LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT

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En cherchant de la sagesse, on sait bien qu’on ne le trouverait pas. Car, Dieu nous a créé hommes faibles, et autant qu’on pense d’avoir trouvé la sagesse, on trouve que c’est faux. Mais de quelle que manière, nous avons la capacité d’apprendre que il-y-a des choses qui sont meilleurs que des autres choses et vouloir les saisir. Le pis, c’est de ne pas tenter à faire une chose pour crainte de l’échec. De toute manière, J’ai essayé. J’ai écrit cette ouvre d’abord pour moi-même, puis pour tout le monde. Si il-y-a des problèmes la dedans, c’est ma faute. Mais, si vous trouvez quelque chose de bien en cette ouvre, louez Dieu et pas moi. Je prie que Le Bon Dieu bénisse vos mariages, et que vous aimez les uns les autres comme Jésus Christ vous a aimés.

Auteur

iii
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THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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ABSTRACT

MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS

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Mentor: Dr. Charles Davidson Reader: Dr. Scott Hawkins

Christians use spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and journaling as methods to enhance their relationship with God. However, Christian rates of divorce are not different than the United States average where more than one in three first marriages ends in divorce. This is despite a Christian belief that marriage is a special relationship. The rate of divorce among Christians should be reduced. Marriage can be practiced as a spiritual discipline that will benefit the relationship as well as yielding sought after spirituality. Marriage as a spiritual discipline would help couples increase marital satisfaction, thus driving down the divorce rate. A survey on marriage attitudes and needs given to random adults will expose areas of marital agreement and discord. Principles of practicing marriage as a spiritual practice can be shown through survey, case studies, and analysis of existing data.

Abstract length: 139 words.
LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

ANOVA analysis of variance

AVP Arginine Vasopressin, also called ADH Antidiuretic Hormone

EFT Emotionally Focused couples Therapy

fMRI functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MATLAB® is a high-level language and interactive environment for numerical computation, visualization, and programming. It is a product of MathWorks, Inc.

VTA Ventral Tegmental Area
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................v
LIST OF ABREVIATIONS ...............................................................................................vi
INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................1

A Short History of Marriage ...................................................................................1
Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................8
Statement of Limitations .........................................................................................9
Theoretical Basis ...................................................................................................12
Methodology .........................................................................................................14
Review of Literature .............................................................................................16

Books ........................................................................................................16
Dissertations/Theses .................................................................................19
Journal and Magazine Articles ..................................................................22
Scriptures Review .....................................................................................23

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH .............................................................................................26

Survey Design Rational ......................................................................................27
Survey Process ......................................................................................................33
Survey Question Overview ..................................................................................34
Survey Data Handling ............................................................................................36
Survey Analysis ....................................................................................................36

CHAPTER 2: PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS ..............................................................52

First Principle ........................................................................................................55
INTRODUCTION

A Short History of Marriage

Marriage is a well-recognized human institution that has been practiced for as long as man can understand.\(^1\) Historically there have been several methods of finding a marriage partner such as capture, marriage by consideration or price, and marriage arranged by families. Marriage partners understood the family and cultural expectations of their marital roles and responsibilities which provided a framework for cooperation. While not perfect, these methods benefited early societies by forming kinship bonds and peace-making opportunities. This was beneficial to the tribal nature of society, especially when considering demographic factors such as high mortality and morbidity rates. Economic factors, social customs, and sometimes basic survival worked to keep couples together. Marriage was a part of the cultural and religious duties and expectations that were taught to children. Social and religious customs developed to help meet the needs of the marriage partners.

These methods are still practiced in several parts of the world, but have been abandoned in most developed countries. Ideas of marriage for romance and love have taken over the thought of western societies. For example, Victorian era ideas of love and romance had an impact on how marriage partners were selected. Modern era prosperity and mobility has given single people greater economic choices that do not mandate marriage. Postmodern thought has resulted in a decoupling of marriage from religious duties, or commitment. One result is that basic needs of the marriage partners are not being met. A result of this situation is a high level of marital

dissatisfaction and a rising divorce rate.

Marital problems and divorce were seen as social problems and so social models were developed to address the problem. Therapeutic methods such as premarital and marital counseling have had limited success. Legal models such as no-fault divorce and covenant marriage have aggravated the problems by addressing symptoms and not the root causes. Social services have subsidized broken marriages, and in some cases, give financial incentives to divorce. The benefits of these efforts have proven ephemeral.

Using the divorce rate as a metric, social methods have not given the hoped for results. Instead of stability, marriages have approached a fifty percent failure rate.² Fathers have been driven from the home and vilified as the problem by a radicalized feminist view of family. Fathers are often jailed as “dead beats” because of impossible debt imposed by a biased family court system. This situation was inevitable because of the financial incentives created by the divorce industry and the uncompassionate nature of bureaucracies. As Mary McCarthy said, “Bureaucracy, the rule of no one, has become the modern form of despotism.”³ Families will remain dysfunctional because that dysfunction serves the bureaucratic system of family law, social services, and other appendages of the divorce industry.

While Christian couples have a strong understanding of marriage, they are not immune to marital problems. It is a frustrating paradox that those who hold marriage in high esteem would be as vulnerable as the rest of the population. The causes are complex because of the wide geographic and sociopolitical demographics among those who identify as Christians. However it


is generally accepted that marital problems have many negative effects on Christian couples, their children, and extended family.\textsuperscript{4} Divorce seems to aggravate marital tensions in couples that are close to the divorcees and serve as negative role models.

For Christian clergy marital problems can have an even greater impact on their lives. They can suffer the same things as other religious people, but marital problems can lead to ministry failure and immediate job loss. This failure can have destructive effects on church members and organizations. Clergy tend to be held up as examples for the local church and their failings are judged by tougher standards. Members can adopt the negative attitude that if a member of the clergy cannot keep a marriage together they have no hope for their own marriages.\textsuperscript{5} Members can also see clergy failings as permission to engage in similar behavior including divorce.

Protestant clergy has been found to have higher levels of occupational stress compared to leaders of other faiths or denominations.\textsuperscript{6} In a study of clergy health conducted by the United Methodist Church, the incidence of chronic health conditions had increased among clergy.\textsuperscript{7} In a subgroup of United Methodist clergy depression was prevalent; nine percent of the respondents reported depressive symptoms in the preceding two weeks. This was higher than the national


\textsuperscript{7} General Board of Pension and Health Benefits and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, \textit{Church Systems Task Force Report}, (May 2011).
average of six percent of respondents. Clergy ranked the need for access to mental health counseling among their top three desired health programs. Stress has a negative impact on the clergy’s ability to function and is a large factor in burnout.

Depression does have biological causes, but can also be a result of stress. In one study, African American clergy discussed several factors as promoting depression, such as society’s materialistic influence and the dysfunction and failure of families. Rising professional and personal expectations leading to longer work hours and less time for self-care are also significant problems. There can be hesitancy on the part of some clergy to ask for help. Participants in the study indicated they would be more willing to engage in treatment if the knowledge of their treatment was private or if only friends and family had knowledge. Fear for professional and personal status was associated with the larger community knowing about treatment. African Americans tend to prefer counseling over medication and are more interested in receiving spiritual counsel from clergy. Pastors who are able to utilize their spiritual expertise, but to also refer when needed proved to be extremely effective service providers. This spiritual component in marriage counseling is important, but has not been fully explored.

Historically Christians have used spiritual disciplines to enhance their relationship with


God. A spiritual discipline is some religious activity that a person regularly engages in on an ongoing basis. Disciplines include activities like prayer, meditation, fasting, and journaling, but can also include everyday acts such as meals, or work activities. When traditional Christian spiritual practices were given less emphasis there was a migration to the spiritual practices of the East such as Zen or various Hindu practices. This happened about the same time as the rise of the sexual revolution and the divorce rate. Spiritual disciplines were overshadowed by models of therapy and self-help that may have alleviated some symptoms, but did nothing for spiritual satisfaction.

Spiritual disciplines are not supposed to be a burden, but something that enhances the practitioner’s relational experience with the transcendent. The relational aspect of spiritual disciplines is important; an example is communal worship. However many practitioners turn their focus inward to the exclusion of those around them. Hermetic lifestyles may have their place within spiritual disciplines, but are not compatible with marriage. An inward focus can leave a spouse feeling alone, or left out and lead to marital problems.

Marital problems lead to a loss of spirituality and a vicious cycle of disappointment and resentment. Because religious couples tend to see marriage as a covenant before God and the church, marital problems bring into question belief in the basis of the institution. Some people hold the idea that a marriage is solid because it was solemnized in a church or by a member of the clergy. Religious people suffering marital problems can feel betrayed by their belief in marriage as a divine institution. The divorce rate among Christians is one consequence of a failure of couples to find marital and spiritual happiness.

The concern for marriage precedes World War II with marriage preparation and
education. The first program was developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932. Nine years later, the Philadelphia Marriage Council established a standardized program for the purpose of helping couples gain “a better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties.” Father Patrick Peyton, a Roman Catholic priest, started the Family Rosary Crusade in 1942 as a way to strengthen families by encouraging them to say the rosary prayer together on a regular basis. Father Peyton’s crusade was developed into a radio program and then into television. The program’s slogan, “The family that prays together, stays together,” was created by Al Scalrone, a professional commercial-writer and was apparently first broadcast on 6 March 1947 during the radio program, “Family Theater of the Air.” These early efforts were the catalyst for other denominations to develop their own programs.

The idea is that family activities will enhance the marital pair bond and bring satisfaction to the couple. This may work by bringing the couple into a situation where they will cooperate for a common goal. The results of these efforts are hard to gauge. The divorce rate is dependent on the failure of the pair bond because one or both partners have needs that are not being met. According to Dr. Harley, when needs go unfulfilled in a marriage then there will be a search for


fulfillment outside of the marriage. There is a possibility that a new bond will form with the person meeting the need and this will eventually lead to a breakdown of the marriage.\textsuperscript{17}

Marriages should start with a strong pair bond based in the couple meeting each other’s needs. The attachment that couples feel for each other gives satisfaction. Marital satisfaction can lead to greater feelings of attachment to God. The point is that the marriage itself should be based in the discipline of the couple meeting each other’s created needs. Joy in marriage will benefit spiritual satisfaction and attachment to God.

Marriage as a spiritual discipline to increase marital satisfaction brings the idea of joy to the discussion. Gary Thomas has proposed that marriage can be practiced as a discipline to accept marital difficulties as a way to increase spirituality and a relationship with God.\textsuperscript{18} This can be a valid approach, but marriage does not have to be a burden. The insight here is that instead of concentrating on traditional spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and journaling, the focus should be on meeting the needs of the marriage partner. When the other person’s needs are met there will be increased feelings of love and an increase in marital satisfaction.\textsuperscript{19} Marriage as a discipline should improve marital and spiritual satisfaction within the couple pair bond, and increased marital satisfaction should drive down the divorce rate.


\textsuperscript{19} Harley, \textit{His Needs, Her Needs}, 181.
Statement of the Problem

The problem is how to bring together the two seemingly different goals of marital and spiritual satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is seen as an earthly pursuit; spiritual satisfaction is a pursuit of the transcendent. If marriage is understood as something ordained by the Creator, then it becomes easier to accept, not only that the two can be related, but that they are in fact different facets of the creation. Addressing the problem naturally raises several questions that helps lead to a resolution.

Marriage is usually held to be a lifelong commitment with most couples making vows to stay married until the death of a spouse. According to the United States Census Bureau, however, that is not the reality, with approximately one half divorcing.\(^{20}\) This raises the question of the perception of marriage among the general population. Is marriage a lifetime commitment or is it something else? Is it only a legal requirement or does it have religious connotations?

According to Knutson and Olson, around seventy-five percent of first marriages will be solemnized in a church.\(^{21}\) Many churches teach the benefits of spiritual disciplines to their members, and many churches may require that couples take a formal premarital preparation class before any marriage is solemnized by them. There are many couples, however, that became active for the first time in a denomination or returned to one when their children were of an age for religious education. They may not have had the benefits of premarital counseling or education about spiritual disciplines. Are religious couples willing to practice marriage as a


spirtual discipline?

Couples that have been married for a long time have been sought out as mentors for those who are newly married. This need is understood by parents for their own children, but is also a need for young married couples who have been dislocated from their nuclear families. Couples that have been married for long periods are understood to have learned from the school of hard knocks certain insights into what makes a successful marriage. What benefit do couples that have approached marital duties as a religious duty, or discipline claim for their marriages?

**Statement of Limitations**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the principles and benefits that living marriage as a spiritual discipline can provide. The survey will examine the attitudes towards marriage, the willingness of married people to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline, and what spiritual benefits married couples feel they gained from marriage. The size of the sample is expected to provide meaningful results, but the population surveyed may not adequately represent all possible attitudes.

This thesis is directed towards a Christian audience; however, the methods of practicing marriage are generic to the general human condition and can be practiced by anyone. This does not affect the principles, but only the purpose of why a couple practices them. From a religious perspective, the needs that all humans have were designed by God. If the reader wants to believe that such needs are designed by something else, that belief does not negate those basic needs or the way that they are fulfilled in marriage. For example, couples who believe in Atheism can apply this material to their marriage, although there will be no spiritual benefit.
Marriage practiced as a spiritual discipline is not a panacea for marital problems, nor is it a nostrum. It is only presented as another tool that can be used by religious couples and clergy to both strengthen their marriage and increase spirituality. A spiritual discipline could bring an unbeliever to a belief in God, but it is better understood as a method for a believer to feel closer to God. The various needs to be practiced are well known to bring couples closer, but they are not specifically tied to religion, and can be practiced by those who are not religious. The difference is the purpose and starting point for a practice. The religious person engages the discipline to both increase marital satisfaction and to enhance spirituality. The person who is not religious can engage in the same behavior, but for other reasons such as love of their spouse. There also may be circumstances where the attempt to practice marriage as a discipline would be harmful to the couple.²²

Intimate Partner Violence and associated mental health problems are limitations.²³ It has been noted that “bilaterally violent couples also experienced more jealousy and psychological aggression and less relationship satisfaction than either group of unilaterally violent couples.”²⁴ No couple can expect to have any type of marital satisfaction as long as there is any type of violence or coercion. Violence and other forms of abuse must end before there can be any movement. This means that there are certain steps that an individual and couple must first take before they can start on marriage as a discipline. The issues that must first be resolved, or at least


understood can include health issues, including mental health, but are not limited to the ones listed here. Anything that would prevent or impede an individual or couple from freely practicing marriage would be an area of concern.

The primary idea of a spiritual discipline is to bring someone who already has faith closer to God. The practice of a discipline depends on the ability of the individual to maintain that discipline, and for those without self-control there is little chance of them benefitting from this thesis. It is possible for someone to develop greater self-control, and that is something that should be encouraged. This is a matter of choice and not something that can be imposed.

Marriage as a spiritual discipline may not prevent problems or divorce. Marital difficulties can develop from many different stressors and, when those are not within the control of an individual, there may be need for professional intervention to resolve the issues. Professional intervention can help define and quantify problems so that an individual or couples know what they are facing. This allows for both understanding and accommodation as is practical according to the situation. There may be unforeseen factors that will come to light which can also impact the couple’s relationship. For example, there can be issues of past abuse, or scripts from the families of origin, or conflicting traditions.\textsuperscript{25} These are not necessarily things that would stop the couple in their pursuit of a stronger, closer marriage, but are things that need to be understood and managed so that they do not become major issues or points of contention.

