral counselor will ask the engaged couple in the third session. The pastoral counselor will read and discuss Philippians 2:1-18 with the engaged couple. The writer will say to the couple, “The one habit that can make or break your relationship is the capacity to adjust to things beyond your control.” Also, he will say, “The most important quality of a marriageable person is the habit of happiness.” The writer will warn the couple of the three toxins that can seep into a marriage relationship. These three toxins include resentment, blame, and self-pity. The engaged couple will be asked when they are most likely to blame their partner for something that is perceived as wrong. Also, the couple will be asked what keeps them from choosing to be happy.

In the fourth session, the writer will ask the engaged couple if they can say what they mean and understand what they hear from each other. The writer will read and discuss James

4:1-3 with the engaged couple. The writer will teach how men and women communicate differently. In general, men communicate to report facts, and women communicate to build rapport. There are two communication basics. The first skill is clarifying content. The second skill is reflecting feelings. The writer will say, “Without being genuine, the best communication techniques in the world will fall flat.” Empathy is a key to communication, and it involves using both the head and heart. The couple will be asked if they more use their head or heart.

The fifth session focuses on gender differences. “Have you bridged the gender gap?” First, the writer will read and discuss Genesis 2:18-25 with the engaged couple. Next, the writer will discuss the significant differences in how the different genders solve problems. In general, men want to fix problems, and women want to explore problems. Another major gender difference is in expressing love. In general, men need shared activity, and women need to be cherished. The couple will be asked if they can think of any gender differences that have the potential to cause conflict in marriage. The couple will also be asked to take steps toward celebrating the differences that they both bring to the marriage.

In the sixth session, the writer will ask the question, “Do you know how to fight a good fight?” The writer will read and discuss Ephesians 4:26 with the couple. Next, the writer will say, “Negative feelings that get buried have a high rate of resurrection.” The writer will warn the engaged couple about the four negative actions to avoid in conflict, which are criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. Then, the writer will teach the engaged couple a formula for turning a criticism into a complaint. The writer will ask the couple how conflict was generally handled in their family of origin. Also, he will discuss with the couple what “conflict habits” they bring into the relationship.

In the final session, the writer will ask the engaged couple if they are soul mates with one another. The couple will be encouraged to attend church, pray, and read the Bible together in order to grow spiritually. Each couple has its own unique style for growing spiritually. The writer will ask the couple to rate their desire to grow in spiritual intimacy in marriage on a scale of one to ten. On that same scale of one to ten, the couple will be asked about their satisfaction with their current level of spiritual intimacy.

After the pre-marriage counseling sessions, the pre-married couple will answer four questions on a survey.¹⁷⁰ These questions will help the writer to determine the effectiveness of SYMBIS for pre-married couples. The first question will determine the most beneficial aspect of pre-marriage counseling. The second question will determine how helpful SYMBIS was on a scale of one to ten. The third question will ask the pre-married couple if they recommend SYMBIS to an engaged friend. The last question will ask the pre-married couple if they regret a subject not covered in the pre-marriage counseling sessions.

Intervention for Marriages in Crisis

The writer desires to be fully equipped to understand the primary problems and solutions for a marriage in crisis. Therefore, the Association of Biblical Counselors will be holding its National Conference, “Called to Counsel,” on September 16-18, 2021. The conference will be held in Fort Worth, Texas, and the writer plans to attend. The Association of Biblical Counselors offers a specialized track with eight sessions in the area of marriage counseling. After attending the marriage counseling sessions, the writer will receive a certificate of completion after the eight sessions.

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix E.

Every week the writer's office will receive incoming calls and set crisis marriage counseling appointments. The administrative assistant to the writer will be the one who sets the appointments for the writer. The appointments can be set for FBC Texarkana members. Appointments can also be scheduled for those who are involved in the church's ministries. Information about the writer's office will be publicized on the FBC Texarkana website. Also, all the staff members at FBC Texarkana will be aware of the pastoral counseling office's policies and procedures.

A couple in a troubled marriage starts by calling the writer's office at the church and setting up an appointment. Patty Ashby, the Assistant to the Writer, is the one who sets up the appointments on the schedule. She will attempt to find the soonest available date on the calendar for appointments with the couple to begin. She will also try to find an appointment time when both Chris and Rochelle Schroeder will be available to be present. Rochelle being present at the marriage counseling sessions will be beneficial because it gives a wife's perspective.

The writer will ask the couple questions to assess the marriage's health and most significant need in the first session. Next, the writer will teach the couple some practical conflict resolution skills that can immediately be implemented into the marriage. The goal of the first counseling session is to begin to bring hope to a hurting marriage situation. At the beginning of the first counseling session, the writer will interview and collect data on the marriage's current health.¹⁷¹ The couple will answer the questions together by giving a verbal score with a rating of one to ten. The writer wants to gauge the level of love, respect, passion, intimacy, and commitment in the relationship. Ratings on these questions will give a quantitative result to

¹⁷¹ See Appendix F.

determine the current health of the marriage. The maximum score will be fifty points. The writer will conduct the interview at every session; however, many sessions take place with the couple.

Before the second session, the married couple in crisis will be set up online through an email to complete a marriage assessment called “Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts Plus”. The couple will not meet with the writer until the SYMBIS Plus is completed online. The writer will receive and review the SYMBIS Plus results before the second session. For most of the second session, the writer will review the SYMBIS assessment results with the couple in crisis. The writer will use an approach with the couple in a crisis of pointing out the positive results of the test in order to give hope.

Following these first couple sessions, the writer will determine the most significant needs for healing the marriage and then develop a course of action for upcoming counseling sessions. The writer will choose a marriage book or marriage curriculum to facilitate and counsel the couple. The writer has a variety of marriage books to be assigned to the couple for study.¹⁷² The books can be purchased in person at the pastoral counseling office. The couple is assigned reading from the chosen book each week, and then the chapters read will be discussed by the writer and the couple during each session of marriage counseling.

The writer may also choose to facilitate a marriage curriculum with the married couple.¹⁷³ The curriculum will begin during the third session, after the initial session, and the second session reviewing the SYMBIS Plus. In the third session, the writer and the couple will discuss the purpose of marriage. In the first session, the couple and writer will discuss the definition and purpose of marriage. The couple will be asked how their marriage relationship agrees or differs from God’s definition and purpose of marriage. The writer will ask the couple the question, “Do

¹⁷² See Appendix G.

¹⁷³ See Appendix H.

you believe marriage is a contract?” The couple and the writer will read and discuss Genesis 2:18-25. That Scripture text will help the couple see who created the marriage institution and why it originated. The text will also help discussion on the terms “leave”, “cleave”, and “one flesh”. Finally, the writer will ask the couple the question, “What are you receiving out of marriage that you wouldn’t have received by remaining single?” Session one will conclude with reading and discussion over Matthew 7:24-27 and Galatians 5:22-23.

In the fourth session, the couple and the writer will discuss love and acceptance in marriage. They will read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. The writer will ask the husband and wife how they like to give and receive love from their spouse. The writer will discuss the three types of love in the Greek language; eros, philia, and agape. Next, the husband and wife will discuss how they can display those kinds of love to their spouse. The writer will ask the couple about hindrances in the relationship and how positive behaviors can be reinforced. The writer will ask the couple about expectations and disappointments in the marriage. Finally, the writer and couple will discuss family differences and lessons learned from parents on the marriage relationship.

In the fifth session, the couple and the writer will discuss communication and conflict in marriage. They will discuss the five levels of communication and rate themselves in this area. They will discuss conflict styles and ways for conflict to be resolved. The couple and the writer will read and discuss James 4:1-3 and Proverbs 19:11. This session will allow the couple to discuss a recent conflict with the writer. Then, they can all discuss what can be done differently in the future if that same conflict happens again.

The writer will discuss roles and responsibilities in marriage with the couple in the sixth session. In this session, the couple will read and discuss Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Corinthians

12:14-26. The writer will help the husband and wife to see the unique gifts and abilities that each brings into the marriage as man and woman. Also, the husband and wife bring uniqueness as God's created individual. They will also discuss the process of how decisions need to be made in the marriage.

The seventh session will give an opportunity for a couple to discuss the challenging issues in marriage. First, the writer and couple will read and discuss Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7-8, and Ephesians 5:31. In the next part of the seventh session, the husband and wife will discuss individual relationships with parents and in-laws. Last, the writer and couple will discuss issues related to finances. In-law relationships and finances often have the potential to be contentious in the marriage relationship. The writer will remain flexible to discuss any other issue more specifically where the couple is experiencing a struggle.

In the last session, the writer and the couple will discuss their spiritual life together. In this session, they will discuss the spiritual devotions of prayer, Bible reading, and church attendance. The writer will pray for the needs of the couple at the end of each session. The writer will interview the couple at each session and collect the data to determine progress.¹⁷⁴ The information collected on the surveys each session is love, respect, intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Intervention of Marriage Class

A significant component of developing a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at FBC Texarkana will be marriage classes throughout the year. The writer and his wife will teach marriage classes in the fall, spring, and summer every year. These marriage classes will

¹⁷⁴ See Appendix F.

each be five to ten weeks in duration and offered as electives simultaneously as other classes for church attendees. These classes will be advertised for members of the church and the community to attend. The church will use mail-outs, emails, the church website, social media, and church announcements to advertise these events to the church and community. In addition, the marriage classes will be live-streamed on the FBC Texarkana marriage ministry Facebook page.

On August 25, 2021, a ten-week marriage class will begin, “Love Like You Mean It.” “Love Like You Mean It” will take the participants through the Apostle Paul's principles on love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. The curriculum teaches the heart of a marriage that honors God. Each session will cover a specific principle from the scripture passage. Every session will include a homework assignment, a video teaching, and a time of discussion from the content shared in the video. Chris and Rochelle will pray and take attendance at the beginning of every session. They will then conclude every Wednesday night session with prayer. They will make sure that every couple has the “Love Like You Mean It” workbook.

The first session is titled “Everything Minus Love = Nothing.” The couples will evaluate their own marriage based on the 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 standard of love. The second session is titled “Love is Patient. Are you?” God uses situations in our lives to cultivate patience. The third session is titled “Love is Kind. Are you?” The three elements of kindness are attitude, speech, and actions. The fourth session is titled “Love is Humble. Are you?” In this session, the couple will read and discuss Philippians 2:3-4 and 1 Peter 5:5. The fifth session is titled “Love is Generous. Are you?” The couples will be encouraged to be God-seeking instead of self-seeking. The sixth session is titled “Love is Easy Going. Are you?” In this session, the couples will be warned in this session of the three love killers, which are rudeness, irritability, and resentment. The seventh session is titled “Love is Virtuous. Are you?” The couples will read and discuss

Ephesians 4:15 together, which challenges the Christian to speak the truth in love. The eighth session is titled “Love is Honest. Are you?” The couples will read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:6. This verse teaches Christians that love flourishes in an environment of transparency and trust. The ninth session is titled “Love is Tenacious. Are you?” In this session, the couples will read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:7. The tenth session is titled “Love Never Fails.” In this final session, the couples will read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:8. This verse will remind the couples that true love will never fail.

At the start of the ten-week class, the writer will ask the participants to complete a survey about the current state of their marriage, according to the ten truths discussed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. At the end of the ten-week class, the writer will ask the participants to complete the survey again. The same pre-survey and post-survey for the class will help the writer to determine the effectiveness of the teaching and curriculum.¹⁷⁵ The survey will be on a scale of one to ten, not at all true to mostly true.

The ten questions of the survey will line up with the teaching from the ten sessions. First, “Do you have love in your marriage?” Second, “Are you patient with one another?” Third, “Are you kind to one another?” Fourth, “Do you have humility in your marriage?” Fifth, “Are you generous with one another?” Sixth, “Do you have peace in your marriage?” Seventh, “Do you encourage one another?” Eighth, “Can you tell each other the truth?” Ninth, “Are you committed to each other?” Tenth, “Do you feel hopeful about your marriage?”

¹⁷⁵ See Appendix I.

Intervention of Marriage Mentoring

A new component of developing a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at FBC Texarkana will be creating a marriage mentoring program. The marriage mentoring program will start small, with just two Sunday School classes, before deciding whether or not to extend the program to the rest of the church.

This program will primarily be led by one Sunday School class, led by Ron and Barbara Morrow, as the mentor couple's class. Ron and Barbara Morrow's Sunday School class is full of older married couples who have been married for many years. Ron is the chairman of the deacon board at church and a leader in many ministries. He and many of the individuals in the class are delighted for the opportunity to mentor younger couples. Steve and Sandy Gillespie are members of Ron and Barbara Morrow's class. They are willing to assist with matching up couples and overseeing the overall success of the program.

The other Sunday School class is one led by Ali and Cody Deal. Ali and Cody are a young and energetic couple in the church who are willing to lead and influence other young couples. The couples who desire to be mentored will come from Ali and Cody's class. The younger couples will be encouraged, but not forced, by Ali and Cody to participate in the mentorship program. The program will be designed to run for a six-month duration.

Ron and Barbara Morrow, Ali and Cody Deal, Steve and Sandy Gillespie, Patty Ashby, Chris and Rochelle Schroeder are the marriage mentoring team. They have met regularly to discuss the implementation of the marriage mentoring program. At the first meeting, it was discussed with this team the purpose of a marriage mentoring program at FBC Texarkana. Everyone agreed that marriage mentoring is a great way to strengthen marriages in the church.

The mentee couple and the mentor couple will each complete an application to participate in the mentorship program.¹⁷⁶ The application is designed to determine the motivation of the mentors for participating in the program since it will be entirely voluntary. The application will ask four key questions. The first question asks, “How motivated are you to become a marriage mentor?” Second, “What concerns or fears do you have about becoming a marriage mentor?” This question allows the fears to be open and addressed at an early stage in the process. The third question asks the potential marriage mentor couple to rate their marriage on a scale of one to ten. The last question asks the potential marriage mentor couple to answer the reasons they believe that they would be a good marriage mentor couple.

The marriage mentoring team will match mentee couples with mentor couples based on the applications at the second meeting. In addition, other mentor couples will be recruited outside of the one Sunday School class to become mentors. Steve Gillespie will approach these mentor couples with a letter and an application. The application to be a marriage mentee has three questions to answer. First, the potential marriage mentee couple will be asked to rate their marriage on a scale of one to ten. Next, the potential marriage mentee couple will be asked the question, “How are you hoping that a marriage mentor couple could help you in your marriage?” Finally, the potential marriage mentee couple will be asked about scheduling preferences. The last question is designed to help the marriage mentor couple in scheduling times together.

Ron and Barbara Morrow will communicate to the marriage mentor couples that it would be ideal to meet with the mentee couples at least six times in the six-month time frame. The couples will have autonomy on what activities they would do together. For example, they could have a time of fellowship and fun, or they could spend time a more serious time studying

¹⁷⁶ See Appendices J & K.

marriage books together. The marriage mentorship program will not have a set curriculum for the couple to study together.