A marriage that is already suffering may not be saved by adopting marriage as a spiritual discipline. For example, the partners might say that they are committed, but secretly they are planning divorce. This also means that if a marriage partner has already procured a lawyer and is

not willing to abandon legal action, then not much can be done for that couple. Suspicion and distrust also work against couples in an antagonistic relationship. There must first be a resolution of underlying conflict to save the marriage before the marriage can be enriched.

Theoretical Basis

Marriage is a natural condition rooted in human biology where heterosexual couples pair bond in the attempt to have children. Humans are among the five percent of mammals that have a monogamous social structure and bi-parental care of offspring.\(^{26}\) Functional magnetic resonance imaging, (fMRI) gives evidence consistent with the hypothesis that reward and neuropeptide circuits are involved in human pair bonding.\(^{27}\) The study was primarily focused on the neurobiology of mating-induced, heterosexual pair bonds. It should be considered that other types of social bonds, including family and close friendships might use some of the same neurobiological mechanisms.

Despite religious and social roles and expectations of marital life, there are certain natural basic human needs that can be fulfilled in marriage. Willard F. Harley, Jr., is a psychologist, who is concerned at the failure of marriage counseling to prevent divorce, and wrote “His Needs, Her Needs: How to Have an Affair Proof Marriage.”\(^{28}\) He studied the reasons for marital conflict and dissatisfaction and came to the understanding that they are both the results of unfulfilled needs. When the needs of a married person are fulfilled by a spouse then there will be feelings of love


and togetherness. When needs go unfilled then there is conflict, bitterness, and distancing. This leads to a search outside of the pair bond for the fulfillment of those needs and this can lead to affairs of an emotional, or sexual, nature.

The question becomes one of striving to meet the other person’s needs to promote marital happiness and eliminate the desire to seek fulfillment elsewhere. This can become the basis for a spiritual practice that brings the couple closer together, both emotionally and spiritually. This differs from the idea of Gary Thomas who sees marriage as a call to holiness more than happiness. He asks the question, “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” While this approach may benefit certain people, it would be reasonable to think that most people want marriage to bring happiness, not suffering. Marriage as a spiritual discipline would be a way to encourage the joy that can be found in a healthy marriage.

The theoretical basis of marriage as a discipline is based in the existing methods and practices that can lead to marital satisfaction and closeness in the couple. If these can be practiced as a regular discipline it would help the couple achieve both marital and spiritual fulfillment. For example, a person feeling stress in marriage could go off alone and pray about the stress, which may or may not help; or, the person could engage the spouse and use collaborative problem-solving to resolve the issue to their mutual satisfaction.

Attachment theory supports the thesis. When a person moves to secure attachment then

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30 Gary, Sacred Marriage, 13.

there can be a better relationship with a spouse and a more spiritual relationship with God.\textsuperscript{32}

Needs and marital satisfaction are linked to couples’ attachment. Attachment to God also meets an inner need which is expressed in worship and feelings of being connected to the transcendent. Needs met in one area of life allow the individual the opportunity to explore other needs from a safe place. Since man and woman were created to be companions equal to each other, then it is acceptable to understand that marriage as ordained by the Creator can be spiritually fulfilling.

In addition to the general hypotheses about practicing marriage as a spiritual discipline, a general rationale for the study is to provide data that would prove useful to therapists, and other professionals, who work with religious couples. The therapist who has no appreciation for religious tradition and the important interplay between psychological and spiritual health, or the unique place that sexuality may play in the life of a religious couple, may be less than effective or even counterproductive. In addition, it is expected that health professionals, educators, and consultants, who work with religious clientele would benefit from information regarding the practice of marriage as a spiritual discipline.

**Methodology**

The research protocol uses a survey that will be presented at random by the researcher at various locations.\textsuperscript{33} Responses by no-less-than one hundred individuals are needed to gather a minimum relevant statistical sample. The survey is designed to provide data that can be used to

\textsuperscript{32} T. Clinton and J. Straub, *God Attachment: Why We Believe, Act, and Feel the Way We Do About God*, (Nashville, TN: Howard 2010).

assess marriage attitudes and needs. Comments made by the survey respondents may be noted and reported in the thesis. Basic statistical details will be gathered such as age and gender, but the survey will be anonymous. Research published in journals and books that address marital needs and attachment will also be presented with the survey results. Published research is the result of studies conducted by professionals and institutions.

The Introduction looks at some history of marriage and some of the effects that marital conflict can have on an individual’s spiritual well-being. This naturally leads to the rationale for marriage as a spiritual discipline.

The first chapter presents the survey questions rationale, an overview of the data and an analysis. The data will be evaluated and conclusions drawn in the areas noted in the survey: marital attitudes, willingness, and the benefits that couples claim for their marriages.

Chapter two compares and contrasts conclusions drawn from the project survey to conclusions drawn from the research of others. Results of the project survey and the various claims of related research will support the proposition marriage can be practiced as a spiritual discipline. The resulting benefits to the individual and couple will be explored.

Chapter three is a discussion of the various points in the research and an expansion on the research results. Principles for marriage as a spiritual discipline are discussed. Benefits to the principles and examples for possible use are given.

Chapter four provides an overview of the project from inception to completion. Some conclusions are formulated to the potential benefits to marriage and spirituality if pastors would recommend the practice in churches. Recommendations for how marriage can be practiced as a spiritual discipline will be examined. How and why additional research would be helpful will
also be explored.

What benefit do couples that approached marital duties as a religious duty, or discipline claim for their marriages? What have couples been doing that has helped their marriages over time, and can these be translated into the disciplines that couples should practice? What are the basic practices that couples should concentrate on that form the foundation for a happy marriage? Finally, there may be a need for a person to resolve the conflicts of present relationship style and move to secure attachment.

A Review of the Literature

Books

The literature contrasting the benefits of being married with being divorced has been studied and documented. However, the idea of marriage as a spiritual discipline has not received much attention. Gary Thomas wrote, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* His idea is to treat the difficulties and suffering that can occur in marriage as the discipline to improve one's relationship with God.

The information of what couples need to practice is well documented. Willard F. Harley, Jr. wrote his book, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, to explain what he discovered about what really causes a couple to love each other. As a psychologist he was

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bothered by the failure of professional marriage counseling to keep couples together and investigated what was responsible for marital happiness. He realized that people had needs which, when fulfilled by another person, caused feelings of love to develop. It is the practice of meeting a spouse’s needs that should be the basis for the discipline in a marriage.

Les and Leslie Parrott’s wrote, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before–And After–You Marry*. They raise many of the same ideas as Harley; however, the Parrots’ book expresses these ideas form a different perspective. This book is of greater usefulness in premarital situations. Because it discusses marriage from both the wife’s and husband’s perspective, it allows an opportunity for gender identification of the readers.

John Gottman, a psychologist, spent twenty years studying what makes marriages last. He published his results in a book, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail and How You Can Make Yours Last*. He developed a method to predict with ninety-four percent accuracy whether a couple would stay together. He realized that the key to a lasting marriage were conflict resolution skills.

Susan Heitler wrote, *From Conflict to Resolution: Strategies for Diagnosis and Treatment of Distressed Individuals, Couples, and Families*. Dr. Heitler a practicing psychologist, lays out methods based on her experience to help couples cooperate and work out the problems in their relationships.

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their problems. Helping couples reach a place where they can solve their own problems is the goal of therapy. She also wrote, *The Power of Two: Secrets of a Strong and Loving Marriage*.\(^{40}\) This book builds on Dr. Heitler’s experiences and insights in working with couples.

*Why don’t we listen better? Communicating and connecting in relationships,* was written by James C. Petersen.\(^{41}\) This book gives an effective approach to couples to learn how to communicate with each other. Effective communication helps to avoid conflict and encourages cooperation. Communication is facilitated by using the talker/listener card and brings the ability to listen to even difficult situations.

Mike and Trisha Fox bring a slightly different approach with, *Marriage for Today: A Practical Guide for Couples*.\(^{42}\) While some ideas are timeless, their presentation can help or hinder the reader. This book is useful when addressing certain audiences.

Esther Perel, a practicing psychologist wrote, *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*.\(^{43}\) This book is important not only for introducing the idea of erotic intelligence, but for its practical understanding of certain dynamics in relationships. Whether the reader agrees with the author or not, there are certain situations that will reveal themselves when working with couples that the effective practitioner needs to understand.


Dissertation/Theses

Allen Lee Tilley’s dissertation is entitled, *Equipping husbands and wives to develop spiritual disciplines.* The point of this author is that couples can be brought closer together if they can jointly practice a spiritual discipline. He understood the discipline as one of the many historical practices. The importance of this dissertation is the idea of a spiritual discipline aiding marriage.

John Julian Jackson wrote, *Developing Joint Spiritual Practices for Couples.* The author used the Myers-Briggs type indicator as the basis to produce a joint spiritual discipline that the couple could practice together. The purpose was to bring the couple closer together and closer to God. The joint spiritual practice was focused on something other than the couple.

Mark A. Kramer’s thesis, *A Small Group Seven-week Teaching and Discussion on Principles in Building a Healthy and Strong Marriage,* is useful as a guide to teaching couples. While it is possible to engage more couples in a large group setting, small groups give the intimate atmosphere that allows for questions to be answered and ideas shared between couples.

Larry R. Thornton wrote, *A Biblical Approach to Establishing Marital Intimacy.* It was the desire of the author to establish a marriage enrichment program which is based on the model


of God and his message. This approach is compatible with spirituality and disciplines.

Ronald Lee Beck wrote *Effective Blended Family Ministry in the 21st Century Church.* With high divorce rates and remarriage there is a greater need to understand the dynamics of blended families. This is especially true when it comes to the impact that remarriage has on relationships. Existing relationships bring extra pressure on the ability to pair bond. This was the first and most important fact discovered by the author and was considered the most critical element.

Scott Harold Vail, *Reducing the Divorce Rate Among Christians in America: Premarital Counseling a Prerequisite for Marriage.* He points out that according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, for 2008, the divorce rate in America is nearly fifty percent. As a remedy he proposes that the church should require a formal premarital program as a prerequisite for marriage. The expected result would be fewer divorces and an increase in marital satisfaction. Resources formerly consumed by counseling and ministering to troubled marriages and families would be available to minister in other areas.

Erroyl McGinty, Jr. *Living out Love in Marriage: Learning and Applying Four Types of Love to Sustain Marriage.* The practical use for this thesis is in a couples’ ministry, a distressed marriage, premarital and marital counseling, or a couple looking to tune-up their marriage through understanding the principles of living out love in their marriage. He examines and

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explains what he sees as the four components of love: Feelings and Physical Love (Eros), Action and Service (Philia), Commitment and Covenant (Storge), and God’s Love (Agape).

Katherine A. Forkner, *And Do You Take This Stranger To Be Your Lawfully Wedded Wife? The Usefulness of Social Penetration Theory within Premarital Counseling.* She investigates the function of social penetration theory within premarital counseling programs. The research was designed to address three questions: (1) Do engaged couples believe they know the depth and breadth of their partner adequately enough to be prepared for marriage after receiving premarital counseling? (2) Do counselors indirectly support the basic premise of social penetration theory by actively using strategies to help engaged partners reveal important aspects of the breadth and depth of their personalities before entering into marriage? (3) What areas of deficiency do counselors and couples find exist in current premarital counseling programs in regards to reaching an intimate depth and breadth of each partner’s personality?

Connie Carter Gardner, *Stigma and the Acceptability of Depression Treatments Among African American Clergy.* Marital difficulties among clergy are one reason for ministry failure. The best approach is to obviate marital problems before they can become too hard to overcome. The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to investigate stigma associated with depression treatments and to approximate its association with treatment acceptability among African American Clergy.

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Journal and Magazine Articles

Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse in an article about spiritual direction in *The Journal of Pastoral Care* said that “Spiritual disciplines undertaken without motivation not only do not help, but often are actively counter-productive, since they degenerate so easily into mere stimulants of guilt or else breed cynicism and hypocrisy.”\(^5^3\) This touches on the motivations of both spouses and is a warning that if not carefully approached for the right reasons there could be negative results. However, marriage as a discipline can be practiced by one person. The love dare is a case in point.\(^5^4\)

Sarah Murray, and Robin Milhausen wrote, “Factors impacting women’s sexual desire: Examining long-term relationships in emerging adulthood,” in *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*. They noted that women in the study indicated that intimate communication helped them to feel sexual desire; however ineffective communication decreased desire. They noted that Perel raises the idea of “bilingual intimacy” where couples communicate in non-verbal ways. They propose that the desire of women might be enhanced if they can recognize how a partner signifies love and affection, beyond verbal intimacy.\(^5^5\)

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Scripture Review

The scriptures are rich with references to marriage. Marriage is ordained by God and divorce is shown to be something that God does not like. The practice of marriage as a spiritual discipline is not in conflict with these scriptures as the discipline brings the individual closer to God by strengthening what God established.

Genesis 1:27-28 establishes marriage as an act between a man and woman based in the attempt to have children. This is understood as a fulfillment of the first command to all life to multiply and replenish the earth. Genesis 2:24 shows that marriage involves sexual union; this is also supported by 1 Corinthians 7:2-4, and Hebrews 13:4. Genesis 2:24 also shows that marriage involves companionship, which is supported by Proverbs 5:18-19.

Matthew 19:6 proclaims marriage as a condition that is established by God. Jesus also reinforces the understanding that this involves sexual union between the man and woman. Marriage is a natural institution that pre-exists governments and legal attempts at definition. This was the understanding of marriage until recent political actions.

Romans 7:2 states that marriage is a lifelong commitment and mentions the Roman civil marriage law. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 also talks about the widows who can remarry. Marriage is also monogamous, “each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.” 1 Corinthians 7:2 also states that this is how God created Adam and Eve.

Polygyny for the king was warned against in Deuteronomy 17:17. Polygyny is having many wives. Polygamy is having many spouses either male or female. Polyandry is having many husbands. Examples of polygyny are recorded in the Bible. Examples of polyandry can be found
in the region of northern India.\textsuperscript{56} There have been a few examples of true polygamy, but these are exceptions to what must be considered normal human marriage, that is one man and one woman. 1 Kings 11:1-9 talks about Solomon’s religious failures that occurred from practicing polygyny because he allowed his foreign wives to engage in their native religious practices.

Malachi 2:16 tells us that divorce falls short of God’s ideal. God said that he hates divorce. Matthew 19:9 also says that divorce is not permissible for every cause. The problem of divorce is not new, but our understanding of what makes a long lasting relationship can change the divorce dynamic.

Ephesians 5: 28, is a prescription for husbands; “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” This is continued in verse 5: 33; “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” It is interesting to note that respect or admiration is one of a man’s needs according to Dr. Harley.\textsuperscript{57} The theme of love is also seen in Titus 2: 4; “so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children.”

1 Corinthians 11:9-11 “created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the LORD, however, woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless.