The plan is for the mentor couple and mentee couple to complete a survey at the end of the six-month for the writer to determine the marriage mentoring program's effectiveness.¹⁷⁷ The marriage mentor couples will be asked six questions on the survey. They will first be asked to list how many times they met with the mentee couple. The goal of the marriage mentoring program is to at least meet six times in the six-month time frame of the program. Second, the marriage mentor couple will be asked to rate the new mentoring relationship on a scale of one to ten. Next, the marriage mentor couple will be asked to rate their own helpfulness as a marriage mentor couple on a scale of one to ten. Fourth, the marriage mentor couple will be asked the greatest challenge to mentoring this specific couple. The possible choices on the survey will be scheduling, childcare, chemistry, insecurity, or another option not listed. Fifth, the marriage mentoring couple will be asked the question, “What could we do to make this mentoring process better?” Finally, the marriage mentoring couple will be asked, “What would you like us to know about your mentoring experience?”

The marriage mentee couples will be asked five questions on a survey at the end of the six-month program. They will first be asked how many times they met with their marriage mentor couple. Next, they will be asked to rate how beneficial the program was on a scale of one to ten. Also, they will be asked to rate how likely they would be to continue the mentoring relationship past the six-month time frame. A desire would be for relationships to be formed and continued into the future. Fourth, the marriage mentee couple will be asked to choose the aspect of their marriage most improved by the marriage mentoring experience. The possible choices

¹⁷⁷ See Appendices L & M.

will include the aspects of finances, parenting, communication, conflict resolution, or another option not listed on the survey question. Finally, the marriage mentee couple will be asked if there is anything they would like the leadership to know about their mentoring experience for the six months. The responses to these questions by the participants will help the writer determine the adjustments needed in this marriage program. At that point, the writer will also determine whether or not this program should extend to the rest of the church.

Intervention of Marriage Conference

The writer would like the church to host annual marriage conferences where a marriage speaker is brought in to teach marriage principles to a gathered crowd. The conferences would be advertised within the church and outside to the community. The purpose of the marriage conference would be to strengthen existing marriages. The numerical goal for the conferences would be to have at least 200 to 250 people in attendance each time, depending on the event and speaker.

First Baptist Church of Texarkana has a weekly ministry to stepfamilies. The ministry is called “Blended and Blessed,” which is led by a couple in the church named Bill and Rhonda King. They have been dedicated leaders of this ministry for over ten years. They have personal experience in raising their own stepfamily after divorce and remarriage. Their children are now adults, and they dedicate their time to helping younger families. They lead a class for couples in a stepfamily at the church every Wednesday Night. In the class, they often instruct using books and videos from Ron L. Deal. They also lead fellowship times for stepfamilies, usually at their own house. These times help to build community and connection in the group.

Stepfamilies face unique challenges in raising children and having a healthy second marriage. The writer believes it is vital for the church to find ways to minister to these families. Couples in a second marriage, especially those with children, face unique challenges compared to those in a first marriage. Seeing the needs of these families, the church decided to host a stepfamily marriage conference led by an expert in this field, Ron L. Deal.

After Deal agreed to come, a committee was formed in the church to plan the event. The committee included Chris and Rochelle Schroeder, Patty Ashby, and Bill and Rhonda King. For six months, the committee mainly discussed the finances and advertising for the event. The conference was held on Friday night and Saturday morning of August 6-7. The event will be called “Building a Successful Stepfamily Conference.”

Couples who will attend the conference will be asked to fill out a qualitative survey at the end of the conference to determine the conference's effectiveness.¹⁷⁸ First, attendees will be asked to rate the conference on a scale of one to ten, poor to excellent. Next, the attendees will be asked to rate, from one to ten, the likeliness of inviting a friend to a future stepfamily conference. Then, the attendees will be asked the question, “What would you tell a friend about the event?” The attendees will be asked if the conference met expectations. Finally, the attendees will be asked what questions they would like to ask the speaker. The responses to these questions from the attendees will help the writer determine if Deal should return to the church for future conferences.

¹⁷⁸ See Appendix N.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will outline the results from the collected data on this project. The chapter will help the reader to understand the meaning of this study. The researcher will use graphics to illustrate changes that resulted from the project's implementation.

Results for Dating

Nineteen individuals participated in the "Boundaries in Dating" series and completed the survey.¹⁷⁹ The first question of the survey asked the participant, "What lesson from the 'Boundaries in Dating' series was most helpful?" Listed below are the responses to the first question on the survey.

"Looking into what dating is and whom should I date."

"The series made me want to read more from the book."

"God needs to be the center of your relationship."

"Learning the boundary process. Dating is very complex, and having the different aspects broken down into bite-size pieces was much appreciated! Also, dating when lonely was very interesting and helpful."

"Learning how to set good boundaries and what to look for in dating relationships."

"Understanding how to establish boundaries and follow it through."

"What you can and can't live with. The section on opposites attract."

"When you are the problem. Whom shall I date?"

"Maybe the too much too fast one."

¹⁷⁹ See Appendix C.

“Dating with a lonely heart. Physical boundaries in dating and how to stick to them.”

“Detention Hall: Properly defining yourself and your boundaries.”

“The ‘Nip It in the Bud’ lesson. Communicating values and habits to your dating partner in order to set the relationship up for success.”

“Make sure you set boundaries. Different ways to set boundaries.”

“How easy it is to ‘frontload’ a relationship and the problems it can cause. Also, the idea of ‘casual dating’ can be helpful.”

“For me, the addition of boundaries and to have to watch out signs in dating.”

“If you are the problem. Remember to look at the portion of the problem you may have contributed to. What you can and can’t live within dating. Also, setting up detention hall.”

“The biggest lesson I learned from the series, “Boundaries in Dating”, was that boundaries can be healthy and there is more than just attraction to someone that makes a good relationship.”

“As someone who struggles with establishing boundaries, it was beneficial for me to dig in deeper on the importance of it, as well as discussing the intentionality of boundaries.”

“Don’t begin a friendship out of loneliness. How to know when you’re the problem.”

On the “Boundaries in Dating Survey,” participants were asked, “How helpful was the “Boundaries in Dating” series? Also, they were asked, “Would you recommend the “Boundaries in Dating” curriculum to a friend? These questions were answered by the participants on a scale of 1 to 10.

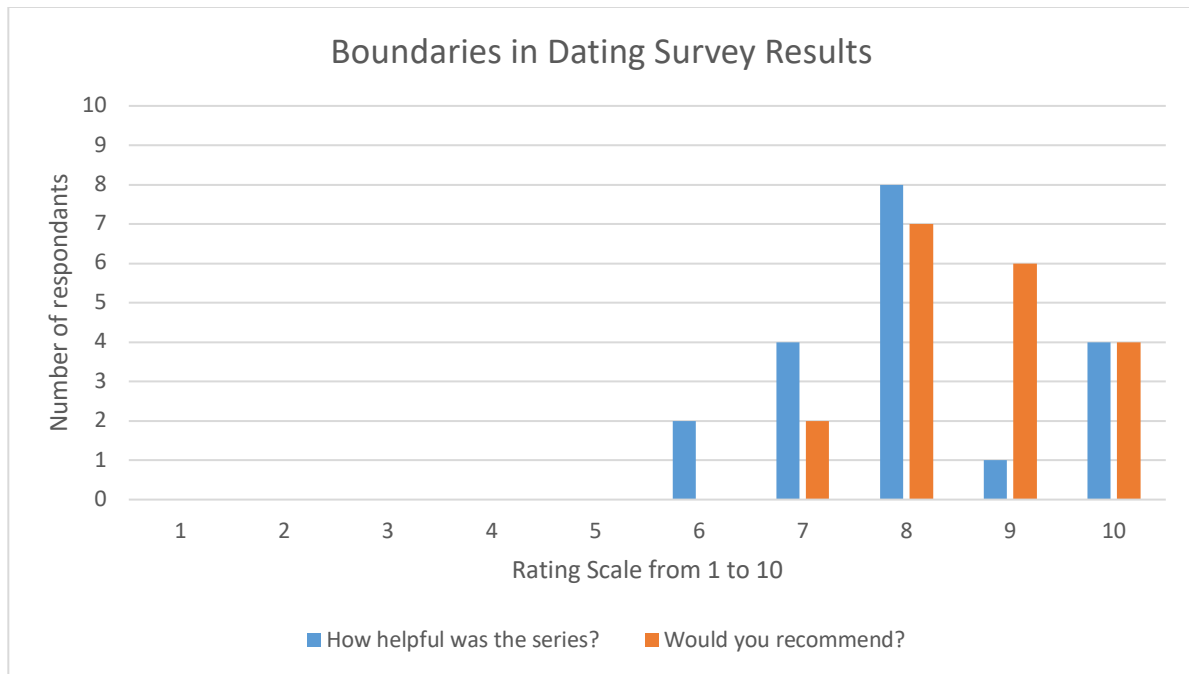


Figure 4.1 Boundaries in Dating Survey Results

The final question on the “Boundaries in Dating Survey” asked, “Was there anything you wish was covered in the ‘Boundaries in Dating’ series?” Listed below are the responses to the final question on the survey.

“I do wish it had more Biblical content, more Scripture tied in. In terms of topics, maybe more about ‘dating without exclusivity’ as our generation seems foreign to the idea.”

“I wish it was more Biblically based.”

“I wish it had more scripture references, so maybe it could be paired with another study. I think this would be helpful for those newer in their faith, as well as mature to see connections to the truth of God’s Word.”

“I do feel like reading the book as we did the study would have been good.”

“It sometimes made me feel uncomfortable, but I almost feel like I need to be uncomfortable in order to grow and move forward.”

“When you don’t have much experience and just assume that you are the problem or the reason.”

“I feel like it covered more than I expected to learn in this series.”

“How to properly communicate with someone after you’ve told them your boundaries and they don’t listen.”

“Yearning for a mate and how to deal with that.”

“I wish there was more material on pre-dating, early dating because I feel like that’s where a lot of us are at. It’s hard to even get to the actual dating stage.”

Out of the ten participants writing comments on the final question on the survey, three of the participants desired the dating series to include more biblical content as support for the principles being taught. One participant recommended giving the class the option of reading the book independently during the study. Five participants expressed that they experienced growth through the study. One participant expressed a desire to learn more about how to get to the dating stage.

Results for Pre-marriage Counseling

The writer used SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) as a tool for all the pre-marriage counseling at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The counseling process for pre-marriage counseling includes one week for assessment and then seven weeks of counseling sessions. Following the pre-marriage counseling sessions, the writer had each couple complete a “Pre-Marriage Counseling Survey.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ See Appendix E.

Six couples completed the sessions and then the survey.¹⁸¹ The first question on the survey asks, “What one aspect of the pre-marriage counseling was most helpful?” The participant had the three options of SYMBIS Assessment, Discussion, or Homework Exercises on that first question. Out of the six couples, four couples chose “Homework Exercises” as the most helpful. One couple chose the “SYMBIS Assessment” as the most helpful. Finally, one couple chose “Discussion” as the most helpful.

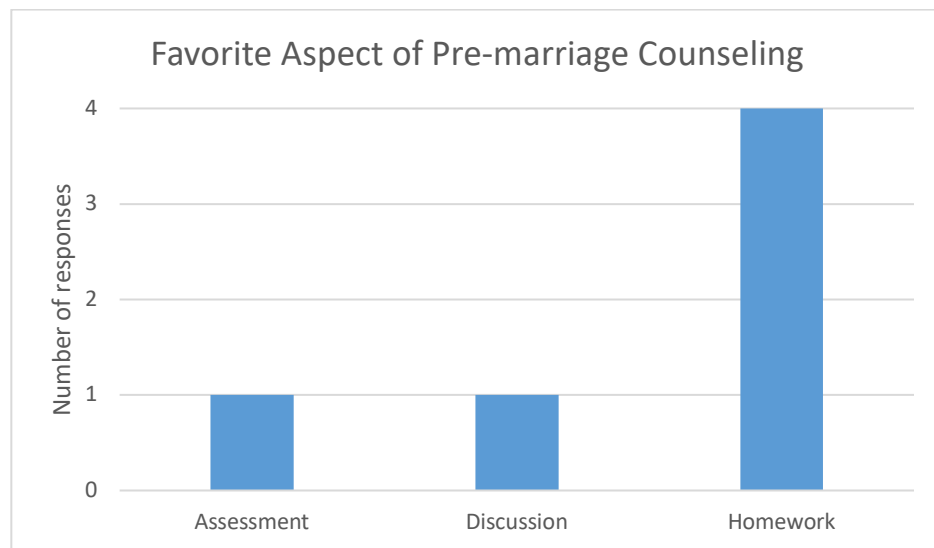


Figure 4.2 Favorite Aspect of Pre-marriage Counseling

The second question on the survey asked, “How helpful was the SYMBIS pre-marriage counseling to you on a scale of 1-10?” Two couples ranked it a 10; one couple ranked it a 9; two couples ranked it an 8; one couple ranked it a seven. All of the couples marked that they would recommend SYMBIS pre-marriage counseling to an engaged friend. None of the couples had any regrets about something not being covered in the sessions. All six of the pre-marriage couples indicated on the survey that they were pleased with all the areas covered in the SYMBIS

¹⁸¹ See Appendix E.

pre-marriage counseling sessions. There is nothing additional they desired to be covered in the sessions.

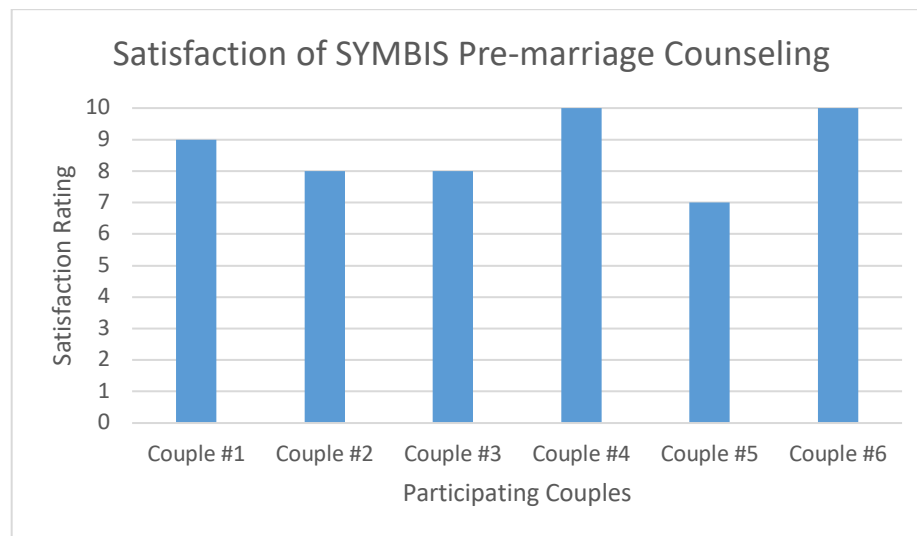


Figure 4.3 Satisfaction of SYMBIS Pre-marriage Counseling

Results for Marriages in Crisis Counseling

The writer attended the Association of Biblical Counselors National Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, on September 16-18, 2021. At the ABC Conference, the writer attended the eight sessions in the Marriage Track. The first session dealt with encouraging couples to have a marriage after God's heart. The second session focused on oneness in marriage. In the third session, the presenter taught the marriage counselors how to get to the root of marital struggles. The presenter in the fourth session taught ways to navigate expectations in marriage. The fifth session focused on listening and communication in marriage. The presenters in session six shared how a marriage counselor can support a couple through struggles. The seventh session focused on the need for couples to abide in Christ. The final session was a panel discussion with all the presenters on stage, answering marriage counseling questions from the audience.

The writer did marriage counseling on seven different couples who were in a struggling marriage. Below are the results of the counseling sessions with each couple.

Couple #1

The wife first set up an appointment to meet with the writer by herself. She felt like she was emotionally abused and physically threatened by her husband. She shared that both she and her husband struggled with alcohol, and this addiction brought out the worst behavior in both of them. After meeting with her for one session, the husband then agreed to meet with the writer for a session. Finally, both husband and wife agreed to attend the church's recovery ministry and meet with accountability partners. In two months, the husband and wife have both been able to maintain sobriety.

Then, the husband and wife began marriage counseling together with the writer. In the first session, the writer discussed and evaluated the relationship's health with the couple. The writer gave practical tips on how the couple could become better at conflict resolution. The couple agreed to come back for a second session. Before the second session, the couple completed the online SYMBIS Plus Assessment. The assessment was reviewed during the second session and served as an encouragement for the couple in showing the possible strength in the marriage. After the second session, the couple desired to continue meeting with the writer.

The writer met with the couple for six more sessions and took them through a series of discussion questions each week.¹⁸² The couple worked with the writer together for eight full sessions. The writer used the "Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire" for sessions three through eight with the following scores, Session 3 = 37; Session 4 = 43; Session 5 = 41; Session 6 = 38;

¹⁸² See Appendix F.

Session 7 = 40; Session 8 = 44.¹⁸³ In the eight sessions, their level of commitment toward one another was the area displaying the most improvement.

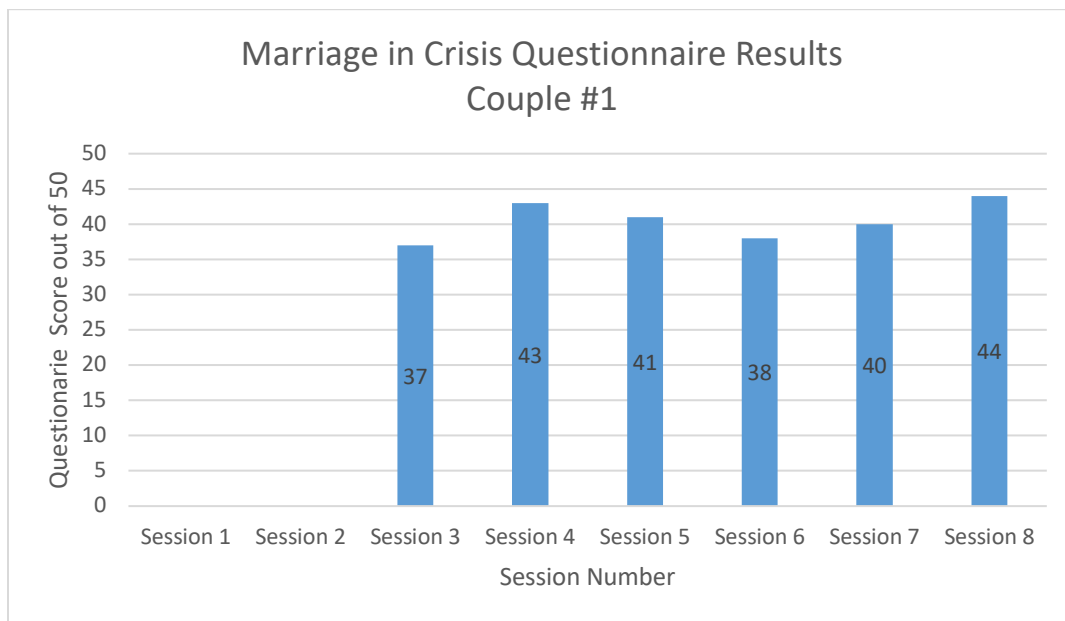


Figure 4.4 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Results Couple #1

Couple #2

The husband set up an appointment for the writer to meet with his wife and him. In the first session, the writer assessed some of the greatest needs in the marriage. After the first session, the couple agreed to continue counseling. The couple was assigned to read *His Needs Her Needs* by William Harley. The couple came back for the second session two weeks later with the entire book already read. After the second session, they did not feel a need to return. The writer completed the “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” with the couple in the two sessions. At the beginning of session one, the score was 18, and at the beginning of the second session, the

¹⁸³ See Appendix F.

score was 24. Her showing more respect toward him and showing her more love were the most significant areas of improvement in just two sessions with this couple.

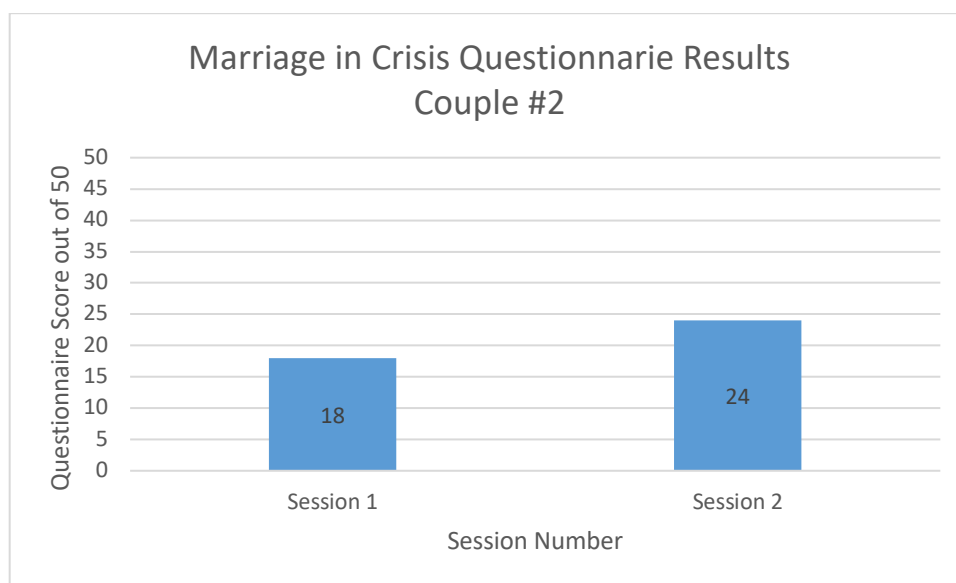


Figure 4.5 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Couple #2

Couple #3

This couple came to the pastoral counseling by reference from the Senior Pastor at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The couple became aware of the church and counseling ministry through exposure to the television ministry. At the time of the first session, the couple was separated in their marriage. The couple met with the writer for six sessions. In those sessions, the couple read and reviewed material from the book *Love Like You Mean It* by Bob Lepine. At the beginning of each session, the writer completed the “Marriage In Crisis Questionnaire” with the couple with the following scores, Session 1 = 20; Session 2 = 32; Session 3 = 29; Session 4 = 29; Session 5 = 33; Session 6 = 35.

The six sessions were challenging for the writer because the husband displayed a pattern of being closed off emotionally. In session one, he shared that he had participated in an extra-

marital affair. He then convinced his wife and the writer that the affair was over. After session six, the wife called the writer and shared that the husband had filed for divorce. The marriage was now over and not the affair.

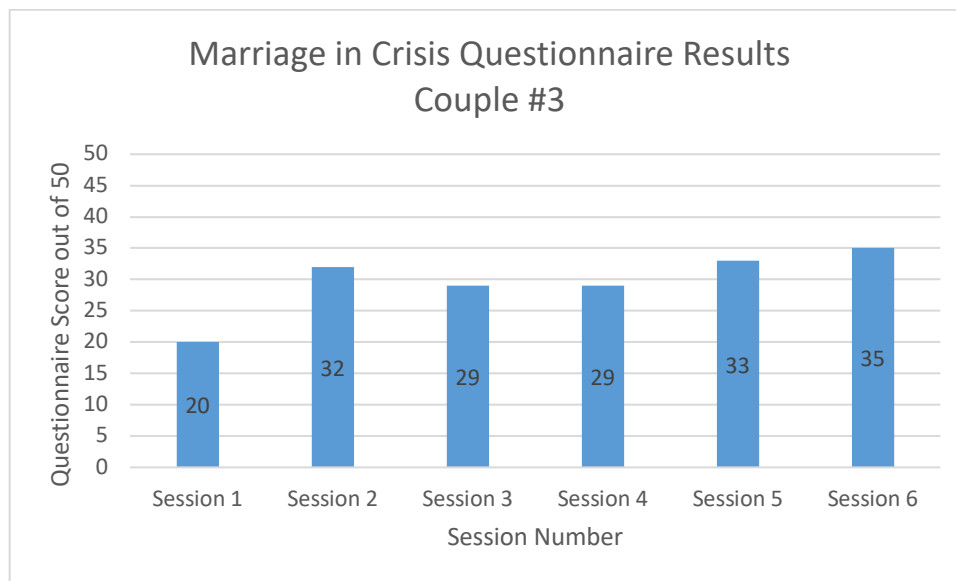


Figure 4.6 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Results Couple #3

Couple #4

The husband and wife have been married for 25 years and have five children who graduated from high school and out of the home. The couple is considering a major geographic move which is putting major stress on the marriage. In the first session, the writer was able to assess the greatest needs in the marriage. Before the second session, the couple took the online SYMBIS Plus Assessment. The couple enjoyed reviewing the results from the assessment, and it served to renew confidence for the couple in the marriage. The writer listened and led the discussion as he felt the couple needed in the remaining two sessions. The couple met for a total of four sessions and completed the “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” each time with the following results, Session 1 = 16; Session 2 = 17; Session 3 = 18; Session 4 = 29. In the four

sessions, the couple improved in all five areas, mostly in the areas of love and respect toward one another.

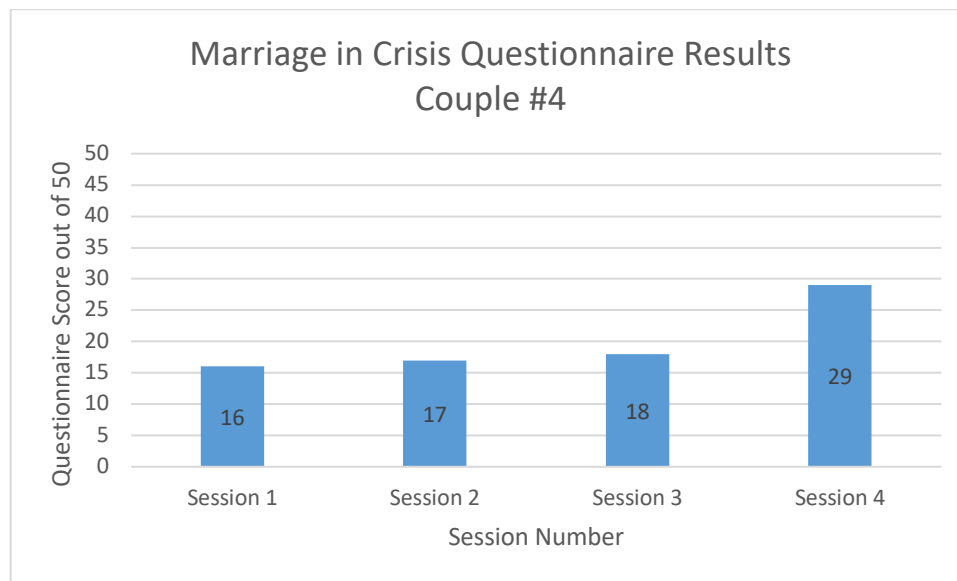


Figure 4.7 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Couple #4

Couple #5

This elderly couple has been married for 50 years. In the first session, the writer spent most of the time listening to the wife's criticism of the husband. Love and respect were the most significant areas of weakness in the marriage. Unfortunately, the couple was only willing to come for two sessions. In the two sessions, the "Marriage Crisis Questionnaire" showed a slight improvement in the two sessions from a score of 24 to 31.

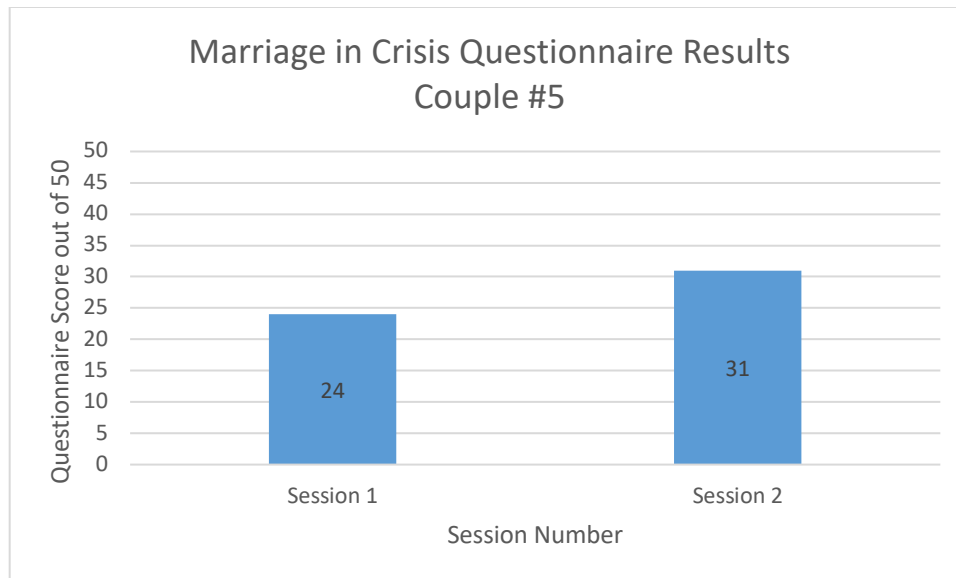


Figure 4.8 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Results Couple #5

Couple #6

In the first session, the writer assessed some of the greatest areas of weakness for this married couple. At the end of the first session, the writer suggested that the couple read and study “Love and Respect” by Emerson Eggerich. The couple met for a total of five sessions and completed the “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” each time with the following results, Session 1 = 22; Session 2 = 22; Session 3 = 26; Session 4 = 33; Session 5 = 38. The couple showed consistent growth in the areas of love and respect throughout all five sessions.