\textsuperscript{57} Harley, \textit{His Needs, Her Needs}, 187.
Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

1 Corinthians 7:2-5, "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer."

1 Corinthians 7:32-34. “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.”
CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH

Marriage practiced as a discipline is for spiritual enhancement; however, the goal is to have a strong marriage as the basis for the spirituality.\(^1\) Because marriage is common to the human condition the basis for a strong marriage should cut across cultural and religious boundaries and should be measureable. The challenge is to formulate a survey that can be used across the spectrum of marital conditions and religious backgrounds while still delivering useful information.\(^2\)

The survey should encourage candid answers and not influence or bias those responses. The direct approach where respondents are asked what they think or feel about a subject is the typical method used by many researchers. For this thesis project asking for specific information about marriage as a spiritual discipline was tested and found to bias the responses. Particularly, the response to the thesis title of marriage as a spiritual discipline was shown to produce both strong positive and negative feelings.\(^3\) This direct approach seemed less than satisfactory in discovering what should be basic to all humans no matter what their beliefs. A new survey was designed that would test for marital attitudes and needs in a neutral manner. A goal of the survey was to test ideas of previous researchers and to measure areas that need attention by spouses.


Survey Design Rationale

The survey was designed to test and measure marriage attitudes and compatibility. For example, it asked each gender to rank typical marital needs. Statistical information was gathered as anonymously as possible. Several problems needed to be avoided such as the classic Dunning-Kruger effect where the incompetence of the person responding causes the respondent to overestimate performance. This could cause answers to a question about the state of a respondent’s marriage to be better than they really are. Another problem is bias introduced by asking narrow category questions that cannot possibly cover all responses. Some respondents will be happy with the categories provided while others will be unhappy to check “other.” This is especially true when questions of religion or denomination are used.

Design included the criterion to avoid demand characteristics which are anything that makes the participants aware of what the experimenter expects to discover. Demand characteristics can possibly change the experiment’s outcome because participants might change their answers to conform to the investigator’s expectations. Experimental methods such as natural observation and deception studies have been developed to avoid problems. Natural observation looks at behavior as it occurs in a natural setting. Deception studies are when a participant is told the researcher is looking for something other than what is of real interest. In the study survey, the title and instructions function as unavoidable demand characteristics. The selection of the questions and the number of the questions help to mitigate this effect.

Basic information about age, gender, and marital status was solicited. This included if the respondent was divorced, widowed, remarried, and if they attended premarital counseling or a

marriage class. Age, gender, and marital status are useful as statistical categories to test against if there is enough information. The question about premarital counseling or marriage classes is gratuitous information that may or may not have a bearing on the information in the survey. It was included out of curiosity to see what the response would be. The problem is that you do not know what you will get until you measure it, and you only get what you measure.

Questions one through eight asked the respondent to choose between two competing ideas by choosing choice “a” or “b”. Choices presented could be diametrically opposed concepts, or gradations of the same ideas. Having two choices is a classic Bernoulli test that should give clear percentages according to the responses. Bernoulli tests are used to develop binomial distributions. The standard minimum sampling for a standard distribution is thirty individual samples. However, it is recognized that some respondents might have difficulty with some questions and so a larger sample is better to establish the curve.5

The last part consisted of ranking two sets of five different marital needs from one to five, with one being the most important and five the least. These needs are identified as the most important by the work of Dr. Harley and can be found in his book His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage.6 Each set of needs was ranked by both genders to test how each saw their own needs and how the perceived the other’s needs.

Depending on the results, there are several different statistical tests that can be performed

5 Pande, Neuman, and Cavanagh, The Six Sigma Way, 212.

Design criteria included testability by various statistical methods to determine relevance. For example, the null hypothesis sees all groups as simple random samples of the same population. The implication is that any method used will have the same effect, which might be nothing. Rejecting the null hypothesis implies that different methods will have altered results.

Adequate hypothesis testing limits the rate of Type I errors which are false positives that lead to false scientific claims. This is accomplished by holding the data to a predetermined statistical significance level. It is also important to limit Type II errors which are false negatives resulting in missed discoveries. Type II errors are a function of several things including: sample size, significance level, and effect size. Sample size is positively correlated with experiment cost. Significance level is when the standard of proof is so high that the chances of overlooking a discovery are also high. Effect size occurs when the effect is obvious to a casual observer; this is when Type II error rates are low.

There are many different statistical tests that tend to be variations of one another. Three that are typically used are Chi-squared, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Bayes’ theorem. Chi squared is used on raw data. ANOVA is used on percentages. Bayes’ Theorem is used to find the inverse probability or conditional probability of an event.

Chi square testing depends on the understanding that there are basically two types of random variables, and they yield two types of data: numerical and categorical. A chi square ($X^2$) statistic is used to investigate whether distributions of categorical variables differ from one

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another. Categorical variables yield data in categories and numerical variables yield data in numerical form. Responses to such questions as "What is your gender?" or, "Are you married?" are categorical because they yield data such as "Female" or "no." In contrast, responses to such questions as "How old are you?" or "How would you rate the following from one to five?" are numerical. Discrete data come from counting processes, while continuous data are from measuring processes. Chi Square statistics compares the tallies or counts of categorical responses between two or more independent groups. Chi squared tests can only be used on actual numbers and not on percentages, proportions, or means. The key idea of the chi-square test is a comparison between observed and expected values. This answers the questions of how many of something was expected and how many were observed in some process.

ANOVA is a method to test a hypothesis that is often used in the analysis of experimental data. This is called the null hypothesis that assumes that there is no statistical significance in a set of given observations. The researcher typically is trying to reject, disprove or nullify the hypothesis to support an alternative. A probability value (p-value) is calculated for the data and compared to a set significance level. Results are called statistically significant if deemed unlikely to have occurred by chance, assuming the truth of the null hypothesis. If the p-value is less than the significance level, the rejection of the null hypothesis can be justified.

The problem with this approach is that if enough variables are tested, then by chance alone, a result will be found that meets the criteria for “statistical significance.” This can be presented as a positive finding which is more popular than a negative finding. For example, if you toss a coin enough times, eventually you may get heads a significant number of times in a

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row, but this does not mean that the coin is different from any other coins. This is why sample size and decisions that led to a certain sample size should be reported.\textsuperscript{11} Because this is a test of significance it is also preferable to report confidence bounds.\textsuperscript{12} ANOVA can be a powerful tool, but "has long enjoyed the status of being the most used, and some would say abused, statistical technique in psychological research."\textsuperscript{13}

Bayes’ Theorem is a simple mathematical formula used for calculating conditional probabilities.\textsuperscript{14} Bayes' theorem is useful for inferring causes from their effects as it is often easy to discern the probability of an effect given the presence or absence of a cause. This is because tests are not the event. For example, there can be a test of marriage attitudes separate from the actual state of matrimony. Tests can also be flawed. For example, false positives detect things that don’t exist, and false negatives miss things that do exist. Testing yields test probabilities which may not be the real probabilities. This happens because researchers often consider test results without considering the errors in the tests. So, for example, false positives will skew results, especially when testing for something rare. Philosophically, experiments should be understood as potentially flawed and treated accordingly. This is because testing design, measuring equipment, and analytical methods will have an inherent rate of error. The important point is to make sure that results are real and not generated noise.

The survey was designed to gather attitudes on marriage as an institution. This includes


\textsuperscript{12} Wilkinson, “Statistical Methods,” 599.

\textsuperscript{13} Howell, \textit{Statistical Methods for Psychology}, 320.

\textsuperscript{14} Howell, \textit{Statistical Methods for Psychology}, 123.
the respondents’ feelings on their capabilities to get the love they feel they need which involves attachment theory. It also looks at how the needs of a spouse are understood and how those needs are fulfilled. There is also a section where needs are ranked in importance according to the respondents. The data will be used to test the hypothesis that some people see marriage in legal terms and others as a natural condition, if they understand how they interact with a spouse and ranking of each other’s needs. Another hypothesis is that women and men are compatible as to marriage attitudes and needs. This will give the data necessary to state with a degree of confidence how marriage as a spiritual discipline should be approached. The results are also expected to show the respondents’ focus towards themselves or spouse. Some analysis is required in support of the design of the experiment; while other analysis is performed after changes in the factors are formally found to produce statistically significant changes in the responses.

Even though many of the questions were focused on a spouse, the answers would be a reflection of the thoughts of the respondent. For example, question pair eight appears to focus on what the spouse should give to the respondent; however this also tests how the respondent understands motivations behind giving. If the respondent agreed with the idea of giving what the other person likes then that indicates an individual that is also open to giving what others like.

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Survey Process

Data was collected from people at random and from situations where those of all religious backgrounds might be present. The minimum sample size was expected to be no less than one hundred individuals. Single individuals were included to solicit their attitudes towards marriage and how they understand relationships in marriage. The principle investigator distributed the surveys and collected them on the spot. The surveys were placed in an envelope for later sorting and compilation. The survey was also available in Spanish to allow the participation of the Spanish speaking population in the region. Participation was completely voluntary in all cases, and there was no compensation.

Respondents who wanted to make comments were invited to write them on the survey. Comments made to the investigator that were of interest were noted for possible inclusion in the thesis. Comments were written down as soon as possible. A significant number of respondents wanted to talk with the investigator after answering the survey. This got to be a problem in certain situations and took up enough time that the overall number of people contacted was far less than possible. Some of the conversations were related to marriage in general, but other conversations focused on specific questions or ideas.

There were one hundred-nineteen respondents that gave useable data of one form or another. Collection was stopped because it was realized that further respondents would produce more data, but it would not be better data. The lack of divorcees could have been changed by actively seeking them, but that would have changed the random nature of the survey. Actively seeking specific characteristics could have made unforeseen changes in the data such as skewing the age distribution or gender balance. A survey of divorcees would be interesting on its own, but
is outside of the scope of the study.

**Survey Question Overview**

The first section collects individual statistical data to be used in compiling the results. This data separates the respondents by age, gender, and marital status. The additional question of premarital counseling was included to see if this had any noticeable effect on the marriage attitudes. Religious beliefs were not included. This exclusion was determined during the project development and was disclosed in the section describing project limitations.

The second section asks the respondents to choose between two competing ideas. Some of the sets test the investigator’s ideas, and other sets separate the respondents by their attitudes. Each set of ideas is separately numbered and each idea is lettered “a” and “b.” The first set tests the understanding of marriage in terms of a legal or natural construct. The second set tests for the duration of marriage whether for life, or for no fixed duration. The third set tests between those who feel that marriage meets natural needs, or only legal requirements. The fourth set tests between the expectation of having a mature partner, or sharing marital responsibility equally.

The fifth set tests the attachment of the respondent by having them choose between statements of secure or ambivalent attachment. The sixth set tests between avoidant and disorganized attachment. It is expected that between the four statements a pattern will emerge around the four styles. The individual with a disorganized attachment style feels that they are

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17 Howell, *Statistical Methods for Psychology*, 86.

18 Vail, “Reducing the Divorce Rate,” 15.

unworthy of love and not able to get what they need. Ambivalent persons feel unworthy, but can get the love they need by being angry or clingy for fear of abandonment. Avoidant individuals have a false sense that they are worthy and capable of getting needed love, but also think that other people are incompetent or untrustworthy. The secure person feels both worthy of love and capable of getting love.20

The seventh set tests between the idea of knowing what a partner’s needs are, or feeling that a partner knows the respondent’s needs.21 The eighth set distinguishes getting what one likes or getting what the other person likes. The seventh and eighth sets also test for awareness of a spouse’s needs versus how the respondent sees his needs being met. This can be interpreted as tension between narcissism and empathy.

The third section asks the respondents to rank two groups of items according to their importance to marriage. The ranking is from one to five with one being the highest importance and five being the lowest. These items come from Harley’s top five needs for a woman, and the top five needs for a man.22 The respondents are ranking both as a test to see if they are inwardly focused on themselves or if they understand the needs of the other person. The hypothesis is that rankings will vary by the age of the respondent.

A significant statistical signal is expected to appear in certain question pairs. For example, certain questions will show if there is a single distribution, or perhaps some kind of bimodal distribution based on gender, age, or type of marital status. The hypothesis is that older


21 Harley, His Needs, Her Needs, 184.

22 Harley, His Needs, Her Needs, 187.
Survey Data Handling

The surveys as collected were assigned a serial number and reviewed for completeness and for any written changes to the questions, or comments in the margins. One problem encountered was when both choices under a certain number were chosen, which invalidated that response. The serial number was used in the entry of data to insure accuracy and for quality assurance reasons. Surveys that were incomplete were set aside for separate analysis as to which questions were avoided, or as to what types of changes respondents made to the original form. Surveys that were complete, but had comments were coded as to the type of comments to allow analysis for trends, or to be noted as remarkable comments.

The data from the surveys were compiled in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Individual surveys were records in rows, and data elements in columns. Places with either missing or conflicting data were noted with a separate identifier to both segregate invalid responses and to allow useable data to be analyzed. Matrix analysis can show correlation even with missing data.

Survey Analysis

The survey was designed for complete answers to all questions. It was expected that some respondents would skip questions or be unable to accept the forced choices on the survey. Where a survey was complete enough to be counted, it was. However, there were several surveys that had too many unanswered questions, or were essentially blank, to be included. For the main analysis of the one hundred-nineteen surveys, only eighty-seven were complete enough to be
used as designed. This number included forty-seven women and forty men. All of the surveys except those that were completely blank had information that could be used one way or another.

One thing that is noticeable with the responses is the under-representation of divorcees. If approximately fifty percent of the population is divorced, there should have been more divorcees in the sample. There may be reasons for not having more divorcees that are not readily accounted for in the random way that the surveys were distributed. For example, divorcees may have been reluctant to participate in a survey about marriage.

It is expected that those who would be willing to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline would be less likely to divorce. This idea seems to go against the divorce statistics in certain religious populations which match that of the general population. The answer probably is found in the numbers of religious people who do not practice any spiritual discipline. Statistics on spiritual disciplines do not appear to be available. In testing questions for the survey, the subject of disciplines was explored. For example, it was noticed that people would report reading the Bible, but not practicing lectio divina; keeping a diary was common, but not spiritual journaling.\(^23\) Prayer was reported, but not prayer as a spiritual discipline. Among many religious people there was lack of understanding what a spiritual discipline was and how they are practiced. These questions were not used on the survey for obvious reasons.

The data was found to be nearly split between female and male respondents. Seventy-two married and twenty-six single people responded. There were not enough respondents in the other categories to be statistically significant, but it was curious that there were so few that had undergone premarital counseling or marriage classes. What constituted premarital counseling, or

classes were left up to the respondents. Counseling could have included formal programs to being required to meet with the pastor several times before an agreement to officiate at a wedding. Classes could have been a formal program in a classroom setting to self-study using prepared materials.

There are several ways to analyze questions one through eight where the respondents were asked to choose between two competing ideas. This was designed as a Bernoulli trial for each question with two choices where the probability of success was one half. If the respondents were choosing at random, it would be seen in the p-value which can be found on a Binomial Probability Table. Given enough trials the binomial probability should approach a normal distribution. Questions nine and ten, where the respondents are asked to rank needs from one to five yield numerical answers and should be analyzed using chi squared or some other statistical test. Individual responses can be correlated to all other responses using MATLAB. This can show how uniform the answers are by age.

The number of respondents was one-hundred-nineteen, with sixty-nine being female and fifty male, with one not marking that box. It is not determined if the individual did not want to identify gender or if this was overlooked. Of the female respondents, twenty-nine were married, thirteen single, and two indicating that they were divorced, two widows, one remarried, and eight having taken pre-marital counseling. Of the male respondents, twenty-three were married, eleven single, and two indicating that they were divorced, four widowers, one remarried, and eight having taken pre-marital counseling. Of those having taken pre-marital counseling, the same number may be from husband and wife responses. The response to remarriage also may have been given by a wife and husband.
The variability of all answers is shown in the above chart. There were those who did not like the programmed answers and either did not answer, or wrote their own question or alternate response. There were twenty-two females and ten men who did not respond to one or more questions. Question four was highest overall for non-response with nine abstentions from men and five from women for a total of fourteen. The highest female non-response rate was question eight with nine abstentions. Interestingly, question eight had the second most male non-responses at eight from a total of seventeen. The abstention rate was higher than expected and caused a problem in the analysis that was planned for the data. Having a few respondents abstain from
answering one or more questions is expected by accident alone. However, the rate seen for some of the questions raises the possibility that there is a problem that was not anticipated or addressed in the survey. One respondent thought that the programmed answers divided the questions too closely; however this may have only been for a distinct but noticeable minority.

Question one asked the respondents to choose between marriage being a purely legal matter or being defined by nature. Ninety-two out of one-hundred-nineteen selected response “b,” that marriage is defined by nature. There were eighteen who selected “a,” that marriage was a purely legal matter, and nine abstained. Eleven women and six men said marriage is a legal matter. A female respondent notably commented that marriage was “God’s law.” A male respondent commented that marriage was from “nature’s God.” The question did not indicate where the law came from, so these notes speak to the same idea that marriage is ordained by God. It was thought that the response to the questions related to marriage as a natural condition and meeting human needs would show a larger trend between men and women. However the difference between them was not as large as expected; the response of men was larger than that of women.

Question two had the respondents selecting whether marriage was for life or for no fixed duration. One-hundred-one of the respondents said that marriage
was for life. However, there was still a significant fifteen out of the one-hundred-nineteen respondents that choose no fixed duration and three abstained. One woman noted that marriage was for the life of the spouse, and of course that is for a life, just not the respondent’s.

Question three asked the respondents to choose between the idea of marriage meeting basic human needs or only meeting legal requirements. One-hundred-three chose basic human needs, while seven chose the legal requirement, with nine abstentions. The hypothesis was that people would understand that basic human needs are natural, and they are reflected in the institution of marriage. Legal requirements are human inventions and may mirror the natural order, or go against it. Of course there is the possibility that some respondents, such as the woman in question one, see marriage as God’s law.

Question four was the choice between a mature and responsible spouse and a spouse that contributed equally to the marriage. The response was sixty-two for the mature spouse and forty-three for the equal contribution, with fourteen abstentions. This response rate was unexpected, but interesting. The idea of a mature and responsible spouse is subjective, but so is the idea of equal contribution, which leads to score keeping. This was one of the questions with a significant abstention rate.
were also seven respondents who abstained. A secure person feels worthy of love, but so does the avoidant person. A disorganized person feels unable to get love, but this could apply to the ambivalent person also.

Question five asks the respondent if he feels worthy of love versus being unable to get the love needed. While the overwhelming answer was feeling worthy of love, there were six respondents that said they were unable to get the love that they needed. There were also seven respondents who abstained. A secure person feels worthy of love, but so does the avoidant person. A disorganized person feels unable to get love, but this could apply to the ambivalent person also.

Question six compliments the previous question and asks if the respondent is capable of getting the love wanted versus not being worthy of love. One-hundred-eight out of one-hundred-nineteen said that they were capable of getting the love they wanted. Two respondents said that they were not worthy of love. If a respondent was checking answers at random they might choose this answer, but there were also nine who abstained. While their particular thoughts cannot be known this does indicate that something was behind those choices. With the number of abstentions it is felt that the answers represented disorganized attachment
Question seven was the choice between understanding a spouse’s needs and a spouse that understands the respondent. The choice was between an outward focus on the spouse and an inward reflection on the respondent. One-hundred-three chose understanding a spouse’s needs compared to eleven that said their spouse understood them. There were five people who abstained from answering the question.

Question eight showed a large difference in how the female respondents choose versus the male respondents. Eighty-three percent of the females chose that a spouse should give them the things that they liked, while only fifty-five percent of the males choose that. Twenty-eight percent of the males thought that the spouse should give them what the spouse liked, with seventeen not choosing to respond. This shows a problem with the males in this sample. It was expected that the majority would pick the idea that the spouse should give what the other spouse liked.
Male respondents were asked to rank their own needs and female needs. Females were asked to rank their own needs and those of males. These rankings were evaluated against the expected rankings as given by Harley.\textsuperscript{24} It is remarkable that the rankings given by both females and males were very close together, with the average answer being two or three, except in one case. The overall ranking was different than that given by Harley, but that can be expected due to individual differences and the sample size. With a larger sample, it would be expected that the trend would be towards the rankings given by Harley. The ranking for males’ needs was not

\textsuperscript{24} Harley, \textit{His Needs, Her Needs}, 187.
significantly different than how women ranked the same needs. This was also true for how men ranked women’s’ needs, versus how women ranked those same needs.

Women ranked trust – honesty and openness as the number one need followed by affection, talk-conversation, husband as a good father-family commitment, and financial support. Women ranked men’s needs as peace and quiet-domestic support, admiration, recreational companionship, sexual fulfillment, and an attractive spouse.

Men ranked women’s needs in the same order as women ranked them. Men ranked their own needs with peace and quiet, recreational companionship, admiration, sexual fulfillment, and an attractive spouse. This ranking differs in the change between admiration and recreational companionship as numbers two and three, but the difference was very small.

The need for financial support had the strongest response from both men and women. It was rated as the lowest priority of all of the listed needs. This can be seen in the chart of the average answers per item, where the average answer for this item was four. This rating stands out when compared with the average of all other ratings. There is no clear reason for this ranking except that it reflects this particular sample.
The two questions that stand out as the problem areas are number four and eight. Question number four is a choice between a spouse being mature and responsible and a spouse contributing equally to the marriage. The response was about half the respondents choosing mature and responsible with about thirty-eight percent choosing equal contribution. Question number eight is a choice between a spouse giving the respondent what they like and giving the respondent what the spouse likes. The problem was that men chose response “a” fifty-five percent compared to women at eighty-three percent. These response percentages differ from the eighty to ninety percent response seen for the other questions.

It was expected that respondents would choose a mature and responsible spouse because
a mature, responsible individual would contribute more than a childish individual. It was also expected that respondents would want to be given the things that they liked as opposed to what someone else would like. Question four demonstrates a misunderstanding among men and women. Question eight shows a misunderstanding primarily among men.

One situation that was brought to the attention of the researcher was that some of the respondents were part of an S&M club. This was a cause of concern and may explain some of the responses, but the exact effect is impossible to calculate. It would be interesting to be able to isolate responses by groups and then compare groups. For example, one respondent wanted to see responses broken down by religious affiliation. Another respondent was interested in marriage attitudes and the debate on homosexuality. While those may be interesting areas of research they are outside of the scope of the present study.

One respondent thought that the investigator might have cut the questions and answers too closely. Another respondent who is in a doctoral program thought the questions were interesting and wondered where they came from. A respondent with a Ph.D. in Information Science wondered why so many responses were being sought and opined that it was unnecessary.

Bayes’ theorem gives the inverse probability or conditional probability of there being a critical factor that would lead to disillusion and dissolution of marriage. The important point and first principle is to know oneself first, and then be able to communicate wants and needs. Survey questions seven and eight show that the problem is in knowing what the individual wants and in communicating that desire.

MATLAB® was used to create a color visualization of the correlation of the data by age.
The data was prepared by making all “a” responses a “one” and all “b” responses a “negative one.” The non-responses were made “zeroes.” The matrix uses all of the data and is one-hundred-nineteen by one-hundred-nineteen units in size. The upper left corner which is position “1,1” is the youngest respondent, and the bottom right corner has the oldest respondent; the order is youngest to oldest going top to bottom, and left to right. The last seven rows and the last seven columns were respondents who did not supply their age. These respondents did not correlate well in general; they appear to not have liked filling out the survey, or provided their own questions and answers. Each entry is the correlation coefficient value between respondent “i” and respondent “j” where “i” is i\textsuperscript{th} row, and j is j\textsuperscript{th} column. Each respondent appears as both an “i” and a “j” in the matrix.

Correlation is visualized by colors in the plot. High correlations are darker and low correlations are lighter. The dark diagonal line running from the upper left corner to the lower right is present because each respondent correlates perfectly with herself. The blue strips show respondents who gave unique answers and who do not correlate with any other respondents from the survey. The visualization of the correlation gives meaning to data that would otherwise not have been useful in other statistical methods.

Younger respondents who are shown in the upper left of the visualization tended to exhibit greater uniformity or similarity in how they answered the survey. This can be seen in the darker colored areas towards the top left compared to the bottom right. The older respondents showed greater variation in their answers which can be seen in the yellow of the visualization. Respondents twenty-nine to thirty-three years old in columns thirty through forty have the greatest correlation. There is less yellow in that area than elsewhere. This same age group also
has a good correlation with those in their seventies and eighties in columns eighty through ninety. This is a situation where correlation is not causation, but does indicate that some other factor is at work in how people responded to the survey.

MATLAB® was also used to create a color visualization of the correlation of the data by gender. The same data was used, but with females as the vertical axis and males as the horizontal axis ordered by age. The order is youngest to oldest going top to bottom, and left to right. The lowest rows and right most columns were respondents who did not supply their age. Responses
where the gender was not marked were excluded from the visualization.

Correlation is again visualized by colors in the plot. High correlations are darker and low correlations are lighter. There is no dark diagonal line running from the upper left corner to the lower right because respondents are not being correlated with themselves, only with the other respondents. The blue strips show respondents who gave unique answers and who do not correlate with any other respondents from the survey. Older females represented in the bottom of the visualization showed greater variation in their answers. This can be seen in the yellow of the visualization. Older males correlated well with the rest of the respondents.
CHAPTER TWO: PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS

It is necessary to first understand what spiritual disciplines are and how they are practiced before the idea can be applied to marriage. A spiritual discipline is any activity such as prayer, fasting, or journaling that is done on a regular basis as a way to enhance a relationship with God. Any routine activity can be a spiritual discipline if it is approached with the understanding of the practitioner’s relationship and dependence on God. For example, preparing food and mealtimes can be a spiritual discipline and was practiced as such in many monastic communities. The point is not necessarily what you do, but the attitude that you have when you engage the discipline.

A spiritual discipline should be fulfilling when engaged with a good attitude. This does not mean that it will not be hard work, but should be seen as an activity with a desirable goal. People will readily practice a musical instrument, sports, or other activities with the reward of mastery and the satisfaction of accomplishment of something difficult. It is hard to be motivated to engage in an activity with no clear goal. This leads to a poor attitude that is typically followed by misery and defeat. Marriage may appear to be an activity that is easy; however, this is not true given the high failure rate. Marriage may also appear to have vague goals, but this is not true.

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1 Howard Thurman, *For The Inward Journey*, (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1984), 12.
4 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 2.
The goal of marriage is the joy of a lifelong partner and companion.

Marriage as a spiritual discipline has the twin goals of bringing the couple closer to each other and closer to God spiritually. Marriage is recognized as God-ordained and as a wholesome way to obey the command to all life to multiply and replenish the earth. Marriage can be defined as the natural pair bond between a man and woman in the attempt to have children. Children are a happenstance, and in-laws are an imposition. For good or bad, marriage partners model their own pair bond on those of their parents, and then pass this model down to their children. A good model only lasts a generation while the impact of a defective model lasts for many generations.\(^5\) A genogram study can give a visual representation of this type of generational problem.

What makes marriage different from traditional spiritual disciplines is that marriage is a cooperative enterprise and traditional practices tend to be solo activities. For example, journaling is a solo practice even if you are sitting next to someone who is also journaling.\(^6\) Both practitioners are in their own world. This can be compared to parallel play in young children. They may be sitting together and enjoying the company, but each child is in their own play world. Cooperative play is when children interact to engage in a joint imaginative relationship. Marriage by definition is a relationship, and while the spiritual benefits may go to the individual practitioner, the effort is focused on the spouse. The spiritual as well as the physical welfare of the spouse should be the focus of this cooperative relationship with the purpose of bringing the couple closer to God.


Marriage as a spiritual discipline is best accomplished when both spouses are engaged in the discipline. However, if only one spouse wants to practice marriage as a discipline there are still benefits as long as there is a good attitude and goal. For example, the Love Dare is a program for one spouse to show acts of kindness and love to a spouse who may be totally disengaged. Situations where one spouse is totally disengaged are signs of a failing marriage. In such a situation the Love Dare is useful as a reparative action. Marriage practiced as a spiritual discipline however has the goal of keeping the marriage healthy so that it never needs to be repaired. It is easier to maintain a good marriage than it is to repair marital dysfunction. Proactive concentration on what makes a healthy marriage keeps the goal in front of the practitioner. With practice the little things that make a marriage happy become second nature to the practitioners. This may not be easy at first but will become habit where the spouse’s needs are known, and there is time dedicated to fulfilling them. This understanding gives two important starting points for practicing marriage as a spiritual discipline, communication and time.

Communication is how an individual learns a spouse’s desires and needs in a constructive way. Communication requires active listening so that there is no confusion about what was said or heard. The problem is that one spouse may enjoy giving subtle clues about what they want while the other is expecting clear statements. This can be a gender difference or an artifact from a person’s family of origin, but it needs to be recognized and compensation made by both

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9 Kendrick and Kendrick. The Love Dare.
It is important that each spouse should set the other up for emotional success and not failure. For example, a cliché that is seen time and again is the husband who cannot remember his own wedding anniversary. The interaction of the importance of the date to her and his lack of care to remember makes for continuous comedy about her disappointment and his discomfort. While we laugh at such dysfunction, a goal should be to avoid problems with communication and time management methods to prevent disappointments.

Continuous disappointment degrades love, and positive action builds love. This either reinforces a spouse’s emotional reserves or depletes it. Dr. Harley illustrates this situation with the metaphor of the Love Bank. When a spouse meets the emotional needs of the mate then deposits are made in the bank, but when there are unfulfilled needs the account balance dwindles. He emphasizes how important it is to schedule enough time to meet each other’s most important emotional needs. Husbands and wives must schedule enough quality time each week to give each other their undivided attention. He even calls this the Policy of Undivided Attention. This can be found at his Marriage Builders® website.

First Principle

The first principle is that the individual who wants to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline needs to understand themselves. They should be able to answer why they want to

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practice a spiritual discipline? The point of the spiritual discipline is to bring the individual closer to God. This should not be a decision made lightly or under duress. In an article about spiritual direction in *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse says that “Spiritual disciplines undertaken without motivation not only do not help, but often are actively counter-productive, since they degenerate so easily into mere stimulants of guilt or else breed cynicism and hypocrisy.”\(^{13}\) The probability of failure will be high without the proper motivation.

Motivation and discipline are not necessarily dependent on maturity, but working with others does depend on maturity. For example, organized youth activities such as sports will be supervised by adults to guide and direct situations where maturity is critical and to referee disagreements. Marriage depends on maturity, and while there may be parents and in-laws and others around to help guide and direct the couple, this help is dependent on the maturity and wisdom of the helpers. Unfortunately, this does not always help and in certain situations is damaging.\(^{14}\) Maturity as tested in question pairs four and eight show that there can be problems. Those desiring to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline must self-assess where they are so that they can work on self-improvement; for example, working on attachment style.