In the first session with the couple, it was determined that the husband had a severe addiction to pornography. He had struggled with this addiction for most of his life, and now it was harming his marriage. So, in addition to the marriage counseling, the writer met individually with the husband for six weeks to work through the study by Heath Lambert titled, *Finally Free*.

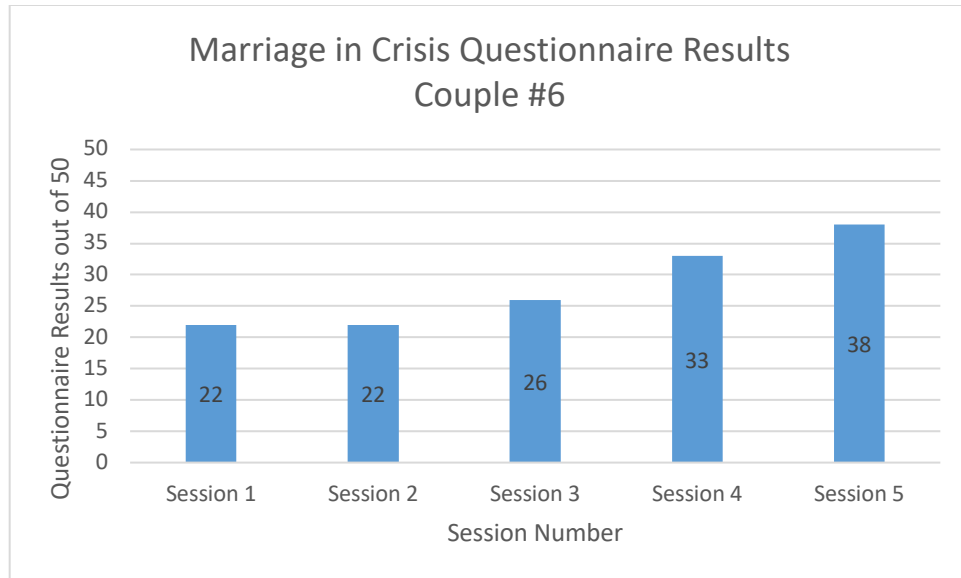


Figure 4.9 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Results Couple #6

Couple #7

The husband set up the appointments with the writer. It was clear from the first session that the wife had built many resentments in her heart toward her husband. In the first session, the couple had a score of 20 on the “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire.” Before the second session, the couple completed the SYMBIS Plus Assessment. The assessment was reviewed by the writer and the couple during the second session. In the third session, the couple filled out another “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” and this time received a score of 29. The most significant improvement areas in the three sessions were love, respect, and intimacy. Unfortunately, the couple had many scheduling conflicts and was unable to continue counseling with the writer.

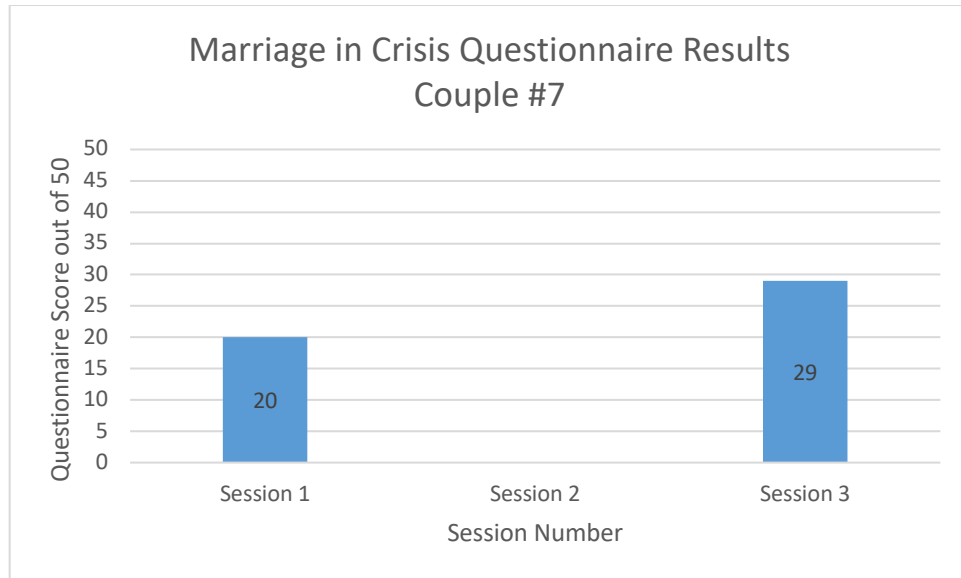


Figure 4.10 Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire Results Couple #7

Results of Marriage Class

Marriage Connection Classes in the past have been six to ten weeks in duration. The duration of the marriage class was ten weeks long. Some people came as a couple, and some came as individuals. The individuals either came alone because their spouse did not want to go or was unable to attend because of work hours or some other circumstance. Some couples missed specific nights of class due to sickness or other family activities that took priority. On the other hand, some couples were consistent and attended the class every night it was offered. Overall, the attendance numbers of the class were fairly consistent. The first night of the class had thirty-eight people in attendance. The last night of the class had thirty-six people in attendance.

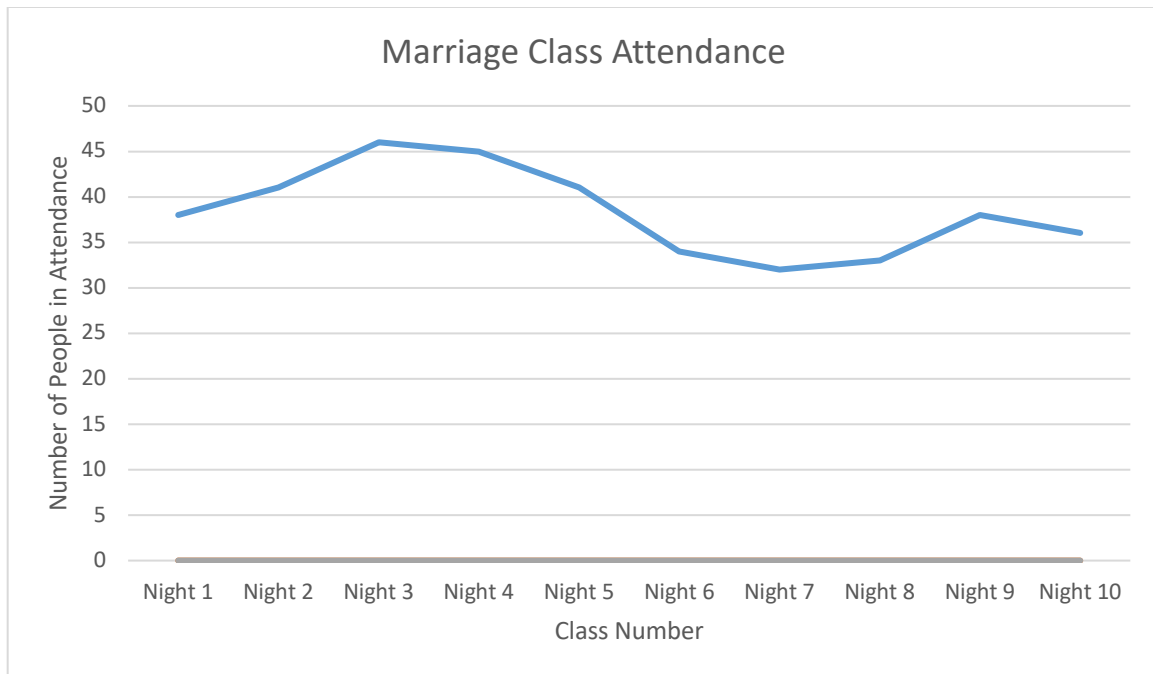


Figure 4.11 Marriage Class Attendance

A total of seventeen couples started and completed the ten-week marriage class. Each of these seventeen couples completed a pre-class and post-class survey.¹⁸⁴ The surveys were designed for the couples to evaluate their own marriages. In rating each question and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the marriage, the couple also evaluated the marriage class. In comparing the pre-class survey with the post-class survey, the average rating score slightly improved in all ten areas for the group. The ten questions in the survey relate to ten elements discussed in 1 Corinthians 13 – love, patience, kindness, humility, generosity, peace, encouragement, truth, commitment, and hope.

¹⁸⁴ See Appendix I.

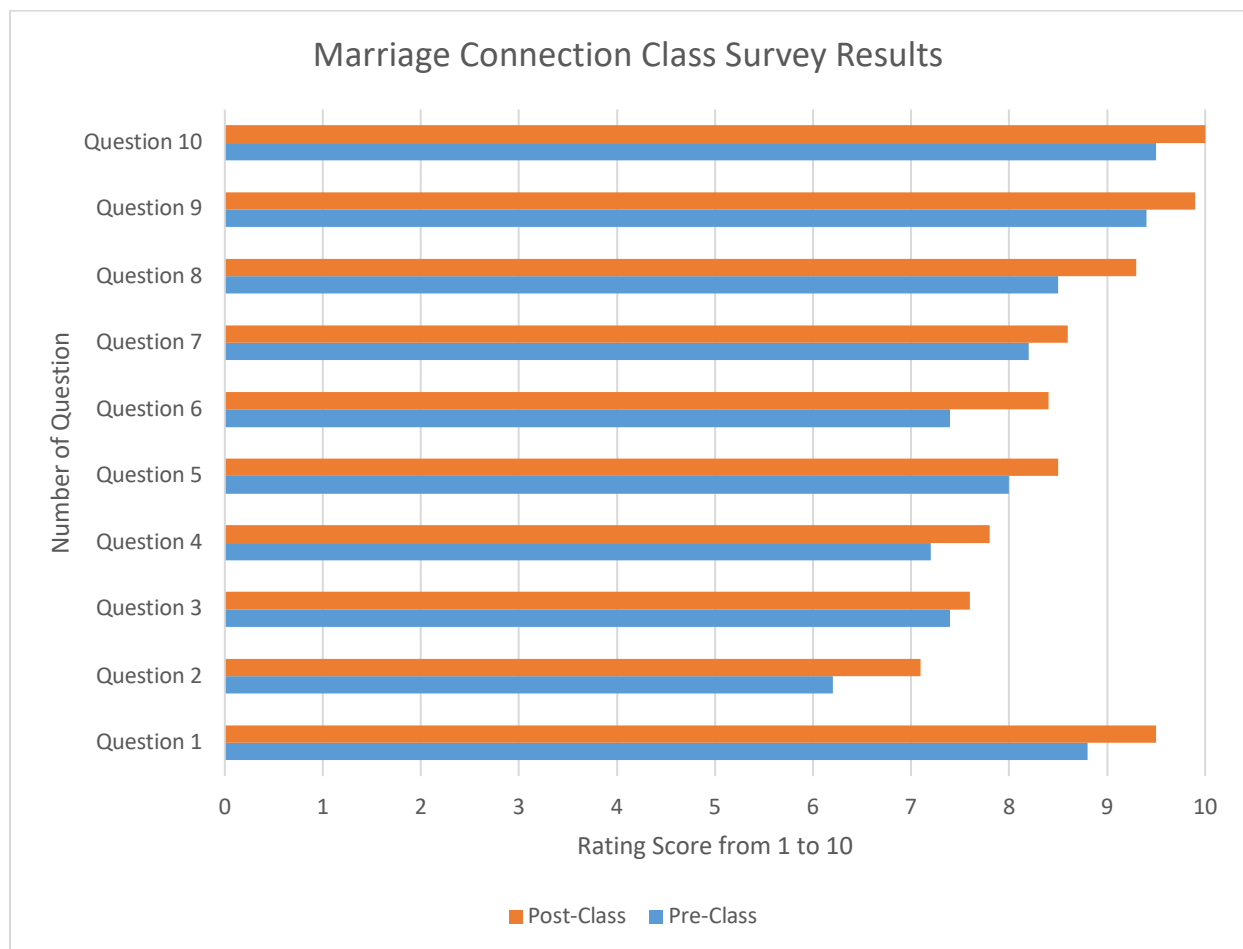


Figure 4.12 Marriage Connection Class Survey Results

According to the surveys, four particular couples experienced significant growth in marriage because of the class. The four couples had all been in marriage crisis and were invited to attend the marriage class by the writer. The writer believes that a marriage experiencing growth in love, patience, kindness, humility, generosity, peace, encouragement, truth, commitment, and hope would be a healthier marriage.

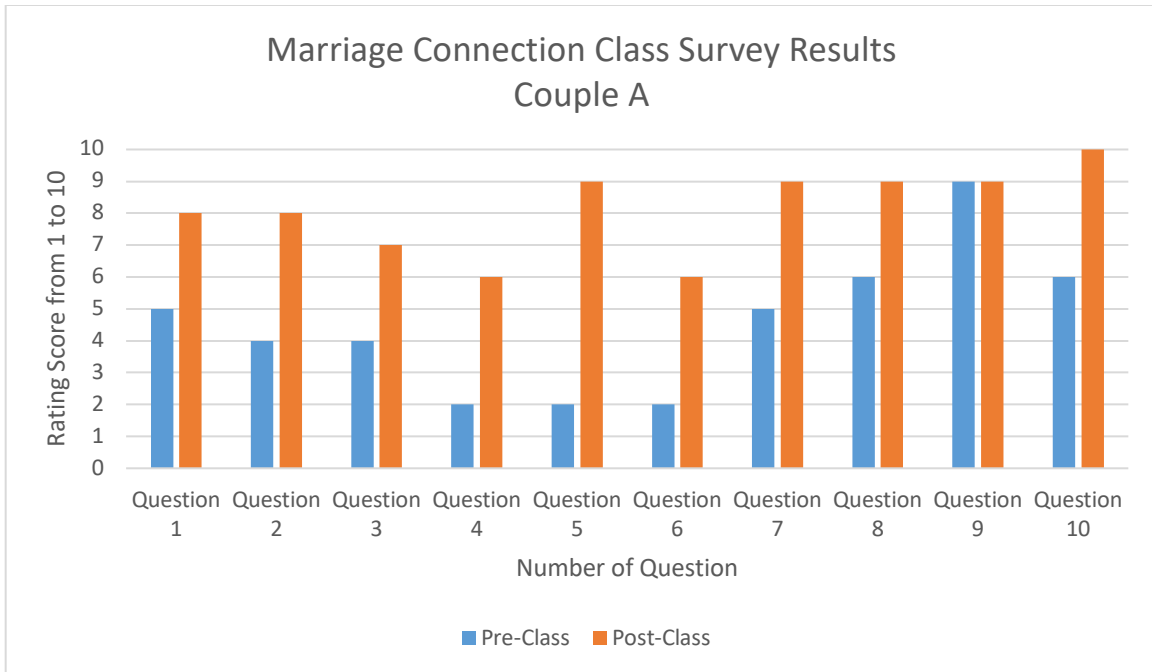


Figure 4.13 Marriage Connection Class Survey Results Couple A

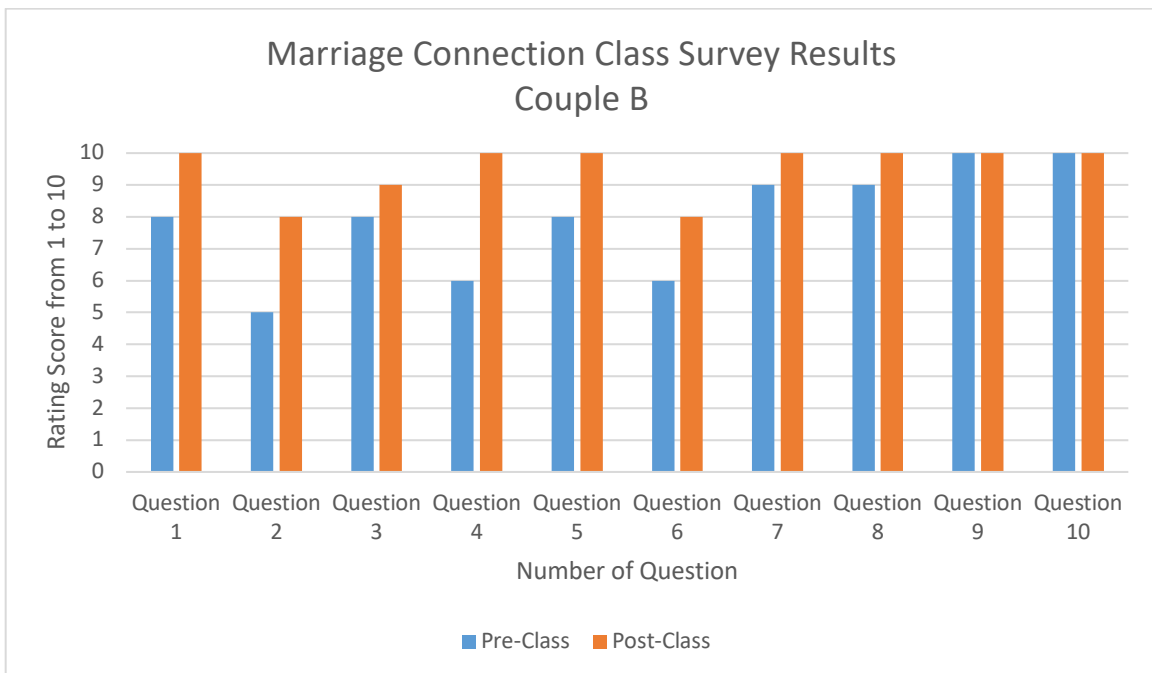


Figure 4.14 Marriage Connection Class Survey Results Couple B

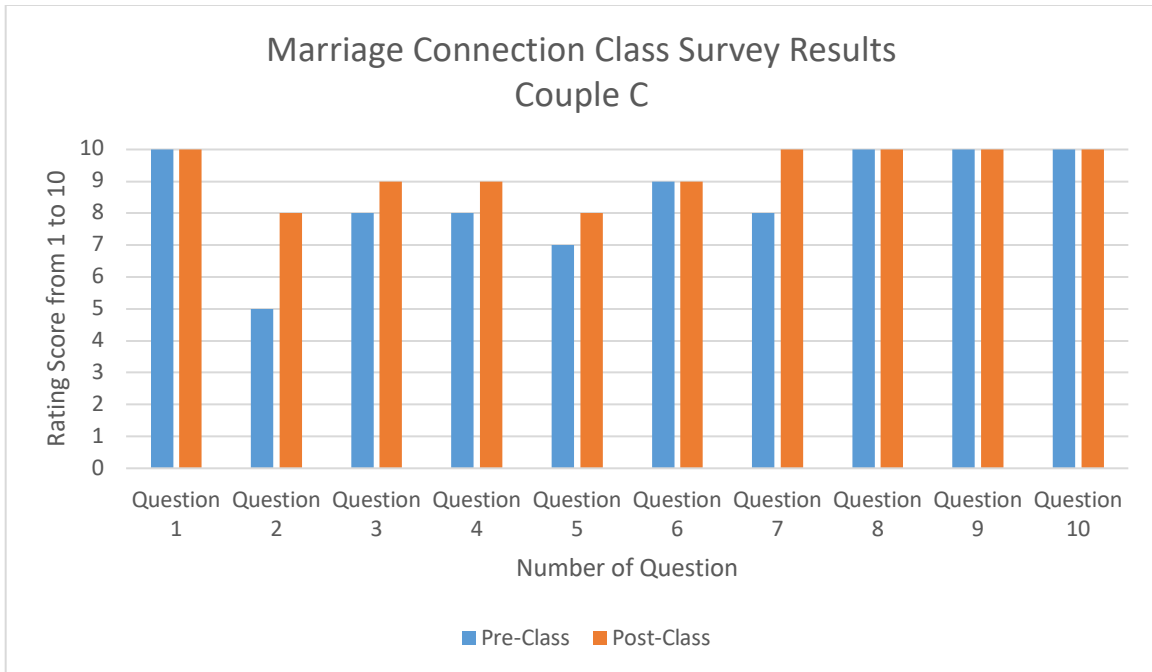


Figure 4.15 Marriage Connection Class Survey Results Couple C

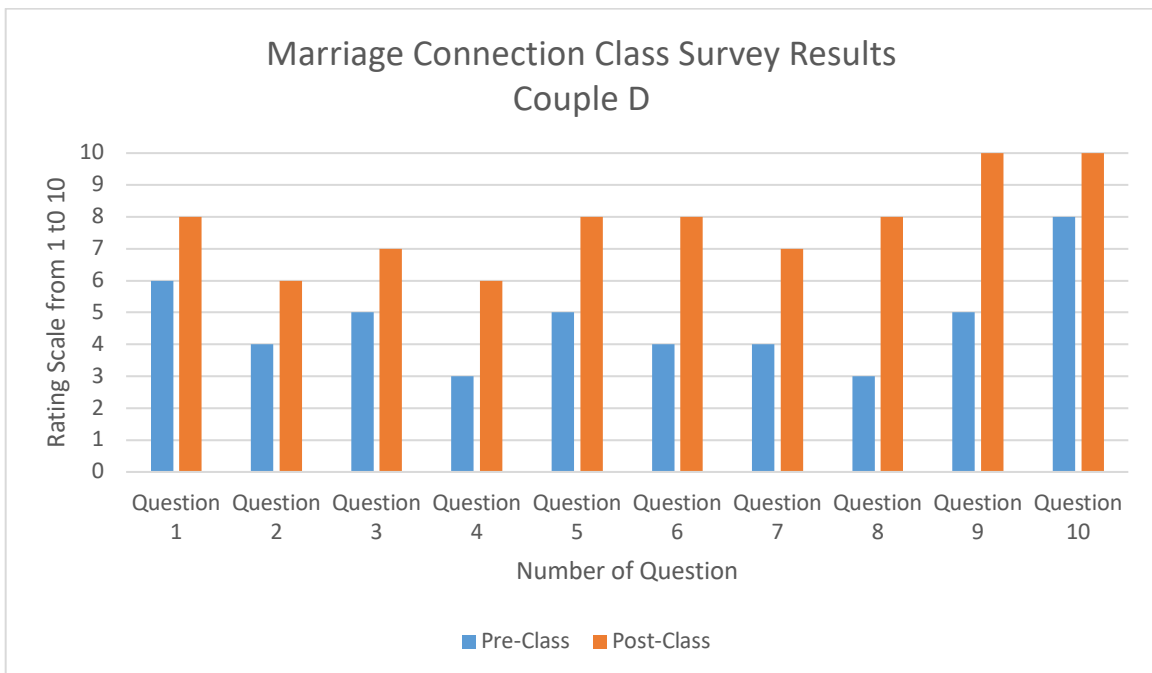


Figure 1.16 Marriage Connection Survey Results Couple D

Results of Marriage Mentoring

A total of eighteen couples (nine mentor couples and nine mentee couples) from First Baptist Church of Texarkana participated in the pilot Marriage Mentoring program. After the six-month time frame, the mentor couple and the mentee couple filled out a “Marriage Mentoring Report Form”.¹⁸⁵ The graph below details the ratings from the first three questions on the report form. Question one: “How many times did you meet with your mentee couple?” Question two: “How would you rate your mentoring relationship?” Question three: “How helpful were you as a mentor couple?”

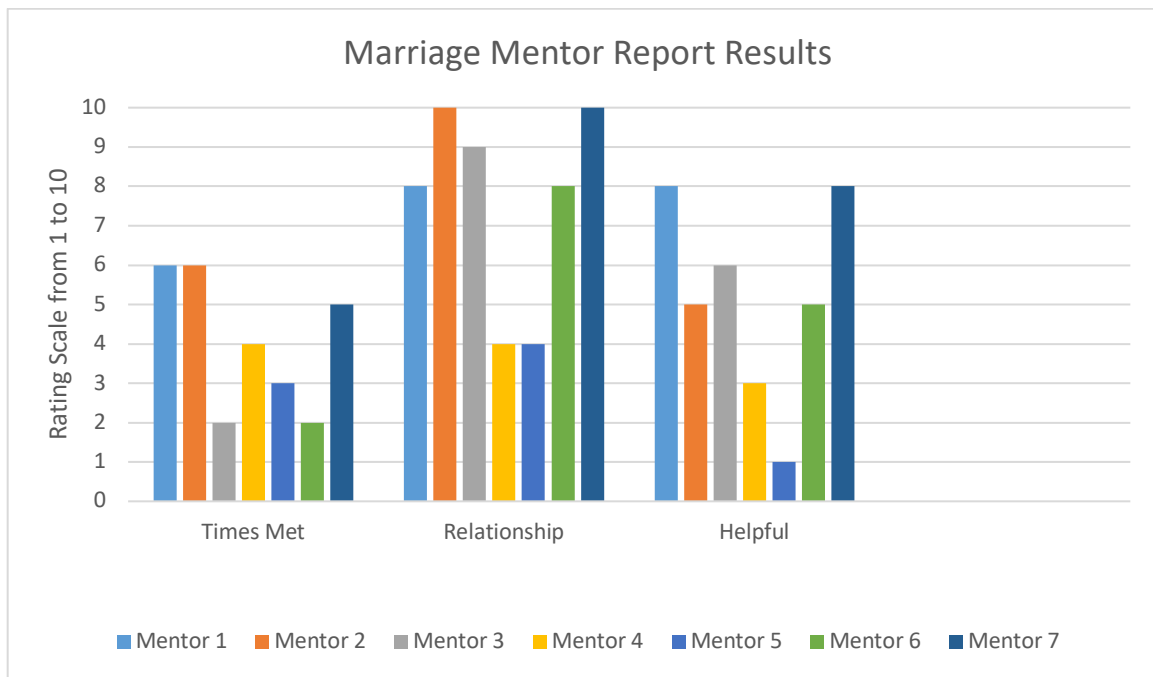


Figure 4.17 Marriage Mentor Report Results

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix L.

One of the questions on the survey asked the mentor couple what the greatest challenge was to be a mentor to their specific mentee couple. The possible answers were scheduling, childcare, chemistry, insecurity, or another response. The graph below details the results.

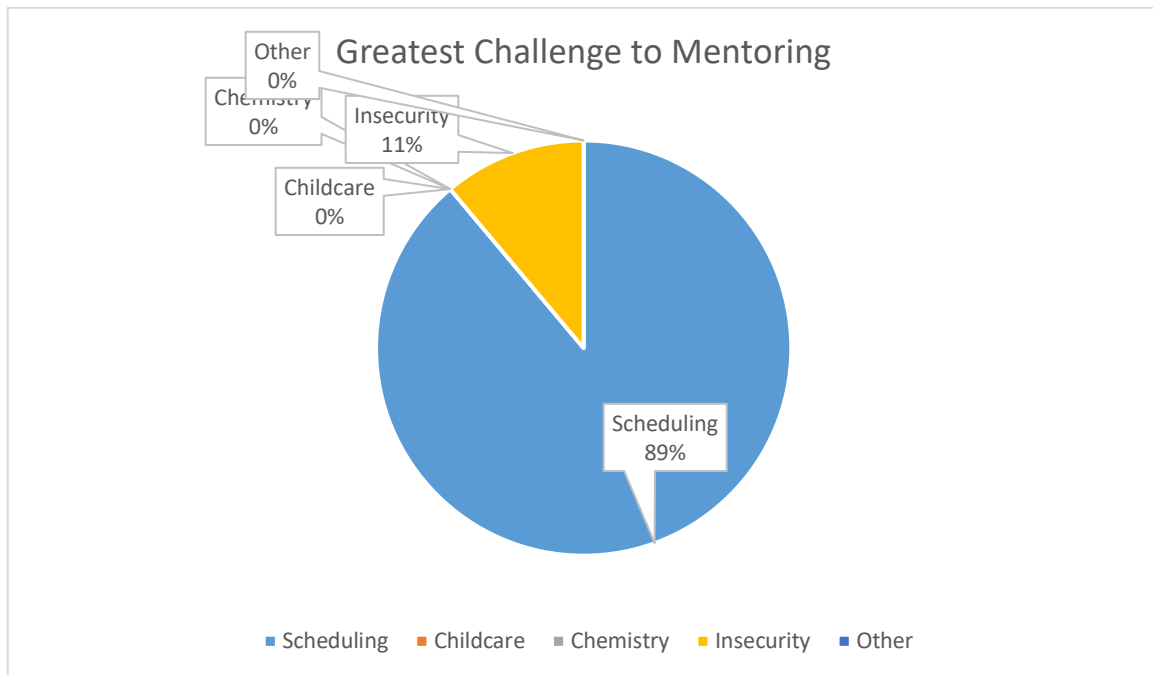


Figure 4.18 Greatest Challenge to Mentoring

The mentoring couple was asked what could be done to improve the process, and the following were some of the comments.

“I know we wanted to allow folks the autonomy to do whatever, but maybe suggested books, plans, may have been helpful for those that are not too creative or really have no idea where to start.”

“I would have liked to have coaching, questions, and general guidance. We attempted to come up with some discussions, but mostly centered around raising kids.”

“Perhaps provide specific activities to do together or provide babysitting one Saturday a month. Mentoring takes time.”

“A coaching session with the writer before the program started would have helped.”

“Offer a childcare night for those families with young kids.”