Understanding attachment style is important. There are four attachment styles that are generally recognized, but have been given different names by various researchers. These are: secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized. The individual with a disorganized attachment


style feels that they are unworthy of love, and not able to get what they need.\textsuperscript{15} If there is abuse the disorganized individual feels that it is deserved. Ambivalent individuals feel unworthy, but can get the love they need by being angry or clingy because of a fear of abandonment. Avoidant individuals have a false sense that they are worthy and capable of getting needed love, but also think that other people are incompetent or untrustworthy. Secure attachment is when an individual feels both worthy of love and capable of getting love. Secure people feel that others are willing and able to love them and are there for them.

The individual who wants to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline must know what attachment style they currently have. Secure attachment is the preferred style, but those with other styles can work towards secure attachment. This is foundational to being able to get good results from a spiritual discipline. The point is that an attachment style has an impact on both marriage, and spirituality. A suggested resource to help understand attachment style is, \textit{God Attachment: Why We Believe, Act, and Feel the Way We Do About God}, by Clinton and Straub.\textsuperscript{16}

The individual also needs to understand what they want out of marriage and what they want to achieve by practicing it as a discipline. This is where the response to question eight becomes important in setting a goal for marriage. The needs of both spouses must be met and this can only happen if each spouse gets what they like. This does not mean that marriage is a win and lose situation where one spouse only takes from the other. Marriage should be a cooperative win-win situation where the partners are mature and responsible to each other.


According to Susan Heitler this depends on movement from conflict to resolution. Her insight is that proposed solutions to a situation may be incompatible; however, concerns seldom are. There are five main ways to resolve conflict: (1) getting angry, which yields fights; (2) giving up, which yields depression; (3) doing nothing about a problem, which sustains anxiety and tension; (4) avoidance via distraction, which invites addictions and obsessive-compulsive disorders; and, (5) collaborative problem-solving to create win-win solutions, which is the best.\textsuperscript{17} This is only possible when partners can accept responsibility for their own situations. Marriage works when a couple is able to keep negative feelings for a spouse from smothering positive feelings.\textsuperscript{18}

A scripture that supports knowing yourself is found at 2 Peter 1:5-7, “For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.” The sequence starts with faith that leads to knowledge and self-control, which arrives at love which according to 1 Corinthians 13:13 is greater than faith and hope. A personality profile is one method to understanding and should be shared with a spouse.\textsuperscript{19} Making a list of likes and dislikes and sharing them with a spouse has helped some couples.

\textsuperscript{17} Susan Heitler, \textit{From Conflict to Resolution, Strategies for Diagnosis and Treatment of Distressed Individuals, Couples, and Families}, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1990).


Second Principle

The second principle is that you have to own your own problems. The marriage partner is only responsible for how he interacts with you, and not for any organic problems that you bring to the marriage or that develop over time. The inverse is also true, that you are not responsible for your partner’s problems. This is especially important when someone is in emotional pain and might lash out in frustration at those closest to them. It should not be taken personally. Many times the person in pain has to be given room to resolve the problem. This can be unpleasant for the rest of the family, but it can be necessary for a positive outcome.

When a person owns their own problems, there is no basis for blaming a spouse for that problem. Problems do not have to ruin a marriage, what does matter is how the couple reacts to them. Communication can be non-threatening and oriented toward collaboration and finding mutual ground to address concerns. Sympathy and empathy can be shared without fear. Fear is a primal emotion that can hurt communication, but fear can be moderated by trust. Trust is developed through intimacy that releases the hormone Oxytocin. This helps collaborative problem solving because, even if one person is in emotional pain there is trust that the spouse is there to listen.

The effects of blame, shame, guilt and compassion and how they can hurt or help are something to consider. Martha Sweezy considers the effects of shame, and calls it an experience.

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21 Gottman and Silver, The Seven Principles, 14.
at once deadening and inclusive. Shame causes a person to feel isolated and worthless with no choices to escape. The person is subject to feelings of panic and despair and the result is often social exile. Rage can be a short-term reaction to the pain, but with long-term costs. These costs can include further transgression and relational failure that drive the person into ever greater fear, shame and isolation. Guilt and compassion are ways to avoid this trap. Shame is useful to promote group cohesion by helping to drive out offenders. Guilt in contrast is useful in helping people stay together and tolerate fallibility. Compassion, however, is something that is different, and is seen as an admittance of inevitable human fallibility.

Martha Sweezy points out that empirical literature on emotion suggests that shame is an aggravating factor in many psychiatric symptoms while guilt is pro-social and an adaptive condition. The problem is that people can be confused about the difference between guilt and shame. The thinking is “I did wrong; therefore, I am bad” and experience the two as linked. It is common for people to use this as a way to manipulate behavior. However, in a family situation this can lead to greater fear, panic, and the opposite of what was intended. The shamed individual instead of seeking reconciliation can withdraw and be angry with the family members that shamed her. This leads to isolation and disconnection from what should be an emotionally safe place.

Another reason shame and guilt are connected is they involve similar thought patterns of self-evaluation and blame. Shame leads to an assessment of self-value and the conclusion, “I am

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bad.” Guilt is an assessment of behavior and the conclusion, “I did wrong.” Shame is correlated with self-attack and rage, and guilt when linked to shame is correlated with self-attack. However, guilt not linked to shame is correlated with concern for others and reparative action.\(^{27}\) In allowing a spouse the room to work through problems a loving mate will listen to the problems as well as needs of that spouse. After the spouse works through his problem he should be allowed to reintegrate into the family system and reengage the marriage. This is an echo of Dr. Heitler’s insight that solutions may be incompatible, but concerns seldom are incompatible. The problem in communication is getting the couple to express concerns before proposing solutions. Shame and guilt can impede communication unless there is a perceived possibility of acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.\(^{28}\)

The point is that in owning a problem we can seek to be free of its power over us. Paul tells us in Romans 6:6 that, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.” Owning problems is important in marital trust because it takes away the betrayal of blame placed on a spouse.\(^{29}\) When there is accountability for personal problems there is hope for change.\(^{30}\) Some couples have found it useful to each other details about what upsets them and what makes them happy. This can be used with the list of likes and dislikes that has already been suggested.

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\(^{27}\) Sweezy, “The Teenager’s Confession,” 180.


Third Principle

Principle three is that you have to listen to your spouse to understand their needs and problems.\textsuperscript{31} Because the one listening does not own the problem he has to remain calm enough to hear the problem. The listener does not have to agree, disagree, or debate. The one talking should share thoughts and feelings without accusing, attacking, or labeling. The goal is a deep understanding of a spouse based on the safety of the communications. The problem is that women and men have different levels of need for talk. Women tend to be more intuitive in reading emotions and moods than men, which is sometimes called emotional intelligence. This leads to the problem of a woman expecting that a man will understand them like a female friend would and are then disappointed when this does not happen. Women are also disappointed when their husbands do not invest sufficient time in intimate talk or give them undivided attention.

Women tend to be more focused on relationships and what makes others happy or sad. However, this does not automatically translate into marital bliss. Women have communication problems just like men are unable to fully express what makes them happy or sad.\textsuperscript{32} Sarah Murray, and Robin Milhausen studied, “Factors impacting women’s sexual desire: Examining long-term relationships in emerging adulthood,” for \textit{The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality}. They noted that women in the study indicated that intimate communication helped them feel sexual desire, however ineffective communication decreased desire. Effective communication should also include affectionate touching such as hugging and hand holding. This invokes the

\textsuperscript{31} Gottman and Silver, \textit{The Seven Principles}, 101.

\textsuperscript{32} Gottman and Silver, \textit{The Seven Principles}, 4.
idea of “bilingual intimacy” where couples communicate in non-verbal ways. The authors proposed that the desire of women might be enhanced if they can recognize how a partner signifies love and affection, beyond verbal intimacy. This is a problem of understanding and communication across the gender divide. Women tend to be verbal and men action oriented, but this does not mean that they cannot understand each other.

Non-verbal intimacy can include many different things. For example, love letters and intimate notes have long been used to begin or maintain intimate connections at long distance. Photographs and pictures are also important reminders of loved ones. When couples are near each other, knowing looks and glances as well as other body language, and personal signals help couples communicate. Communication can also include non-sexual touching and play like rubbing feet together and holding hands. The list goes on, only limited by the imagination of the couple involved.

Intimacy and affection have an impact on bonding which is moderated by Oxytocin in humans. Oxytocin Studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging, (fMRI) also give evidence consistent with the hypothesis that reward and neuropeptide circuits are involved in human pair bonding. When subjects viewed photographs of individuals with whom they claimed to be romantically in love, their brain activity patterns looked remarkably similar to those observed after cocaine or µ-opioid infusions. Many of the activated regions are rich in Oxytocin, AVP or their receptive receptors. Similar patterns of activity occur when mothers view images of

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their own children. There appears to be an overlap between the neural mechanisms of maternal attachment and those of romantic love. In addition, the VTA and striatum show substantial activity during male ejaculation, paralleling the activation pattern evoked by a heroin rush.\textsuperscript{36} It should be clear that engaging in pleasurable activities with a spouse can activate reward circuits in the brain and enhance pair bonding. This should lead to cooperation for mutual satisfaction; however we know that there are always some kinds of marital problems that will hurt the relationship. Marital problems need to be resolved to the satisfaction of both partners.

If marital problems are not resolved to the satisfaction of both partners, resentment builds and begins to corrode the relationship. This happens when a spouse feels that the other always has to get the upper hand or last word in any discussion. This is especially true when one partner feels the other is immature, irresponsible, untrustworthy, or selfish.\textsuperscript{37} Under this pressure the pair bond will begin to come apart with a vicious cycle of destroying intimacy and sexual attraction.\textsuperscript{38} When this negative feedback loop becomes intense enough then one partner will start to “detach” and emotionally remove themselves from commitment to the other.\textsuperscript{39} Domestic abuse can be an extreme version of detachment. The abuse does not have to be verbal or violent, but can be actions directed towards a spouse with the intent of hurting them or driving them away. The hidden message is “if you do not like it, then you can leave.”


\textsuperscript{37} Gottman and Silver, \textit{What Makes Love Last}? 48.


When detachment occurs there may be no way to rescue the marriage and reconcile the partners. It is important to recognize the symptoms of detachment before it is too late. The time to start marriage counseling is before the breaking point. A marriage counselor cannot manufacture a connection; he can only strengthen one that already exists. The point is that the person who wants to strengthen a marriage needs to build attachment and trust with the spouse. This may include changing how marital problems are solved.

Solving a problem by compromise is more important than being “right.” Individuals who cannot accept accountability are doomed to fail in relationships. Everyone is narcissistic to some extent, but this is problematic when partners are unable to empathize with each other and instead compete over issues such as who works harder, who spends more time with the children, who had a tougher day, etc. This is reflected in survey question four where about half the respondents thought it was important to have a spouse contribute equally to the marriage or did not respond.

The idea that a spouse should contribute equally leads to score keeping and arguments over the quality of a spouse’s contributions to the household. When partners don’t understand the other's contribution, each assume the other has it easier and neither feels understood. This can lead to constant bickering and quibbling over minor things, which can only increase dissatisfaction and drive the couple apart. On the other hand, having a spouse that is mature and responsible would give a mature and responsible partner trust and confidence. The point is that the spouse that cares the least drives the relationship. When one spouse cares less than the other

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42 Gottman, and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 111.
there is constant conflict, but when both spouses lovingly try to care about the other there is empathy. Empathy maintains the close bonds that promote intimacy and the release of Oxytocin that promotes trust. The cycle can be self-reinforcing and destructive, or it can be self-reinforcing and constructive. Marriage as a spiritual discipline aims for a constructive relationship.

Caring also has an effect on communication and how a spouse wants to be engaged. This is related to the problem seen in survey question nine, especially on the part of men. One classic situation is where a woman tells her husband that he did something to make her angry. He asks what that is, and she responds “you should know and I am not going to tell you.” It can be added that the cluelessness of the husband often leads to further feelings of anger for the wife. This is a communications collapse where the man wants to have a straight-forward discussion of the problem leading to a resolution based on actions, but the woman is begging for the husband to have an intuitive grasp of the situation. Perhaps this is a need that women have that has not been quantified or tested.

Effective listening needs a receptive mind, and this occurs when the mind is still. This is seen in Psalms 46:10 where it says, "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." Listening builds trust in the relationship because it assures a spouse that her opinion is something worthy of consideration. Why not set aside a block of time each day to let each spouse talk freely and uninterrupted. Experience shows that men in particular need to learn to be quiet and listen without immediately trying to solve problems.

43 Young and Wang, “The Neurobiology of Pair Bonding.” 1052.

44 Gottman and Silver, What Makes Love Last? 123.
Fourth Principle

Forgiveness is the fourth principle for marriage as a spiritual discipline. The neurological and biological effects of being in love can make a couple feel that they will live happily ever after. However, researchers at the University of Denver have determined that, “every marriage faces the virtual certainty of some types of relationship problems.” How couples handle disagreements is just as important as how they handle agreements. Arguing is a form of communication, but does not always provide resolution for concerns. Hurt and disappointment are resolved through forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a unilateral action that is directed towards another person or towards self. Reconciliation must be a bilateral action and demands the participation of the offender and the aggrieved individual.

Based on the results of question pair four there may be disappointment with the amount and quality of a spouse’s contribution to the relationship. There is an inherent conflict between the ideas of a spouse who is mature and responsible versus the desire that there will be equal contribution in the marriage. This shows that there are some unrealistic expectations among the respondents. It is supposed that when a spouse is mature and responsible there will be confidence in that spouse and any contribution. However, when there is a demand for equal contribution there is an automatic presumption of needing measurements of performance. A mature spouse will contribute qualitatively, but an equal contribution is both a qualitative and quantitative

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measure that can only be subjectively evaluated. Because there are no standards for marital contributions they are subject to change over time or according to individual mood. This can lead to one spouse demanding that the other do chores in a specific way, or do something unpleasant. The inevitable problems from this can only be soothed by using some wisdom and forgiveness.

Question pair eight shows another area of inevitable disappointment with understanding and giving of personal likes and choices. For example, the situation where one spouse likes a certain food and the other does not could be a source of marital discord. If that food was served all of the time with the expectation that the other spouse would eat it anyway and eventually learn to like it, then conflict is inevitable. Other matters of individual taste are further illustrations of this problem. The discipline for any relationship is in understanding what the other person likes and prefers and allowing for those differences. The use of forgiveness opens the door to reconciliation with the spouse. The spiritual goal in marriage is to mirror the reconciliation between God and humankind.

Reconciliation requires that forgiveness is asked for and also given. The model for this is found in Luke 17:4 where it says, “and if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive." This constant give and take in marriage is necessary because forgiveness is in constant demand. Women put more effort into saying sorry, and this prolonged effort may not be appreciated by husbands. Men should try going and apologizing to their wives even if they do not know what they did wrong.


Thoughts on Question Nine

Ephesians 5: 28, is a prescription for relationships; “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” Verse 5: 33 continues this thought, “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” This can be understood as a particular case of the Golden Rule. Love and respect are not automatically connected; we can love others and not respect their choices or tastes. For example, choices and tastes in clothing, music, or food can be points of marital contention that lead to disrespectful exchanges. Disrespect towards a spouse can be directed at the most intimate parts of a relationship. One point of marriage as a spiritual discipline is the mandate to not only love, but also respect the spouse.