“Not sure. Distance and time were our greatest obstacles.”

“I think it was good, just hard to get together with their busy schedule.”

The answers to this question indicated that the mentoring couples wanted more intentional guidance than absolute autonomy. The guidance could be given through coaching from the writer and book suggestions. Two mentor couples suggested the need of childcare for the success of the program. Two mentor couples admitted that a lack of time was an obstacle for a successful mentoring program.

The mentees were asked the question, “How beneficial was this mentoring relationship?” On a scale of one to ten, here is the result.

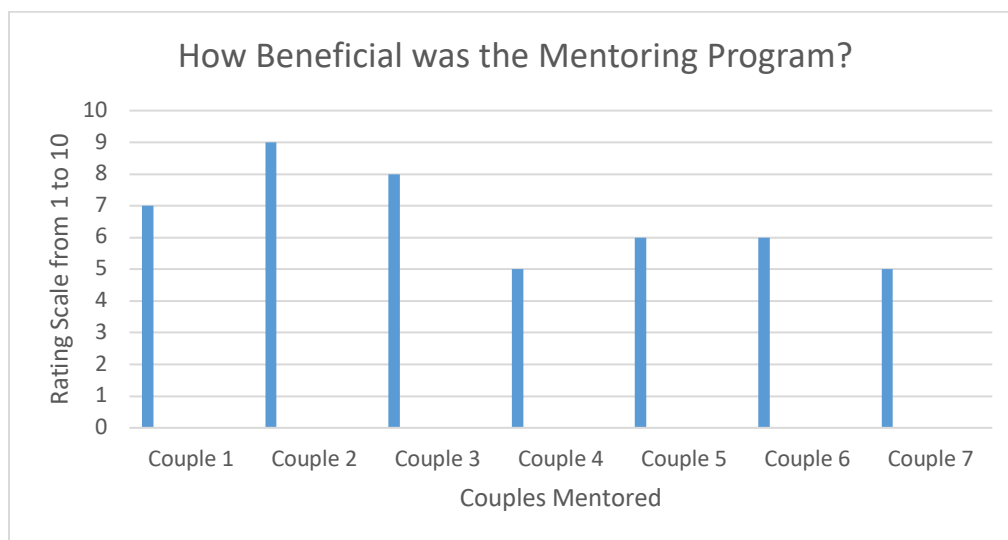


Figure 4.19 How Beneficial was the Mentoring Program?

The mentees were asked the question, “Which aspect of your marriage was most improved by this experience?” The possible answers were finances, parenting, communication, conflict resolution, or something else. The following is the result.

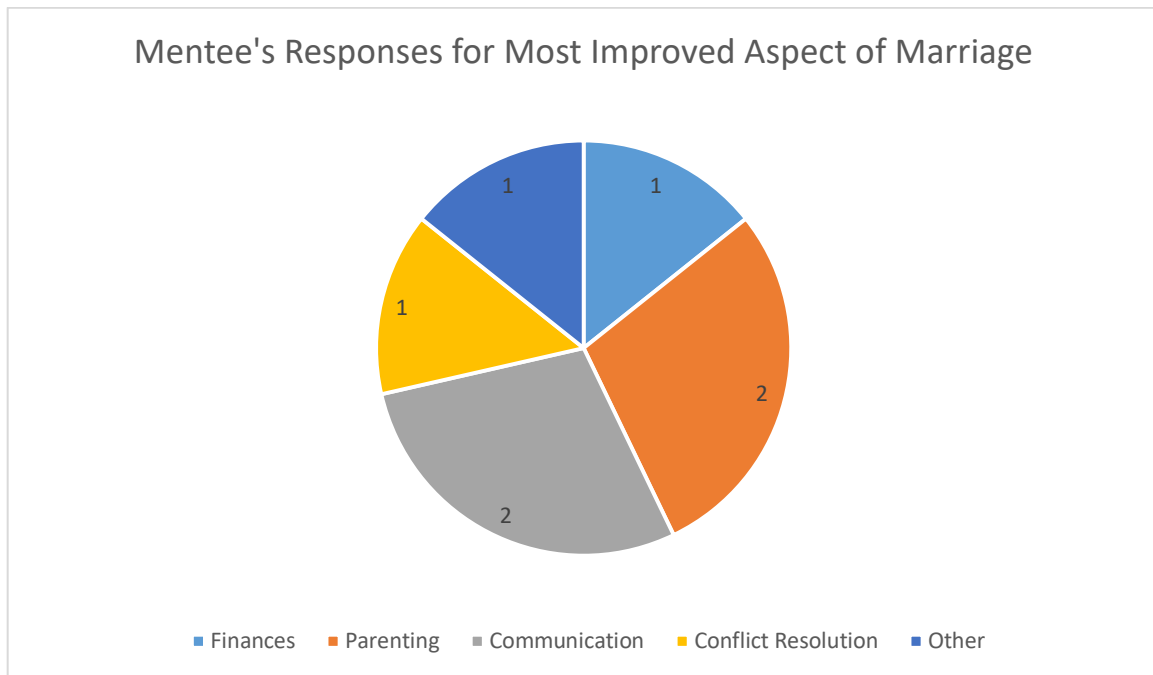


Figure 4.20 Mentee’s Responses for Most Improved Aspect of Marriage

The mentees were asked the question, “What would you like us to know about your mentoring experience?” The following were some of the statements by mentees.

“This was good. We would be on board for continuing the mentoring relationship if we had more time.”

“We love the mentoring idea and would love to continue if we had more time.”

“We quickly became friends with our mentors. They taught us how important intentionality is in marriage.”

“Our mentor couple is really helping us with our communication, conflict resolution, and even how to have more fun with one another.”

“Our mentors were so encouraging as well as honest about raising a teenager.”

“I think we were all very busy, and we had difficulty getting our schedules lined up to meet on a regular basis.”

Two of the mentee couples said they would love to continue the relationship with the mentor couple if they had more time. One mentee couple became friends with their mentor couple and learned about the importance of intentionality in marriage. One mentee couple was helped by the mentor couple in the areas of communication, conflict resolution, and having more fun with one another. One mentee couple learned from the mentor couple about raising a teenager. One mentee couple admitted being too busy to meet on a regular basis with the mentor couple.

Result of Marriage Conference

On August 6-7, 2021, Ron Deal led a stepfamily conference at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The church has an existing stepfamily ministry that uses much curriculum written by Ron Deal, so that group was excited to have him come put on a conference. The expectations were high that the conference would have a good number of people in attendance. After much advertising to the church and community, the conference had 78 people in attendance. Out of the 78 people in attendance, 56 people completed a “Conference Evaluation.”¹⁸⁶

The desire was to have all age ranges of parents represented at the conference. Therefore, out of the 56 people who completed a “Conference Evaluation,” 7 were between the ages of 20-29, 15 between the ages of 30-39, 20 between the ages of 40-49, 8 between the ages of 50-59, and 6 between the ages of 60-69.

¹⁸⁶ See Appendix N.

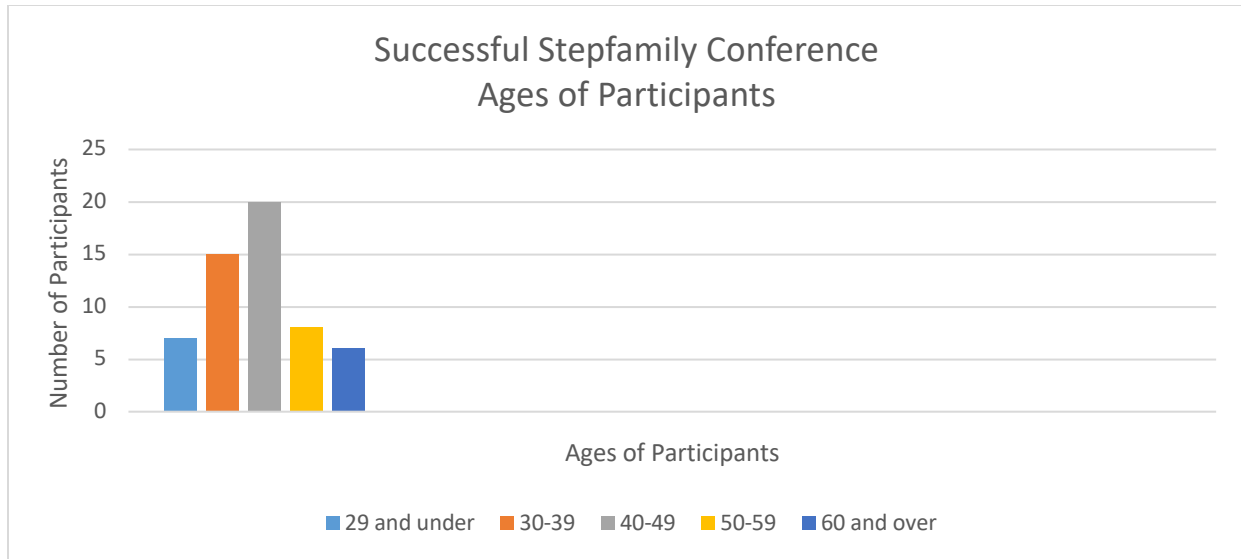


Figure 4.21 Successful Stepfamily Conference Ages of Participants

On the “Conference Evaluation,” participants were asked, “How would you rate the Building a Successful Stepfamily Conference?” Also, they were asked, “How likely would you be to invite a friend to attend a Stepfamily Conference?” These questions were answered by the participants on a scale of 1 to 10.

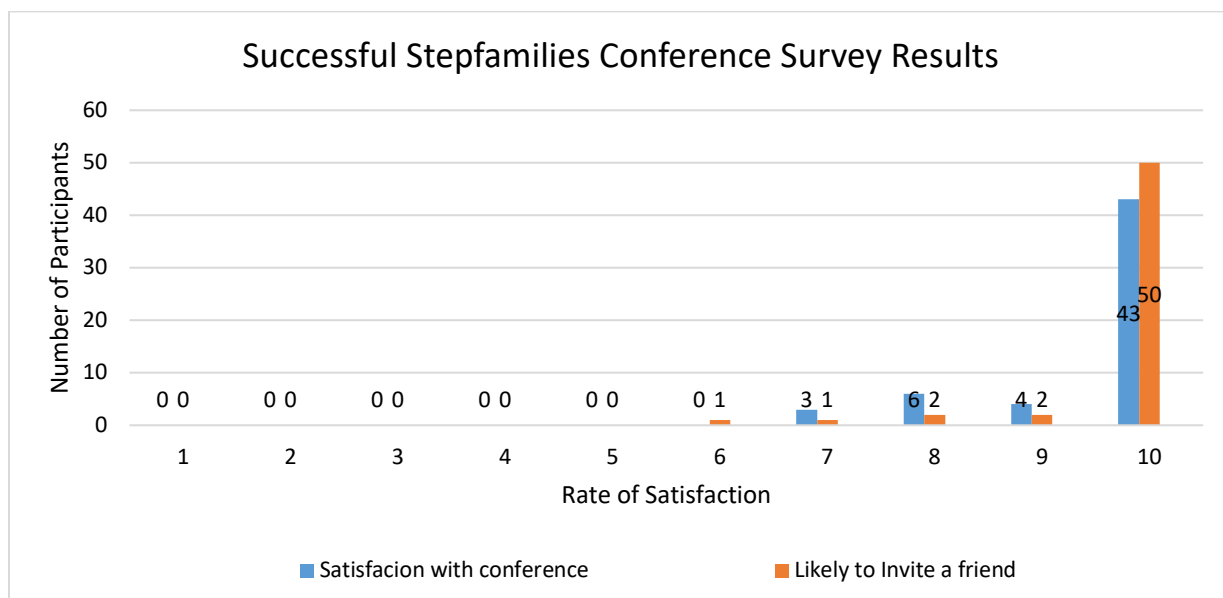


Figure 4.22 Success Stepfamilies Conference Survey Results

Listed below are several of the answers to the question on the “Conference Evaluation,”

“What would you tell a friend about the event?”

“The conference was informative, practical, useful, essential, and entertaining.”

“The conference was an absolute must for all stepfamilies. The tools we learned are invaluable.”

“The conference covered many issues with many solutions to help put into practice in your stepfamily.”

“The conference gave insight to the unique relationship between marriage and step-kids.”

“The conference opens your eyes to the fact that you are not the only one with stepfamily issues. It allowed us to open up and talk to others and ask for advice.”

“The conference was informative about roles, feelings, and needs of each person in the stepfamily. In addition, it provides tools to build your stepfamily.”

“This conference is needed for every marriage in a stepfamily.”

“I wish we knew about this marriage conference ten years ago.”

“The speaker of the conference offered amazing wisdom with practical ways to apply.”

“It was an amazing conference with much-needed information for a stepparent family. At the conference, you get informational and applied techniques.”

All of the comments about the conference were positive and indicated a satisfaction from the participants. The overall theme of the comments was that the conference was informative on the subject of blending families. The participants viewed the conference as practical and needed for step-families in the church.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This conclusion will compare the research for the thesis project proposal with the results of the implemented research project. This chapter will help the reader to understand the relevance and efficacy of the study. The research results will now be able to be compared to similar situations.

Conclusion for Dating Before Marriage

Overall, the young single adult group studying the “Boundaries in Dating” curriculum together was a success. The writer was pleased to have nineteen participants in the four-part series on the topic of dating. Mostly, the survey showed that the participants were satisfied with the study. The content the participants studied for Christian dating is practical and helpful. However, on the survey, three people commented on the lack of biblical references. From previous studies, the class participants are more accustomed to deeper Bible study. This was a rare topical study for the young single adult group.

Recommendations for Dating Before Marriage

The young single adult group will now attempt to do a teaching series on dating every calendar year. In fall 2022, they plan to do a dating series again with a new curriculum called “Sacred Search” by Gary Thomas. The content from “Sacred Search” is more biblically-based than “Boundaries in Dating”. The young single adult group understands the importance of being wise in choosing a spouse. A good marriage has the potential to last a lifetime with vibrancy and intimacy. An intimate marriage with best friends is such a fantastic gift from God. This kind of

marriage is the result of making a wise marital choice. Therefore, it is crucial to be cautious and discerning in making such an important decision as to who one will marry.

Conclusion for Pre-marriage Counseling

The writer has observed the strengths and weaknesses of SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts). The most significant aspect of SYMBIS is the practicality in teaching all the components needed in a healthy marriage. The seven questions for each session of SYMBIS encompass all the ingredients of a potentially healthy marriage. The couples using SYMBIS enjoy participating in the assessment, discussion, and homework exercises.

It is observed that the greatest weakness of SYMBIS is the lack of spiritual depth. SYMBIS offers practical marriage guidance without getting to the heart of the marital conflict. Sometimes it is a spiritual issue more than a practical issue that explains the conflict a married couple is struggling through. The writer will adapt the SYMBIS material to include more biblical and spiritual help for the engaged couple. Each of the pre-marriage counseling sessions will have a Scripture to be read and discussed during the session. The counseling sessions will also always include a time of prayer for the future of the marriage.

Another area where pre-marriage counseling can improve at First Baptist Church of Texarkana is in the area of communication. It will be helpful to contact the pre-married couple before sessions. In this contact, the writer will be able to communicate several things. First, the connection will help to build rapport with the couple and the church. Second, he will remind the couple of that week's assignment. Third, he will remind the pre-married couple of their next appointment.

Recommendations for Pre-Marriage Counseling

The writer has several different options for the pre-marriage counseling curriculum. However, the survey concludes that SYMBIS is an effective tool for pre-marriage counseling at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. Also, the writer feels most confident in using the SYMBIS material for pre-marriage counseling. Therefore, the writer will continue to use SYMBIS with engaged couples as conducted in the thesis project. Also, the process and procedure used by the writer will remain the same. But, again, counseling always needs to have room for exceptions.

Conclusion for Marriage in Crisis Counseling

Overall, the writer was satisfied with attending the Association of Biblical Counselors conference in Fort Worth, Texas, and focusing on the track for marriage counseling. In the future, the writer will attend the ABC conference again. However, the writer prefers to attend the annual conference put on by the American Association of Christian Counselors because the training is in integrational counseling, which better suits the beliefs of the writer. Therefore, the writer will attend the next AACC conference on September 8-10, 2022. Chris and Rochelle will be able to attend the AACC conference together in 2022. They will both register primarily for the marriage counseling electives at the conference.

Below is a list of all the different couples who went through marriage crisis counseling with the writer in a nine-month period of time. The writer will continue to evaluate every couple in counseling so that he can become more effective in helping couples in a marriage crisis.

Couple #1

The writer did well at prioritizing the health and wellbeing of the individuals over sustaining the marriage at all costs. Both individuals have a problem with alcoholism. The writer was able to connect the couple to ministries in the church where they would receive accountability and encouragement. The couple became regular participants, and eventually, they became leaders in the Celebrate Recovery ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The writer ensured that the wife would not be in physical danger by remaining married to the husband. Finally, the writer was able to get the couple to focus on having a biblical marriage that displays sacrificial love toward one another.

The writer regrets not being able to spend more time with the troubled couple. Overall, the couple felt satisfied with the counseling sessions, but they had too many scheduling issues that would not allow them to keep on meeting. However, after the counseling, they were able to attend the marriage connection class.

Couple #2

The writer felt optimistic that the couple showed growth in their marriage in only two counseling sessions. However, the writer did not feel satisfied that he could only meet with the couple for two sessions. Also, in retrospect, he would have encouraged the couple to take the online SYMBIS Plus Assessment. Completing the assessment may have inspired the couple's interest to work through more marriage issues. The SYMBIS Plus Assessment could also serve to build more hope for the couple in their marriage.

Couple #3

The writer worked hard and invested much effort with this couple, only to see a little progress in healing the marriage. The writer regrets not questioning the husband more on the actuality of unfaithful behavior. The husband shutting down emotionally could have been an indication that unfaithful behavior was still going on. The writer believes that this counseling experience made him better at discerning unfaithfulness in a marriage relationship. Overall, the writer felt sad and disappointed that the marriage had ended. The fate of this couple is a reminder that we still live in a fallen world.

Couple #4

The writer built solid chemistry with the couple, which helped the counseling sessions. The couple opened up, and they gave an honest assessment of the state of their marriage. The SYMBIS Plus Assessment served as an excellent tool for breaking the ice in opening up the sessions. The writer regrets the couple not growing more in other areas other than the areas of love and respect.

Couple #5

The writer does not know what he could have done differently in counseling this elderly couple. The couple had fifty years of withholds that at least needed to be vented about in a counseling session. The writer probably did the best thing in just facilitating and allowing the wife to vent. Unfortunately, the couple did not appear like they would have been able to complete an online SYMBIS Plus Assessment. Also, the couple was not interested in spending more time counseling while reading a marriage book or studying together.

Couple #6

The writer was able to work with the husband on gaining victory with an addiction to pornography. Pornography addiction played a significant part in the marriage struggles. Reading together and discussing questions from “Finally Free” by Heath Lambert proved to help the husband tremendously. He was in the midst of his most extended time frame of abstinence from pornography since he was young. He often commented to the writer how much better he was feeling about himself, his relationship with God, and his relationship with his wife.

The counseling sessions were challenging and emotional, but the couple saw a lot of growth in their marriage at the end of the sessions. The writer left the counseling sessions with this couple feeling satisfied with a great accomplishment of marital healing. The SYMBIS Plus Assessment was a helpful tool in building hope for the couple in their marriage. Also, the couple and the writer left the door open to the possibility of future counseling sessions in the upcoming months.

Couple #7

In only two sessions, the writer was pleased with the counseling experience with this couple. It seemed that the SYMBIS Plus Assessment and the “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” were utilized at the right time and right away. The couple seemed to be making progress in the growth of their marriage. Unfortunately, the couple was only able to complete two counseling sessions.

Recommendations for Crisis in Marriage Counseling

The writer is learning a lot about counseling strategies and procedures through this thesis project. The ideal process for crisis marriage counseling involves filling out a “Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire” at the beginning of every session.¹⁸⁷ It is ideal for the writer to have four to six sessions with the couple. However, the couple can attend more than six sessions if necessary. Ideally, the writer wants to stay solution-focused and conclude counseling a couple within a maximum of ten sessions.

In the first session, the writer will fill out the “Biblical Marriage Counseling Goals and Focus Form” inventory with the couple.¹⁸⁸ This inventory form was recommended to the writer at the Association of Biblical Counselors Conference. The goal of the first session is to target areas that need work in the marriage. It also helps the couple to be encouraged by the current strengths of the marriage.

First, the couple is asked to find two or three areas in the heart, actions, or attitudes that can change. Next, the couple is asked to affirm two to three strengths in their spouse to affirm. Then, the couple is asked two or three areas in the marriage that need to change in order to be more Christ-honoring. Next, the writer and couple will read Ephesians 3:14-21 together. This Scripture passage will be used to create a vision for the marriage. The couple will be asked to think and pray about two to three changes that can happen in the marriage. Finally, the writer will directly ask the couple what they want to see happen in the marriage counseling sessions.

After the first session, the couple will be asked to complete the online SYMBIS Plus Assessment. The couple will be e-mailed the invitation to SYMBIS Plus after the first session. The online assessment will be completed and then discussed during the second session. The

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix F.

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix O.

SYMBIS Plus Assessment gives the writer necessary details about the compatibility of the marriage. Looking at the SYMBIS Plus report together is a way to encourage the couple about God's plan to bring them together as a compatible couple. They are compatible because they each have unique gifts and personalities.

These strategies for crisis marriage counseling are set for the ideal situation. However, the writer also understands that pastoral counseling is rarely perfect, and plans do not always play out perfectly. Sometimes, the couple may feel too angry to complete an online assessment. Other times, the discussion in a session may cause the participants to become distracted and sidetracked.

Conclusion for Marriage Class

A different marriage class was offered at First Baptist Church of Texarkana during the spring semester. The spring semester class was only six sessions long because a conclusion was drawn that a ten-session class was too long. The belief was that a six-session series would do a better job of holding the attention span of the participants. Six sessions also allowed for more numerical participation because it was believed to be easier for couples to make that shorter commitment to a class. The class began on January 26, 2022, and the class concluded on March 2, 2022.

Chris and Rochelle Schroeder wrote the curriculum and taught the information being shared with the class as a team. A curriculum written and taught by the counselors, not a video, allowed Chris and Rochelle to better guide and direct the class. Each hour-long session included a time of teaching and concluded with a class discussion. Each participant in the class was given handouts in order to take notes from the material being taught.

At the conclusion of the class, the couples participated in a Sweetheart's Banquet at the church on Sunday night, March 7. The purpose of this event was to encourage and celebrate healthy marriages in the church. The church sold tickets for \$30 so that couples were able to come and enjoy a fun date night. The cost of the ticket was for a fine dinner prepared and served by the church cooking staff. The cost of the tickets also included child care provided by the church pre-school staff. It also allowed for a guest speaker, Bob Lepine. Lepine is a personal friend of Senior Pastor Jeff Schreve. He lives in Little Rock, Arkansas, which is two hours driving distance from Texarkana, Texas. Him speaking at FBC Texarkana sparked a lot of interest because of the marriage class in Fall, 2021 from his book, "Love Like You Mean It." One-hundred and twenty couples attended and enjoyed a time of fellowship around their tables. They also were inspired with a live testimony of a marriage at FBC Texarkana that was saved and healed.

Recommendations for Marriage Class

A few of the participants in the marriage class expressed interest in participating in a connection class focusing on the issue of parenting. Therefore, after the six-week marriage class and Sweetheart's Banquet, Chris and Rochelle began to teach a six-week parenting class. Offering two series of six-week classes allowed some participants to drop out at the end of the first six-week class. Other participants added for the parenting class. The complete twelve-week teaching series, taught by Chris and Rochelle Schroeder, is titled "Family Talk."

Conclusion for Marriage Mentoring

The idea of starting a marriage mentoring ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana is a good idea. Three key lessons were learned from this first attempt at a marriage mentoring program. First, most of the couples struggled with finding time to build the mentoring relationship. Second, mentee couples with young children had difficulty meeting when childcare was not available for them. Third, most mentor couples would prefer more guided instruction and material to be used as curriculum for times with the mentee couple.

Recommendations for Marriage Mentoring

The writer still believes in the potential of this ministry and understands that healthy mentor and mentee relationships have to develop more intentionally than organically. He will make some critical adjustments to the marriage mentoring program at FBC Texarkana. However, some other parts of the program will remain the same. First, an opportunity to be part of the program will be opened up to the rest of the church. During a Sunday Service, the writer will preach a message on the topic of marriage. Following the service, couples in the church will have an opportunity to sign up to participate in the mentoring program as a mentor couple or a mentee couple. The mentoring program will this time be for a duration of one-year.

A committee will help to match up mentor couples with mentee couples. Then, the writer will call together a meeting to kick off the ministry. At the meeting, three key objectives will be accomplished. First, the writer will clearly articulate the expectations and objectives of the mentoring program. Second, he will discuss a specific curriculum to be used during the first six months with the mentors. The writer will have specific marriage and family books to be used during that time. Third, the writer will conduct a two-hour seminar with those in the church who

are interested in serving as a mentor couple. Throughout the process, the writer will be available to the mentors to help solve any issues that develop.

During the one-year time frame, the preschool and children's ministries at FBC Texarkana will offer three nights of free childcare to the participants with children in fifth grade or younger. Those three nights give the couples time to have uninterrupted time together as a gift from the church. Childcare during other times that the couples meet will have to be taken care of by them. In addition, the church will offer a family-style dinner at the close of the year to celebrate and share what was accomplished in the mentoring relationship. Thus, the couples will have an opportunity to continue the relationships that have been developed.

There is one more way for marriage mentoring relationships to begin at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The writer is collecting a database of married couples who have experienced transformation in their marriage. This list of couples are people who were near divorce but then experienced healing in their marriage. They now have agreed to be available for other married couples in the church who are going through similar struggles that they once experienced. They are willing to be a mentor couple for those who are in a hurting marriage. The writer can refer a current married couple in crisis to these other couples who are willing to be available.

Conclusion for Marriage Conference

Overall, the conference led by Ron Deal and focusing on marriages in blended families was a success. Based on the surveys, the couples enjoyed the conference and believed it was helpful for their families. First Baptist Church of Texarkana would like to host Ron Deal again in

future years. The advertising strategies for this conference will be the same in the future. In the future, the expectations for projected attendance numbers will be more realistic and accurate.

Ron Deal's fee for coming to speak in Texarkana was \$6,000. In addition, he charged \$7 for every couple to have a workbook for the conference. The church also had costs for advertising, childcare, and snacks for participants. The church spent advertising money on radio spots and ads in the local newspaper, magazines, and billboards. The church also delivered flyers to local churches and throughout the community. The childcare expense was for the church's childcare staff. In addition, the church's kitchen staff provided snacks throughout the day and a light breakfast at a minimal cost to the church.

The church believed in the importance of this conference, so the leadership decided to absorb most of the cost to make sure that as many couples could attend as possible. Also, some anonymous donors from the church contributed financially to the event. As a result, the cost for attending the conference was only \$25 per couple, and scholarships were also available on request. In addition, advertisements for the event began several months in advance, and couples could register online.

Recommendations for Marriage Conference

The results of the conference are not all positive. First, the writer and other staff members at FBC Texarkana anticipated more people being in attendance by at least double the amount who came. The church did much advertising to the community without much success as most of the participants were from the church. Some of the reasons for lower than anticipated attendance may have been due to hesitancy with the continued COVID pandemic. Second, the conclusion

was made that ministering to blended families is worthwhile, but it is also to a specific type of family.

The writer would like to do future marriage conferences with different marriage experts doing the speaking. A realistic goal would be for the church to host a significant marriage conference every other year. The staff and other leaders can determine what marriage experts could come in the following years. The writer has an interest in hearing such marriage speakers as Gary Thomas, Tim Kimmel, Paul David Tripp, and Les and Leslie Parrot. The marriage speaker does not have to be a famous speaker or author. The writer also plans to bring less-known, and more affordable speakers to the church to conduct marriage conferences.

Additional Ideas

Chris and Rochelle Schroeder have many ideas and plans to improve the marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana so that it is effective and strategic. They must always be working to guard and strengthen their own marriage in this process of helping other marriages. Through attending weekend marriage retreats, attending marriage conferences, and reading marriage books, Chris and Rochelle will always make sure to focus on their own marriage enrichment. The health of their own marriage is vital to being effective writers.

The writer decided to create a Facebook Page to promote the marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The writer will put inspirational marriage quotes on the page on a regular basis. Also, marriage ministry events and classes will be advertised on the page. In addition, the Facebook Page will be used to share pictures of couples participating in different marriage and dating activities. Finally, marriage classes and conferences at FBC Texarkana will

be recorded to be viewed on Facebook Page. Mostly, the writer will use the page to communicate to the couples in the church. Currently, over 500 people follow the marriage ministry page.

A strategic marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana will help bring healing to many couples in the church. The writer will make a focus and intentionality of sharing these stories of healing with the rest of the church. Marriage testimonies will be shared through social media, church services, and other platforms. FBC Texarkana has a media team with excellent recording capabilities. The writer will send the media team names of couples to interview and record. Then, the church leadership will discuss times for the marriage testimonies to be shared.