Husbands should love their wives by respecting their needs and working to fulfill them. In the survey the men and women ranked a wife’s needs in the same order. On average trust was ranked first. Trust for a wife is honesty and openness by the husband. This means that the wife wants to know her husband’s innermost thoughts and feelings. When a husband does not share with his wife she does not feel affection or intimacy with him. Trust is a two way street and if you want trust you must honor trust. One problem is that men may feel that they will be attacked or manipulated for being honest and open. Another problem is that of trusting you not to share intimate details with your family or friends. One situation that many men hate is for a mother-in-law to use an intimate detail to manipulate them. The discipline is to earn and maintain trust so that it is freely given with no hesitation.

Affection in the survey was ranked second and for a woman it is different from a man’s
idea of a kiss on the cheek. Women seek and enjoy what has been called verbal intimacy. This means that a husband should understand his wife’s innermost thoughts and feelings and give her the things that make her happy. One complaint from women heard several times is that the husbands do not know what would make them happy. There is a thought that a husband should be able to learn what a wife likes from conversation and observation. Continual conflict and complaint on this point shows that this passive strategy tends to fail.

Because we are looking at the mutual fulfillment of needs as a spiritual discipline women should understand how men see affection. If husbands do not know what would make women happy then it is up to the women to help men understand; of course, understanding the husband is part of the wife’s discipline. In one study it was proposed that the desire of women might be enhanced if they can recognize how a partner signifies love and affection, beyond verbal intimacy.  

This is a problem of understanding and communication across the gender divide. Women tend to be verbal and men action oriented, but this does not mean that they cannot understand each other. Good communication is necessary for affection.

One way to make a wife happy is to talk to her. Talk or conversation was ranked third in the survey. According to Dr. Harley the average woman, as a minimum, needs fifteen hours of undivided attention per week. Talk should be a time of intimacy and bonding. The need for conversation is not met by simply talking, but when the conversation is enjoyable to both spouses. Good marital conversation is used to inform and investigate each other. It is focused on and gives attention to topics of mutual interest. It is balanced, so both spouses have an equal

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50 Murray and Milhausen, “Factors Impacting Women’s Sexual Desire,” 111.

opportunity to talk. It is satisfying because it gives each spouse undivided attention while talking to each other.

Talk is not satisfying when demands are made, disrespect is shown, or when one or both spouses becomes angry. \(^52\) It is particularly bad when talk is used to dwell on past mistakes or present problems. This is such an important point that if it is not mutually enjoyable, a couple is better off not talking to each other. Painful episodes not only fail to meet emotional needs, but can damage future opportunities for fulfilling talk. This may be hard to accept, but it is natural that an individual will tend to avoid unpleasant situations. In marriage one spouse will avoid or prevent the other spouse from meeting a need if earlier attempts were painful. The discipline here is that this must be understood, and self-control must be exercised.

Survey respondents ranked the need for the husband to be a good father, or family commitment as the fourth highest need. The problem here is that this need varies according to the age of the children. The need can start with infant care and feeding and then transition to playing with or reading to little children. One area that is ripe for problems is discipline especially for adolescents. Not everyone is prepared with the skills for caring for young children, especially babies. Men in particular, while not disinterested, may not have had the opportunity given to young women to learn childcare skills. The new mother needs to understand and be patient in allowing the new father to interact and bond with an infant. For example, it is not good to hand an unexpected disaster waiting to happen such as an un-burped baby into a man’s hands and expect them to be happy with the situation. The discipline here is patience founded in realistic expectations, and providing safe bonding opportunities.

Financial support was ranked the least important need by all of the survey respondents. This may be due to the relative affluence of the respondents. If a wife is complaining about money it may be because she is feeling insecure about her situation. She is looking for sufficient funds for housing, food, and clothing for her and her children. There should be sufficient finances for housing, clothing, and food. One respondent pointed out that this was related to a woman’s inner fears and the need for a man to provide security, or support. This is not easily reconciled with the fact that this need was not important to this sample. However, the fear that some people have can be strong and is something that needs to be controlled, or it can dominate the relationship. Finances can be a source of control issues that can hurt a relationship. For example, some wives have justified their own spending as for the family, while accusing their husbands of spending on themselves. The discipline for finances is responsible budgeting and setting allowances for personal, discretionary spending; this may include allowances for tools or recreational items.

**Thoughts on Question Ten**

Wives are subject to the call to respect found in Ephesians 5: 33; “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” Respect as part of the discipline in marriage is acknowledging that a husband’s needs are important to the marriage and also need fulfillment. The survey responses ranked the men’s needs in the same order with the exception of recreational companionship and admiration. However, the difference between the two was very small.

Peace and quiet or domestic support was ranked as the most important men’s need by all
respondents. Some of the respondents were confused about the difference between this need and the need for the husband to be a good father. Domestic support is not something that is often seen in isolation from other domestic activities. Peace and quiet can mean different things, so the important point is that the couple must communicate and understand each other. If a husband is withdrawing or prefers spending time alone it can be a sign that there needs to be adjustments in the domestic situation. The discipline for the husband is effectively communicating any frustration and actively being part of the solution.

Recreational companionship was rated the second most important need by men, but third by women. Men enjoy doing activities with a wife, just like women enjoy talk. Some men feel deceived when the wife after marriage loses interest in what were fun dating activities. Both spouses need to realize that joint recreational activities are occasions for undivided attention. Whether it is during the actual activity, preparation, or talk afterwards the mutual enjoyment of the joint activity can count towards the fifteen hours of undivided attention. As part of the discipline, there has to be mutual discussion and decision on an activity that both can agree on. This can involve some serious negotiations and one spouse may have to agree to participate in something that is not a first choice. The dividends of spending time together are worth the effort.

Admiration was ranked third by men and second by women. Admiration works both ways, and if a man wants to be admired then he should have respect for his wife. A husband needs to behave in a way so that his wife can have something to brag about to other women. For example, women will brag about their husbands’ academic achievements, their hard work, or their dedication. This can be anything from someone with a special talent, to a simple hard working man who is dedicated to his family. All of it is important and is a source of admiration
As part of the discipline of marriage, couples must avoid talking bad about or belittling each other in public, or among friends. A husband’s standing in the community partly depends on how his wife describes him to others. A woman might only complain about her husband among friends, but this will prove toxic over time as it spreads to the greater community. In the same way a husband should not talk bad about his wife behind her back. A man’s public conduct towards his wife is just as important as his private conduct. A wife’s reputation and standing in the community depends on her husband. There are great dividends to this discipline. Take Proverbs 31: 10-31 as a guide.

Sexual fulfillment was ranked fourth by respondents to the survey. For the man copulation is important for bonding with his wife. The need for sex and the need for affection are often confused with one another. Affection is an act of love such as hugging, kissing, and hand-holding, which is non-sexual. However, if a man’s affection tends to have sexual motives, it is a symptom of his need for sexual intercourse, and not the wife’s need for affection. The discipline is to accept what Paul counseled in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4, “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.” The discipline for the husband is to realize that intimate communication helps his wife feel sexual desire; however, ineffective communication decreases

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An attractive spouse was ranked last in the survey. There is a lot of pressure on women to conform to an artificial standard of beauty. This has been fueled by modern photojournalism and glamour magazines that have set a standard that average women cannot compete with. This has been devastating in certain respects as women try to compete and fail. Self-image suffers and there is a loss of confidence and self-respect. Many women dress and groom to impress other women and some women do not care any longer. The discipline for the woman is to make herself attractive to her husband in accordance with 1 Corinthians 7:34, “… the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.” A wife might not believe a husband’s statement that she looks good, but he is probably telling the truth. The wife should make herself attractive to her husband.

In the same way the husbands discipline is found in 1 Corinthians 7:33, “… the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife ...” A husband will need to notice and comment on small things, for example, a new hair style, jewelry, or clothing, and give good compliments like, “hey, I like those earrings.” Many times a woman will dress to elicit comments, and the man needs to notice and say something. This is especially true for special events and occasions.

Case studies

Three short case studies are presented as examples of couples who spend time together and represent one of the goals of marriage as a spiritual discipline. These couples were noted for

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54 Murray and Milhausen, “Factors impacting women’s sexual desire,” 111.
having a strong pair bond and intimacy. This was evident in how they presented themselves in public and how they talked about each other. The couple that wants to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline should be able to take away the lesson that time spent together and communication makes for a strong marriage.

Case one is a man who works from home and is habituated to talking with his wife all day. This is so ingrained that when he visited his old office away from home, he called a former female colleague by his wife’s name without even thinking about it. The former female colleague thought it was “sweet.” The point is he was so used to talking to his wife that when he was in a different situation he fell back on habit. Because he works out of the house he is in a position to give his wife undivided attention.

Case two is a dentist who has several offices but only one receptionist who also happens to be his nurse and his wife. Because they work together they are able to give each other undivided attention when they commute and during breaks such as lunch and between visits. It has been observed that when they work together they coordinate and complement each other to such a degree that it is almost like one person with four hands.

Case three is a retired couple who volunteered together at a museum. This was a joint hobby that they enjoyed, and a way that they spent time together. They were involved with planning school tours where the children would be taught how things worked. After the wife died the museum hosted a memorial service in their honor.
CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will look at the various benefits to the use of the foregoing discoveries as it pertains to marriage and the practice as a spiritual discipline.¹ There are many benefits to marriage that have been reported by others.² These benefits include economic, social, and physiological factors. For example, married couples are better off financially. Married couples will live longer. Children of two parent households are better adjusted and will tend to greater successes in life. The list is too long to do it justice, so it is enough to say that marriage is beneficial to all involved. It is worth the effort to support marriage as a social institution.

Attachment

There are spiritual benefits to marriage. Some of these benefits are direct and others are indirect. The direct benefits include but are not limited to the satisfaction of pair bonding according to the first command given to all life in Genesis. This pair bonding should include the trust and confidence that close attachment provides to the couple. Attachment affects the way couples interact and colors the perception of that interaction. Couples should work to maintain or develop secure attachment.

Attachment is initially based in the needs of an individual, but should also be moderated by the awareness of the needs of the other person. Maturity will play a role in attachment

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because a self-centered individual will have a hard time relating to and giving to the other person so that her needs are met. If you accept the work of Dr. Harley, then understanding the needs of a marriage partner is the best way to have your own needs fulfilled.\(^3\) As it has been pointed out this involves an understanding of self and an awareness of others. The securely attached individual not only feels worthy of love, but also capable of getting the love needed, and in turn giving love.

Benefits of secure attachment include trusting other people. There needs to be a certain amount of trust as it relates to marriage.\(^4\) For example, finances and how money is spent are often points of marital conflict and one of the causes of divorce. Finances are not only a matter of budgeting, but also a matter of trust and security. This is an area where men are often accused of being immature; however, the lack of trust is also a reflection of a woman’s insecurity and the need for financial support.

It is interesting to note that financial support in the rated list in question nine of the survey was ranked least important by both men and women. This is probably moderated by question pairs four and eight which are about maturity versus equal contributions, and knowing what a spouse likes. This is compared and contrasted with question pair seven where ninety percent said that they should understand their spouses’ needs. This looks like a paradox where there is a disconnection between the overwhelming majority that agrees about understanding a spouse’s needs and the response to giving a partner what the person likes. This disconnection is

\(^3\) Harley, *His Needs, Her Needs*, 179.

greater with men than women and is perhaps the source of the confusion.

Trust is an important component of affectionate touching that supports the pair bond. If trust is absent then one spouse will shy away from the other, and withdrawal and distancing has a biological impact on the pair bond. The old saying is that absence makes the heart grow fonder, but it also makes the pair bond weaker. This is often observed with people who are absent from a spouse for a long period, such as prisoners or members of the military. There is a period of readjustment and re-acquaintance that must take place for people to be comfortable again with each other. It is widely suggested that a spouse may need a few days to become reacquainted with and relearn to trust the returned spouse. This trust is important for good sexual bonding to be reestablished.\(^5\) People will experience things that change them, and a spouse will need to be able to adjust to the change. For example, there may be issues of control over the household or finances, or medical problems and emotional wounds that demand care. A strong initial bond that is maintained with contact such as letters and telephone calls can help maintain strong bonds. In some cases the transition does not go smoothly and the bond dissolves. In other cases the pair bond ceases during the absence and the marriage may later fail.

The important point is that couples need to maintain a trust bond through intimate contact. Because people are unique individuals, for some letters, pictures, and telephone contact is enough. Other people may crave physical contact to maintain a trusting bond.\(^6\) In the extreme situations this need will cause that person to seek physical contact outside of the marriage with a


consequent strain on the marriage. If this does not destroy the marriage there is a possibility that the marriage can be saved if the couple can be rejoined and re-bonded in a safe setting. A safe setting should allow for the resolution of anger or disappointment and a time for the couple to talk with minimal distractions. This should include opportunities for good touching, including hugging and hand holding.

Touch is something that is not always well used by couples. Trust is linked to Oxytocin levels which are raised by touch and intimacy. When there is anger and withdrawal then there is typically a loss of touch. This becomes a vicious cycle where the couple withdraws from each other and there is a refusal to engage in non-sexual touch. The distance between them grows and the lack of trust drives further arguments and distancing. On the other hand, couples who are attached and maintain intimate touch also maintain closeness that facilitates trust.

Les and Leslie Parrott point out that touch increases the health of a marriage. Human skin is covered with touch receptors, and the brain secretes chemicals when these are activated. They point out that a hug can increase hemoglobin, moderate the heart rate and blood pressure and ease pain. Touch is part of courting behavior and is not something that needs to be learned. Typically couples assume that such touching will always exist in their marriage. In some marriages this is true, however in other marriages the touching may diminish. Extended affectionate touching may be severely neglected in couples married for a long time. Touch is something learned in the family of origin and those early experiences should be jointly examined.

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8 Parrott and Parrott, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts*, 95.
and boundaries explored. The type and amount of touch may mean different things, but it is known that men in an insecure situation can interpret touch as uncomfortable. Affectionate touching shows confidence and is a sign of trust.

Trust leads to the benefit of better communication; increased closeness promotes the production of Oxytocin. Trust, communication and closeness promote sexual intercourse which is the glue that holds the affection together. In summarizing the findings from their longitudinal study, Ragnar D. Storaasli and Howard J Markman noted that, “every marriage faces the virtual certainty of some types of relationship problems.” In addition, they note “one of the most important findings was that couples’ progression through the various stages (premarital, early marriage, early parenting) was marked by increasing problems with communication and sex, two problem areas strongly correlated with marital satisfaction.” So, communication and sex, or intimacy needs to be the focus of the spiritual practice with the needs of the marriage partner as the target.

Communication can be enhanced or facilitated by using the recommendations of various authors on the subject. One book which has proven useful is James C. Peterson, Why don’t we listen better? Communicating & connecting in relationships. The book details a process where

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11 Storaasli and Markman, “Relationship Problems,” 95.


participants take turns listening and talking with the help of a talker-listener card developed by the author. The talker-listener card has been likened to a foldable third person to keep the participants honest and on target. The card helps people decide who will talk first by who is most bothered and who is calm enough to listen. The card reminds the talker that he owns the problem and that he is to share his feelings and thoughts; the listener does not own the problem but provides safety, understanding, and clarifies things for the talker. The talker shares without accusing, attacking, labeling, or judging, and the listener listens without agreeing, disagreeing, advising, or defending. The author provides listening advice including common traps to avoid and thoughts on trying out new listening skills. Also included are sections on basic listening techniques and techniques that are useful in special situations like the elderly or intense interactions where, for example, someone starts crying. The author gives advice on using the techniques at mealtimes, in groups and for decision making. This book’s strength is that its utility goes beyond the couple and extends into situations where extended family and friends might be present.

When it comes to talk, Amanda Denes, Associate Professor in the Department Of Communications at the University Of Connecticut, studied pillow talk after sexual intercourse. Her thought is that the flood of Oxytocin that occurs during orgasm gives the couple a chance to bond afterwards. This is more apparent for women than for men because it was felt that testosterone moderates the effect. It is theorized that what happens after is as important as what

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14 Peterson, *Why Don’t We Listen Better?* 55.

goes on before.\(^{16}\) Men tend to crash afterwards and lose interest in their partner or fall asleep and need to make an effort to give their wives their undivided attention.

The work of James G. Pfaus, Tod E. Kippin, Genaro A. Coria-Avila, Hélène Gelez, Veronica M. Afonso, Nafissa Ismail, and Mayte Parada, is important in showing how sexual attraction and response can be conditioned.\(^{17}\) There is a certain amount of neuroplasticity that can explain what is going on in the offender's mind. Attraction and reward preferences do not excuse the offender, but do become part of the narrative that need to be reframed as part of the therapy. This work helps us understand why there are some people who like fetish items, or desire what others see as undesirable. The important point is that aspects of sexual stimulus are learned behaviors that can be reprogrammed so that the attraction and desire is towards the spouse.\(^{18}\) This is where Harley's use of teaching couples to meet each other’s needs becomes a powerful tool for reconciliation.\(^{19}\) Reprogramming can only be accomplished with consent of the individual, and with positive rewards. Attempts to change or manipulate behavior based on unfavorable criticism and nagging will become toxic and destructive to the relationship.

Part of being a good father which also goes along with domestic support and quiet is attachment between the parents and the children. Too often parents are concerned with trying to talk things through and forget that people, especially children need contact comfort. Getting


\(^{19}\) Harley, \textit{His Needs, Her Needs}, 179.
parents to touch in a good way with the release of Oxytocin and vasopressin is one of the goals for good parenting. What D. A. Hughes wrote in his book *Attachment Focused Family Therapy* was intended for working with children but can be applied to adults as well:

“Touch is central to the co-regulation of affect and facilitating a sense of felt safety between parent and child. Touch permeates the child’s prenatal existence and remains important throughout the individual’s life span. Touch is important both in co-regulating affect and in co-creating meaning between parent and child. The comforting touch helps the child to attain resolution about the most painful loss. The deep touch assists the agitated child in becoming calm. The gentle touch enables the annoyed child to accept a parent’s limit on her behavior. The caressing touch enables the child to feel love when she thinks that she may be unlovable. Touch needs to be varied, finding a place in family relationships in many contexts and for many reasons. It needs to be long and short, deep and light, playful and affectionate. Within touch the parent-child relationship is felt more deeply. Good times are experienced as being even better and bad times are easier to get through.”

The point is to use the reward and neuropeptide circuits that are involved in human pair bonding to build stronger bonds. If these are neglected then the bond will weaken. This is one of the points of attachment theory that works for both adults and children. It used to be said that you should not hold a child because it would spoil him. This was short-sighted advice at best and downright destructive at worst. For any family the best advice is to have good physical contact that builds strong bonds.

**Forgiveness**

Because of the difference between those who want a mature spouse versus those who

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want equal contribution to the marriage and the motivation behind actions noted in question pairs four and eight, one of the points of marriage as a spiritual discipline is forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean that the person becomes a door mat for every evil that a partner might commit, but is a way for the couple to heal together. Couples should practice the forgiveness triad of forgiving others, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness, as part of the discipline.²² Counseling from a forgiveness perspective can assist clients in understanding that there is a relationship between receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

Jessica N. Fish, Thomas W. Pavkov, Joseph L. Wetchler, and Jerry Bercik, points out that forgiveness promote mental health, partially by helping to reduce anger.²³ There is a relationship between anger and unhealthy forms of grief that could stand in the way of forgiveness. For example, the advice has been to never go to bed angry, but advice on how to display and dissipate anger is lacking. This is probably because the way anger is displayed is connected to family of origin and individual temperament.²⁴ Some people will yell, and others will silently sulk; one display may not be better than the other, but both can be detrimental to understanding. The one caveat is that at least if there is yelling then there is a chance at an exchange of ideas. Silence tends to lead to withdrawal and distancing which is one of the indicators of impending

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marriage failure identified by Gottman.25

Another consideration is that when someone is wounded deeply they go through the grief process as described by Kübler-Ross, and the reaction to marital problems can also follow this pattern.26 27 This can be true if there has been an admission of a past or present affair or some other major indiscretion. Grief can encompass both the present act, but also past experiences that the aggrieved partner may have suffered. For example, there may have been similar incidents in a person’s family of origin that hurt them deeply, and the new information can trigger emotions that have been suppressed or that the person thought had been resolved.28

The key to the process of forgiveness is that there is willingness to work together on the part of the couple and that forgiveness is direct and absolute. Andy J. Merolla, and Shuangyue Zhang found that direct forgiveness following transgressions improved relationships. In other words it decreased relational damage and increased marital satisfaction. Conditional forgiving, however, detracted from the couple and increased relational damage. It is interesting to note that indirect forgiveness, in contrast to the other styles, was unrelated to relational damage.29 This can be important when someone needs to forgive a past spouse who is unavailable to improve the


26 Clinton and Straub, God Attachment, 28.


Briana L. Root, and Julie Juola Exline looked at three different motives for forgiving: goodwill, moral obligation, and personal benefit. What surprised them was that men responded to the prompts to consider forgiveness, which suggested that simply raising the idea of forgiveness might be useful for men. They also found that men showed differences in response based on the motivation. For example, those who were in the goodwill position showed slightly more forgiveness than those in moral obligation and personal benefit. They found that this research did not contradict their earlier research that suggested men would become more forgiving when prompted to engage in empathic processing. They suggest that to facilitate forgiveness by men, fostering empathy and goodwill toward the transgressor would be particularly helpful.

In the same study women reported that they had already put more effort into forgiving before the study began. Women were also found to be marginally more likely to report that they saw forgiveness as difficult. Women were also more likely to endorse the notion of forgiveness as a process that required emotional healing as opposed to a onetime decision. These findings are consistent with the idea that for many women trying to forgive was not a particularly novel thought. It appeared that many of them may have already tried to forgive and had encountered what they saw as obstacles. These obstacles were of such a nature that they would probably not

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be surmounted by a simple prompt to forgive like men.\textsuperscript{32}

Forgiveness may place a greater burden on the wife, but it is also an opportunity to help the husband understand her efforts.\textsuperscript{33} This will work better in a couple that is committed to living marriage as a spiritual discipline, but would be a problem for a couple in conflict. The point is that the husband should become attuned to his wife’s emotional efforts. Because women tend to focus on relationships more than men this places the burden of understanding on the husband. This effort to understand should not be a source of conflict, but seen as a method to cooperate and coordinate. This should be understood along the lines of Dr. Heitler’s insight that solutions may conflict, but concerns seldom do.\textsuperscript{34} The greater effort of the wife in seeking to forgive is a solution that the husband might not understand. The concern is the grievance for which forgiveness is requested and how that particular situation can be avoided in the future.

Melvin R. Lansky sees forgiveness in psychoanalytic terms as the resolution of splitting manifested in antecedent retributive states of mind.\textsuperscript{35} These states of mind are understood to be resentment, grudge, blame, envy, vengefulness, spite, hatred, and bitterness. He argues that the fixation that leads to splitting is supported by some hidden conflict involving shame and the possibility of facing unbearable shame. This is not the same understanding that the Freudian, Kleinian, and neo-Kleinian systems have proposed. They lean largely on the dynamics of guilt

\textsuperscript{32} Root and Exline, “Gender Differences,” 191.


\textsuperscript{34} Heitler, \textit{From Conflict to Resolution}, 17.

but do not consider the shame that preceded that guilt. The relationship of guilt and shame is important and must be understood separately as motivations.

Everett L. Worthington, David J. Jennings, and Frederick A. Diblasio have examined how psychotherapists, couple therapists, and family therapists have attempted to promote forgiveness in both families and individuals. They have constructed a theoretical understanding that suggests a model with five elements that are crucial to forgiveness. The therapist promotes these elements as a framework for the individual to adopt. The elements are: Decisions to forgive; Emotional forgiveness; Good couple relationships that provide a warm environment that invites restoring after a transgression; Facilitative talk about transgressions; a climate where Christian beliefs and values are apparent and appreciated. This understanding gives place to the spiritual aspects of forgiveness that will complement marriage as a spiritual discipline.

Forgiveness as a discipline should mirror the forgiveness that God has for humankind. This should be freely given from the heart and not as a method of holding a transgression as a lever against a spouse. Remember that forgiveness is a unilateral action and is different from reconciliation which involves the other party. The other party can remain unrepentant, stubborn, and unwilling to reconcile or forgive but that should not stop unilateral forgiveness. Forgiveness has a cathartic action on one’s own spirit when it is no longer held captive to the other person’s problems or sin. We are held captive by our own problems and sin and rely on the forgiveness


38 Michelle Scheinkman and Denise Werneck, “Disarming Jealousy in Couples Relationships: A
of God to free us so that we can forgive ourselves remembering that we love God because he first loved us. Forgiveness is an act of love and a humble spouse should be able to recognize the act for what it is and love back. Spiritually this mirrors secure attachment to God.

**Joint Spiritual Disciplines**

Marriage as a spiritual discipline does not preclude the practice of other spiritual disciplines. One of the problems when it comes to marriage and spirituality is that there has been little exploration of marital spirituality.\(^3\)\(^9\) One caveat is that no other spiritual discipline should stand in the way of, or detract from the marriage. Spiritual practices with a spouse can make a great couples activity. A couple can draw closer to God and to each other through practicing a joint spiritual discipline.\(^4\)\(^0\) The consideration is that any practice should not place a burden mainly on one spouse, and that it is something freely engaged in. Couples with children also need to be mindful about how they are impacted by the discipline. For example, fasting may not be an appropriate discipline for young children or if it is imposed on children.

Some people enjoy going on spiritual retreats; some retreats are for couples, and some are gender separate. The caution is that anything that separates the couple should be approached as Saint Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:5, “Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may

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not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” The point is that anything that separates the couple should be followed by a planned period of being together. Children are a complication, but they will also need a time to reacquaint themselves with a parent that has been absent.

Paul was also for the spiritual side of marriage. 1 Corinthians 11:9-11 “created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the LORD, however, woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Reflections

Motivations for this study came from the investigator’s experiences and observations over many years. Friends and coworkers would have marital problems and some marriages would end in divorce. There seemed to be a pattern to the dysfunction with the last stage being distancing and separation, however the causes and development of the dysfunction remained elusive.¹ Professional counseling appeared not only ineffective, but sometimes injurious and at other times unethical.² This was particularly troubling when the investigator personally faced the same situations. A particularly bitter disappointment was found in the churches; the very ones who claimed to hold marriage in the highest esteem seemed to understand its dynamics the least. The rates of divorce within Christianity are nearly identical to those for civil marriages despite the expectations that they would be less. The courts and structures set up by governments in the guise of helping only proved corrupt and injurious to all within their grasp. The questions that were generated by all of these observations remained unanswered to the investigator’s satisfaction.

The first part of this thesis is an introduction and overview of marriage and its place within human society. Marriage was practiced long before there was extra-tribal government or formal religious structures that began to regulate marriage within that society. However, the basic nature of marriage and its benefit and support by society has been recognized down


² Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 15.
through the ages and throughout human society in whatever form it took. Marriage was understood as both a civil and religious duty and held a special place within societies. As societies became more formalized so did the response to marital failure and dissolution. Changes within societies such as working conditions, mobility, affluence, and the breaking of extended family structures have impacted marriage. Churches and governments have responded to marital problems and divorce with various programs and efforts with no definitive impact.

While the failure of government is not surprising, the failure of churches to stem the tide of divorce is remarkable for several reasons. The Christian church holds marriage as a spiritual commitment before God. Marriages are traditionally solemnized in churches as the locus of the community. Churches attempt to engage their members spiritually and hold clergy up as an example of spiritual practice. Marital problems among clergy and ministry failure are devastating to the overall spirituality of church members. This has led to an emphasis on therapeutic religion with a loss of emphasis on traditional Christian spiritual practices and members turning to other spiritual traditions to satisfy their spiritual cravings. This has neither satisfied marital or spiritual needs, but has caused divisions. What is needed is a way to place marriage and spirituality back in the central place that it should hold in the Christian churches. Traditional spiritual disciplines, such as lectio divina, journaling, and meditative silence are solo endeavors. If marriage is practiced as a spiritual discipline it would have the double benefit of enhancing marital satisfaction and spiritual bonds with the Creator. This is the problem that this thesis addresses.

The Introduction looks at some history of marriage and some of the effects that marital conflict can have on an individual’s spiritual well-being. This naturally leads to the rationale for marriage as a spiritual discipline. Within the introductory section, the theoretical basis for the
project is given which presents biological, sociological and theological reasons for marriage as a spiritual discipline. The introductory section also describes the investigative protocol used to evaluate evidence that could be combined with previous research to deduce the principals needed to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline. This also includes an overview of the works of various scholars and authors who are known in the field of marriage, marital relations, and communication.

The first chapter presents the rational for the design of the investigative instrument and how it would be presented randomly to invite participation. Several problems were identified that would yield biased results, and these where accounted for in the design of the instrument. The instrument was also designed for analysis, but this relied on the respondent’s cooperation in following directions and only choosing the programmed answers. There are several statistical methods that could be used to sort the data.

This chapter also describes every aspect of the survey conducted for this project. Included is the rationale for the survey, the process by which it was conducted, contents of the survey itself, and the results.

The first chapter presents the survey questions rationale, an overview of the data and an analysis. The data will be evaluated and conclusions drawn in the areas noted in the survey: marital attitudes, willingness, and the benefits that couples claim for their marriages.

The research protocol used a survey that was presented at random by the researcher around Baltimore, Westminster, and in parts of Frederick County, all in Maryland. Data was collected from people at random and from situations where those of all religious backgrounds might be present. Single individuals were included to solicit their attitudes towards marriage and
how they understand relationships in marriage. The survey was also available in Spanish to allow
the participation of the Spanish speaking population in the region. The principle investigator
distributed the surveys and collected them on the spot. The surveys were placed in an envelope
for later sorting and compilation. Participation was completely voluntary in all cases, and there
was no compensation. Responses were gathered from one hundred nineteen people. Comments
made by survey respondents were noted and reported when relevant.

The survey instrument consisted of three sections. The first section captured the age,
gender, and marital status of the respondent. This included attendance at pre-marital counseling
to see what the response would be. The second section consisted of eight pairs of questions that
asked the respondent to choose between two competing ideas. The last part consisted of ranking
two sets of five different marital needs from one to five, with one being the most important and
five the least. These needs came from Dr. Harley’s book, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an
Affair-Proof Marriage*. Each set of needs was ranked by both genders to test how each saw their
own needs and how the perceived the other’s needs.

The survey was designed for complete answers to all questions. It was expected that
some respondents would skip questions or be unable to accept the forced choices on the survey.
Where a survey was complete enough to be counted it was. However there were several surveys
that had too many unanswered questions, or were essentially blank to be included.