First Baptist Church of Texarkana mails out a church newsletter to church members every week called “Generations”. The front of the newsletter includes a letter from Pastor Jeff Schreve about a current topic in the church. A majority of the newsletter includes current announcements from different ministries in the church. The last section of “Generations” now has a section titled “Family Talk.” The writer will write articles for this section that pertain to marriage and parenting. The articles serve as another way to keep marriage at the forefront of the ministries at FBC Texarkana.

Chris and Rochelle Schroeder have a dream to combine all the material from the “Family Talk” articles to one day write a book on marriage. The marriage book would include all the practical aspects of having a healthy marriage. The book would also focus on the spiritual truths of having a healthy marriage. The book would then become a good resource for marriage counseling and marriage teaching at the church. They plan to begin writing the marriage book in the summer of 2022.

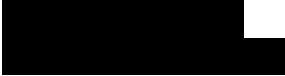
Conclusion

This thesis project has helped to evaluate and develop a strategic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. First, the leader of the young adult class will continue to teach a series for dating. The next time the subject of dating will be taught with a different curriculum. Next, the writer will continue to use the SYMBIS material for pre-marriage counseling. This research finds SYMBIS to be the most effective tool in preparing couples for marriage. Also, the surveys and training prepared the writer to improve in crisis marriage counseling. Growth and change will always be necessary in this area. Fourth, the time frame for the marriage class will be shortened, and the curriculum will be changed. The six-week curriculum will give the instructor opportunities to be flexible with offering other classes for people to get involved. Fifth, a marriage mentoring program will be expanded and strengthened at the church. Sixth, the church will continue to have marriage conferences with different leaders speaking. Finally, marriage ministry will be promoted at FBC Texarkana on a Facebook Page and in a weekly church newsletter.

Appendix A

Letters of Approval

December 9, 2020

Rev. Jeff Schreve
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church of Texarkana


Dear Rev. Jeff Schreve,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research project is to develop a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

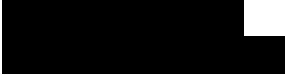
I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The data collected will be used to improve the pastoral counseling marriage ministry in the church. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Chris Schroeder
Pastoral Counselor

December 9, 2020

Patty Ashby
Administrative Assistant to Pastoral Counselor
First Baptist Church of Texarkana


Dear Mrs. Patty Ashby,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research project is to develop a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

I am writing to request your assistance in conducting my research at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. The data collected will be used to improve the pastoral counseling marriage ministry in the church. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Chris Schroeder
Pastoral Counselor

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Pastoral Counseling Marriage Ministry

Chris Schroeder

Liberty University

Doctor of Ministry/John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Liberty University

You are invited to be in a research study on pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member at First Baptist Church of Texarkana participating in marriage ministry. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Chris Schroeder, a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Doctorate of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: This study aims to develop a systematic pastoral counseling marriage ministry at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

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

1. Participate in pastoral marriage counseling for a minimum of two weeks.
2. Participate in a minimum four-week marriage class at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.
3. Participate in a marriage mentoring program at First Baptist Church of Texarkana.

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

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

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- 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.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

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

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation prior to submitting your study materials.] Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Chris Schroeder. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, P. Adam McClendon, at [REDACTED].

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.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

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

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix C

Boundaries in Dating Survey

Name: _____

1. What lesson from the “Boundaries in Dating” series was most helpful?

2. How helpful was the “Boundaries in Dating” series?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Would you recommend the “Boundaries in Dating” curriculum to a friend?

Yes

No

4. Was there anything you wish was covered in the “Boundaries in Dating” series?

Appendix D
SYMBIS Certification

• CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION •

April 26, 2018

CHRISTOPHER P. SCHROEDER

Confidential SYMBIS
INTENSIVE FACILITATOR

Your commitment and passion to help couples launch lifelong love with excellence is evidenced by your striving to become a certified SYMBIS Facilitator. You are making a difference. Your work is sure to have a positive ripple effect in the lives and families of every couple you help.

LES LIE PARROTT, ED.D.
Founder

SYMBIS
SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE BEFORE IT STARTS
ASSESSMENT

LES PARROTT, PH.D.
Founder

SYMBIS.COM

Appendix E

Pre-Marriage Counseling Survey

Couple's Name: _____

1. What one aspect of pre-marriage counseling was most helpful?

SYMBIS Assessment

Discussion

Homework Exercises

2. How helpful was SYMBIS pre-marriage counseling?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

3. Would you recommend SYMBIS pre-marriage counseling to an engaged friend?

Yes

No

4. Was there anything you wish was covered in SYMBIS pre-marriage counseling?

Appendix F

Marriage in Crisis Questionnaire

Couple: _____

Session: _____

Date: _____

1. To the wife: Do you feel loved by your husband?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

2. To the husband: Do you feel respected by your wife?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

3. What is the commitment level of your marriage?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

4. What is the intimacy level of your marriage?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

5. What is the passion level of your marriage?

1----2----3----4----5----6----7----8----9----10

Score _____

Appendix G

Books Assigned for Marriage Counseling

- Carder, Dave, and Duncan Jaenicke. *Torn Asunder: Recovering from an Extramarital Affair*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- Chapman, Gary. *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away: Real Help for Desperate Hearts in Difficult Marriages*. Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2018.
- Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004.
- Harley Jr., Willard F., *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2011.
- Hart, Archibald D., and Sharon May. *Safe Haven Marriage: Building a Relationship You Want to Come Home To*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003.
- Kimmel, Tim., *Grace Filled Marriage*. Nashville, TN: Worthy Books, 2013.
- Lepine, Bob. *Love Like You Mean It: The Heart of a Marriage That Honors God*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020.
- Thomas, Gary. *Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.
- Tripp, Paul David. *Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs To Make*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway. 2021.
- Vernick, Leslie. *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope*. New York: Waterbrook, 2013.

Appendix H

Discussion Sessions

Session 1 **“Purpose of Marriage”**

1. Define marriage. What is its purpose?
2. How does your relationship agree or differ from this definition and purpose?
3. Do you believe marriage is a contract?

H. Norman Wright wrote, “A Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. It is a commitment in which there is no holding back of anything. Marriage is a pledge of mutual fidelity; it is a partnership of mutual subordination. A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent; it is a freeing up of the man and woman to be themselves and become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is a refining process that God will use to have us become the man or woman He wants us to become.”

Read and discuss Genesis 2:18-25.

4. Who originated the marriage institution? Why was it originated?
5. What does leaving mother and father involve?
6. What do the words “shall cleave” mean?
7. What do the words “they shall be one flesh” mean to you?
8. What are you receiving out of marriage that you wouldn’t have received by remaining single?

Read and discuss Matthew 7:24-27.

Read and discuss Galatians 5:22-23

Current Level of Satisfaction
Scale of 1 to 10

1. Our daily personal involvement with each other.
2. Our sexual relationship.
3. Our trust in each other.
4. The depth of our communication together.
5. How well we speak one another's language.
6. The way we divide chores.
7. The way we make decisions.
8. The way we manage conflict.
9. Our spiritual interaction.
10. How we manage money.
11. Our relationship with our in-laws.

Session 2

“Love and Acceptance in Marriage”

Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

1. How do you like to give love? How do you like to receive love?

Define the three types of love: Eros, Philia, Agape.

2. Give examples of how you can display love for your spouse in each of these three areas.
3. What are the hindrances in your relationship to developing love and continuing to grow?
4. What can you do to reinforce the behaviors from your spouse that you enjoy?
5. What expectations do you have for each other in marriage?
6. What disappointments have you had in your relationship?
7. How have your own parents influenced your attitude toward marriage?
8. Something from your parents' marriage that you want to have in yours' is... Something from your parents' marriage that you do not want to have in yours' is...
9. What are some similarities and differences in your family upbringing to each other?

Session 3

“Communication and Conflict”

1. Define listening.

Every message has three components: Content (7%), Tone (38%), Nonverbal (55%). Discuss.

There are five levels of communication:

Level Five: Cliche conversation.

Level Four: Reporting the facts about others.

Level Three: My ideals and judgments.

Level Two: My feelings or emotions.

Level One: Complete emotional and personal communication.

2. At what level do you and your spouse communicate usually?
3. What does “completely resolved” mean to you?
4. What are some of the issues you and your spouse disagree on that do not need to be completely resolved?

Read and discuss James 4:1-3. Proverbs 19:11

5. Describe a recent or current conflict between you and your spouse.
6. What do you believe caused the conflict? What was the outcome? What did it accomplish?
7. How did you create or contribute to the conflict?
8. If you could go through the same conflict again, how would you handle it?
9. What is your usual style for dealing with conflicts?

Session 4

“Roles and Responsibilities”

1. In marriage a wife should... In marriage a husband should...

Read Ephesians 5:21-33

2. According to Ephesians 5:33, what should the wife's attitude be toward her husband? What does this mean in everyday life?
3. What does the word submission mean to you?
4. What is the man's role in marriage?
5. What are the ways in which Christ loved the church? Relate this to the way in which the husband should love his wife.
6. What unique gifts and abilities do each of you bring into this marriage?

Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 12:14-26.

7. What procedure do you follow when a major decision has to be made?
8. I'm afraid to make decisions when...
9. I want to make decisions in the area of...
10. I want my spouse to make decisions in the area of...

Session 5

“Tough Issues in Marriage”

Read and discuss Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; and Ephesians 5:31.

1. How do your parents feel about your spouse?
2. Are there any emotional issues with your parents that interfere with your relationship to your spouse?
3. What would you consider interference by your in-laws?
4. Describe how and where you like to spend your Thanksgiving and Christmas.
5. What new things could you say or do that would let your parents and your in-laws know they are important to you?
6. In the next 10 to 20 years, what type of help will your parents or your spouse's parents need from you?

Rate yourself on your money from the following questions:

1. How do you feel about the amount of money you make?
2. If your income were doubled, how would that affect your life? Cut in half?
4. Do you and your spouse tend to agree or disagree on money issues?
5. Do you save a portion of your money every year?
6. Do you have a household budget?

Session 6

“Spiritual Life Together”

1. What did your parents believe about God, Jesus, church, prayer, the Bible?
2. What is your definition of being spiritually alive?
3. What is your best experience in church? Worst experience?
4. What has been the greatest spiritual experience of your life?
5. If you could ask God any questions now, what would they be?
6. When you pray, what do you pray about?
7. During marriage do you want to pray together? If so, how often?
8. Do you want to read a devotional together or separately?
9. How frequently do you want to attend church?
10. How do you see you and your spouse serving Christ together?

Pray for each other.

Appendix I

Last Name: _____ Date: _____

Marriage Connection Pre-Class Survey

1-----5-----10
Not at All Sometimes Mostly

1. Do you have love in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Are you patient with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Are you kind with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do you have humility in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Are you generous with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you have peace in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Do you encourage one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Can you tell each other the truth?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Are you committed to each other?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Do you feel hopeful about your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Last Name: _____ Date: _____

Marriage Connection Post-Class Survey

1-----5-----10
Not at All Sometimes Mostly

1. Do you have love in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Are you patient with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Are you kind with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do you have humility in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Are you generous with one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you have peace in your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Do you encourage one another?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Can you tell each other the truth?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Are you committed to each other?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Do you feel hopeful about your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix J

Mentor Application Form

His Name: _____ Her Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

His Phone: _____ Her Phone: _____

His E-mail: _____ Her E-mail: _____

Wedding Anniversary Date: _____

Children? Y N If yes, please provide ages and gender.

How motivated are you to become a marriage mentor?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What concerns or fears do you have about becoming a marriage mentor?

How would you rate your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What will make you a good marriage mentor?

Appendix K

Marriage Mentee Application Form

His Name: _____ Her Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

His Phone: _____ Her Phone: _____

His Email: _____ Her Email: _____

Wedding Anniversary Date: _____

Children: Y N If yes, provide ages and gender:

How would you rate your marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How are you hoping that a marriage mentor couple could help you?

Do you have any scheduling preferences?

Appendix L

Marriage Mentoring Report Form for the Mentor Couple

Date: _____

Your Names: _____

Names of Your Mentor Couple: _____

How many times did you meet with your mentee couple?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How would you rate your mentoring relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How helpful were you as a mentor couple?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What was the greatest challenge to mentoring this couple?

Scheduling Childcare

Chemistry Insecurity

Other _____

What could we do to make this mentoring process better?

What would you like us to know about your mentoring experience?

Appendix M

Marriage Mentoring Report Form for the Mentee Couple

Date: _____

Your Names: _____

Names of your Mentor Couple: _____

How many times have you met with your mentor couple?

How beneficial was this mentoring relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likely are you in continuing this mentoring relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Which one aspect of your marriage was most improved by this experience?

Finances Parenting

Communication Conflict Resolution

Other: _____

What would you like us to know about your mentoring experience?

Appendix N

Marriage Conference Survey

Conference Evaluation

Are you attending as (check all that apply) ☐ pre-married
☐ married, (stepfamily)
Select which type:
☐ 1st Marriage for both
☐ remarriage for one
☐ remarriage for both
☐ married (first marriage, not a stepfamily)

Date married (wedding date if engaged): ____/____/____ ☐ male ☐ female

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Spouse or fiancé (first & last, only if different) _____

Age range: ☐ 29 and under ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60 and over

Do you have children? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so how many? _____

Are his? _____ Ages _____
Are hers? _____ Ages _____
Are ours? _____ Ages _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Church name _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Does your church have a stepfamily ministry? ☐ Yes ☐ No Do they have a marriage ministry? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How would you rate the Building a Successful Stepfamily Conference? poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent

How likely would you be to invite a friend to attend a Stepfamily Conference? not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 likely

What would you tell a friend about the event?

Did the event meet your expectations? ☐ Yes ☐ No if no, why not?

If there was one question you could ask the speaker, what would it be?

Would you like to receive e-mail communications from FamilyLife concerning blended family ministries? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Email address: _____



Appendix O

Biblical Marriage Counseling Goals and Focus Form

Biblical Marriage Counseling Goals and Focus Form

- Couple's Name: _____
- 1. What are the top 2 or 3 areas in **your** heart, actions, attitude, and way of relating to your spouse that **you** want help changing so that you can be more Christlike and your marriage can be more Christ-honoring?
- 2. What are the top 2 or 3 strengths that you see in **your spouse** that you want to affirm?
- 3. What are the top 2 or 3 aspects of **your marriage** that you want help changing so that your marriage can be more Christ-honoring?
- 4. Let's create an **Ephesians 3:14-21** vision for your marriage (please read Ephesians 3:14-21).
 - a. Think ahead 3 months. As God does exceedingly, abundantly above all that you could ask or imagine in your heart and in your marriage, what **2 or 3 amazing changes** are you envisioning, praying for, and hoping for?
 - b. What **needs to happen** in **your heart** and in **your relationship** so that through Christ's strength these amazing changes start occurring?
- 5. What else do you want us to know, think about, or focus on in our times together?

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