The last section of the first chapter was an analysis and discussion of the survey data and
comments. For questions one, two, three, five and seven the probability for respondents choosing
one answer over the others was high. A significant signal was found in questions four and eight

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where the value was less than the other questions. Question eight showed a strong gender
difference in the probability of choosing one response over the other.

Chapter two compares and contrasts conclusions drawn from the project survey to
conclusions drawn from the research of others. Results of the project survey and the various
claims of related research will support the proposition marriage can be practiced as a spiritual
discipline. The resulting benefits to the individual and couple will be explored.

Chapter three is a discussion of the various points in the research and an expansion on the
research results. This includes the necessity and benefits of forgiveness as a healing practice in
marriage. There is also importance in giving and receiving affection that goes to all of the family.
This is important as being a good father and domestic support both hinge on how children are
treated.

The significant findings were that while in the majority of questions both men and
women, married and single shared similar opinions on marriage and needs, there was a large
difference over the need for a mature spouse and the motivation behind what someone does for a
spouse. Discipline demands a certain level of maturity, and marriage as a spiritual discipline asks
that the person look out of herself toward the partner as the object of the discipline. Knowing and
understanding the needs of a spouse and what that person likes is key to marital satisfaction. This
opinion is formed by the work of several researchers referenced in this thesis. The insight is that
this can be practiced as a discipline to strengthen both the marriage and achieve spiritual
satisfaction.
Principles for Practicing Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline

There are four principles for living marriage as a spiritual discipline. These start with the individual and then concentrate on the couple’s interaction. Some recommendations for using these principles were given in chapter two and the reader should review them there if there are questions. Motivation for practicing spirituality is separate from marriage, but is important to this thesis.

Know Yourself

The first principle is that the individual who wants to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline needs to know him or herself before they can know a spouse. They marriage partners should be able to answer why they want to practice a spiritual discipline? The point of the spiritual discipline is to bring an individual closer to God. This should not be a decision made under duress. The individual who wants to practice marriage as a spiritual discipline must know what attachment style they currently have. Secure attachment is the preferred style, but those with other styles can work towards secure attachment. This is foundational to being able to get good results from a spiritual discipline.

The benefits of this are that you can understand your motivations. You can discern your attachment style and take actions to correct it so that you are in a secure position. You can work towards cooperation with the spouse so that there is a win-win situation and not a winner and loser.
Own Your Problems

So, principle two is that you have to own your own problems. The marriage partner is only responsible for how they interact with you, and not for any organic problems that you bring to the marriage or that develop over time. The inverse is also true that you are not responsible for your partner’s problems.

Benefits of this are reduction in blame and a basis for cooperation and forgiveness. The point here is that if you want to be forgiven for being human you need to forgive others their humanity. Part of this is accepting that no one is perfect including you.

Talk To Your Spouse

Principle three is that you have to listen to your spouse to understand their needs and problems. Because the one listening does not own the problem he has to remain calm enough to hear the problem. The listener does not have to agree, disagree, or debate. The one talking should share thoughts and feelings without accusing, attacking, or labeling. The goal is a deep understanding of a spouse based on the safety of the communications.

The problem is that women and men have different levels of need for talk. Women tend to be more intuitive in reading emotions and mood than men. This leads to the problem of a woman expecting that a man will understand them like a female friend would and are then disappointed when this does not happen. Women are also disappointed when their husbands do not invest sufficient time in intimate talk. Men often feel that their wives are asking them to

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5 Peterson, Why Don’t We Listen Better? 102-108, 113-156.
guess what they are thinking and being accusative when they do not understand. Men can also feel trapped or cornered by certain topics like clothing, or who looks good.

The benefits of good communications are a basis for understanding thoughts and intentions. Women have reported that talk sets the mood for intimacy, both intellectual and physical. Communication informs one spouse of what their partner likes and prefers. This should take the guess work out of the relationship and move it to a solid ground of information. Intimacy helps the production of Oxytocin that acts to both bond the couple together, but also promotes trust which is essential to intimate communications. This may appear to be a paradox where an attempt to communicate with no intimacy leads to worse communication, and intimacy leads to better communication. This appears to be why the advice has always been, never go to sleep angry. It is better to talk through a problem and reconcile than let the situation fester and find that the inflammation is worse in the morning.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the fourth principle for marriage as a spiritual discipline because this mirrors the spiritual reconciliation between God and human kind. Forgiveness takes one person but reconciliation takes two. Reconciliation has the goal of developing secure attachment between the couple. Secure attachment to God as the source of the spiritual life is the goal of spiritual disciplines.

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8 Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 264.
Survey results for question pairs four and eight show two probable sources of conflict for a couple. Equal contribution to a marriage sounds like a noble goal, but is fraught with subjective definitions and performance measurements. However, if a spouse is mature and responsible then there is a basis for understanding failures as human frailty and not failure to meet subjective standards. This understanding is amplified by the responses to question pair eight where there was a lack of understanding about what should be given to a spouse. Each one of us has unique likes and dislikes and this leads to disappointment when we give what we value to someone who does not also value the gift. While it is human nature to blame the recipient for ingratitude, the real problem is with the giver. It is the responsibility of one spouse to understand the other spouse and what are that spouse’s likes and dislikes. Giving what is truly valued based on communication and understanding gives the best results.

Before a couple reaches the point where they intuitively understand each other and what the other likes and values there will be many mistakes and false starts. Forgiveness is the only method to overcome disappointment and hurt so that the marriage relationship can become stronger. For a spiritual discipline is good for the practitioner, and allows for the possibility of reconciliation.

Discussion

Understanding is one of the goals of communication. One common complaint among

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women is that men do not understand them, and there is a similar complaint from men. This is reflected in the answers to the survey questions four and eight by male respondents. The female averages where higher and this significantly raised the total. Women are more relational than men, and the cliché of the high school girls talking about relationships, while the boys play sports is a reflection of this situation. However, the understanding needs to go both ways and this should occur with effective intimate communications. Effective communications is a matter of trust that such talk will not be related outside of the marital confidence and that it will not bring ridicule or mocking.

Respect for a spouse is supported by the needs of trust, honesty and openness for women; admiration, and peace and quiet as domestic support for men.\textsuperscript{11} Some people indulge in belittling a spouse or saying bad things about them to their children. This is toxic behavior that erodes trust and poisons relationships. Proverbs 14:1 tells us that, “the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.” This verse applies to all spouses and is a call to remember marriage commitment.\textsuperscript{12}

Communication should help establish what each individual’s needs are according to the questionnaire in Harley’s book or as provided at the Marriage Builders\textsuperscript{®} website.\textsuperscript{13} These needs may be different than the typical top five needs for women and men. These needs would then become the focus of the spouse’s discipline. For example, a man would make time to talk with his wife to support her need for conversation; a wife would choose a recreational activity that she

\textsuperscript{11} Gottman and Silver, \textit{The Seven Principles}, 102.


could participate in to be her husband’s recreational companion. The particular need and what it takes to give satisfaction is left up to the couple concerned.

Where this can all go wrong is if there is coercion or manipulation. As already related if someone is coerced into the activity then it will become a source of resentment and frustration. If there is manipulation or unreasonable demands then it will become a weak point that will break when there is too much stress. For example, a woman who thinks that her husband must be home at all times to be a good husband, or a man that has unreasonable expectations of cleanliness or beauty that he wants to impose on a mother with many young children.

The hypothetical couple that has the top five needs as given by Harley would focus on them as a way to strengthen the pair-bond to glorify the Creator. The man would focus on his wife’s needs which would be: Affection is a way to promote the formation of the love and trust hormone Oxytocin. This leads to greater intimacy and cooperation. The role of Oxytocin cannot be over emphasized. Talk and intimacy leads with the wife leads to more sexual intercourse which leads to more Oxytocin on the part of the husband. Talk or conversation, he would plan for the time needed to talk, or to let her talk. According to Harley the minimum amount of time should be fifteen hours of undivided attention per week. This should be a period of undivided attention, or of sufficient isolation that she feels that she is being listened to and heard. For example, if you are driving some place and talking in the car that time can count towards the total time. The conversation however must be an open relaxed and two sided and should not consist of rants towards other drivers or criticism of a spouses driving skills.

Trust is promoted by Oxytocin which is released due to intimacy and it leads to honesty

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14 Harley, His Needs, Her Needs, 66.
and openness. This means that the husband should share his intimate thoughts with his wife; feelings and intimacy are what sustain marriage.\(^{15}\) The wife needs to know how to listen and be supportive without judging or belittling. Trust also goes to the family finances, which is not just how much is available, but also how it is budgeted. Trust also plays a role in how the husband is perceived as a good father and his commitment to his family.

The top five needs for men are compatible with the needs of a wife, but are not expressed in the same way. For example, sexual fulfillment is to the husband what affection is to the wife.\(^{16}\) This does not preclude affection, wooing, and seduction, but is seen as the natural end result of a successful effort. The act of sexual coupling releases Oxytocin which leads to greater feelings of trust and cooperation. This could be a date night or some other way that the couple can keep a sexual spark alive.\(^{17}\) Recreational companionship is a way to keep interest alive in the relationship, but is also an opportunity for talk, and intimacy that women desire.\(^{18}\) Many women cheat themselves out of this opportunity by not choosing a mutually satisfying recreational activity.

An attractive spouse seems to be a problem area because many women are concerned with worldly standards of beauty, or on the extreme other end some women think that beauty and attractive looks are not important. Certainly the standard that a wife should try and meet is the husband’s ideal and not some extreme pushed by advertisers or other people. Beauty can include


\(^{16}\) McGinty, “Living out Love in Marriage,” 66.

\(^{17}\) Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 215.

the use of cosmetics and clothing, but this should be moderated by both the wife’s desires and that of the husband. The question of who the wife is trying to look good to should have the husband as the answer. If there is another answer, such as female friends, or coworkers then there is a problem with the woman’s priorities.

Peace and quiet is another area that is not always understood. Because there is a fusion of the habits and expectations of two different domestic arrangements there is not an automatic understanding of what is expected. Domestic support is how the man’s expectations of family life are met or exceeded. This does not mean that the wife is a slave to the man’s desires, but a partner in achieving his vision of family life. For example, is the husband made to be the primary disciplinarian at the end of the day and has to punish his children instead of enjoying peaceful interaction with them?

Admiration does not just mean having a high opinion of the husband. Too many women indulge themselves by being critical of their mates when they are with friends or family. This can be especially toxic when derogatory comments about a father are directed at his children. This destroys his authority as father and damages respect for both parents. The reciprocal is true for husbands, and to have admiration one should give admiration.

Recommendations for Future Research

The problem with spiritual disciplines and marriage is the natural changing nature of marriage. The social and spiritual needs of couples change through a normal life cycle. There is an opportunity to look at couples at various stages of marriage and how this idea causes them to

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interact. These stages might include: newly wedded couples, couples with young children, couples with teenagers and college age children, empty nest couples, and senior citizens. The needs of each group are different.  

For example, the newly wedded couple is establishing how they interact and the need is for a pattern or guide to long term constructive relationships. The couples with children face the pressure of change that happens with the first and subsequent children. They will need to maintain a focus on each other while they care and nurture the children. The empty nest couple finds that all of a sudden their focus is forced to shift off of the last child to leave and back to them as a couple. This is when a mother who has focused all of her affection on the children feels lost and abandoned. The husband may have established friendships that filled the void of an imperfect family life. If only one of the pair tries to reconnect, or revitalize the marriage and is rejected this might end the marriage. The other pressure at this time is that of retirement. In some cases the woman is used to having her days free and all of a sudden her routine is broken by her husband being around all of the time. Senior citizen couples have their own worries about reduced income, sickness, loss of mobility, and because of the mobile population their children may have relocated far away so that there is no family support. Loss of close friends and social contacts is also something that needs to be considered.

These different situations can be the focus of a study on how these couples can use the spiritual discipline of marriage in each unique circumstance. For example, how the newly

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married couple can establish their own family traditions that help them focus on each other. This may include “date” nights which can last through the arrival of children. The study could look at how each of these things binds the couple together. Marriage takes constant maintenance to keep it in good condition. If there is too much emphasis on things that are peripheral from the couple, then the pair bond will suffer. People will put their efforts where their hearts are. However, this must be balanced by the need for recreation, and friendship.

Conclusions

Marriage as a spiritual discipline is considered successful when there is continual reconciliation between the spouses.\textsuperscript{22} There may be lots of bitterness and anger to overcome, but if the couple can be brought to the point of forgiveness then reconciliation can be held out as a possibility. However, if there is no possibility of reconciliation then there should be at least forgiveness. The long term benefits of forgiveness are therapeutic on their own.

Couples may require counseling to help them with forgiveness and reconciliation. There are many factors that should be revealed or discovered at the beginning of counseling.\textsuperscript{23} Many of these factors can be self-reported by the couple when they first seek counseling. Other factors may need to be discovered through relevant and directed questions.\textsuperscript{24} The intake form should

\textsuperscript{22} Gottman and Silver, \textit{The Seven Principles}, 260.


also provide informed consent to elements of the counseling process. In all cases, having an intake process is valuable to both the counselor and the clients.

Attachment style may have played a part in marriage. The marriage partners should be made aware of their own attachment styles and how this affects their relationship. The goal is to help them move to secure attachment where they can feel worthy of love and capable of getting the love they need from each other. The marriage partners need to recall the narrative, and recognize the pain they have. Then they can reframe the meaning of the story. This enables them to repair the story with forgiveness, grace, and acceptance. The couple should then be able to reconnect emotionally in an atmosphere of safety, trust, and intimacy.

Another goal is moving from a place of shame to one of guilt. Shame is a place where the individual feels like he is no good, and guilt is the conviction of having done something bad. Feelings of shame are harmful and can lead to destructive behaviors. However, feelings of guilt can lead to repentance and a change of attitude and behavior. Guilt can help an offender understand the hurt and pain they have caused by that behavior which can help them apologize. Guilt and forgiveness are both concepts that Christians can understand, and apply.


Marital problems should be recognized and understood as an attack on the marital attachment system. There are many methods of working towards healing the marriage, for example, Emotionally Focused couples Therapy (EFT) can heal attachment injuries. Various styles of therapy should seek to correct the couple’s underlying problems and try to avoid divorce or chronic dysfunction in the marriage. The ultimate goal is to resolve the attachment injuries which then provide the required conditions for forgiveness in the marital system.

Forgiveness for couples should be more than a theological concept, but also a human dynamic. Forgiveness is explored extensively by many disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. If the integrity of these disciplines cannot be honored, then any reflection on forgiveness will be incomplete. Theology is enriched by these other disciplines and is helped through introspection to be more realistic about human forgiving. The result of engagement with these disciplines is a more compassionate understanding of forgiveness. The two people who should have compassion for each other are husbands and wives.

Couples should be in a position to use forgiveness as the first step in reconciling with each other. It takes only one to forgive, but two to reconcile; the goal for couples should be

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32 Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles*, 266.

reconciliation. The point is that forgiveness and reconciliation is not a onetime event, but a continuous process. This is evident in the point Jesus made about forgiveness. If you are required to forgive strangers how much more should a spouse be willing to forgive and reconcile with a partner.

Making a Difference in Marriage

The difficulty is typically in how to disseminate an idea. When it comes to marriage as a spiritual discipline there is more than just one idea that must be promoted. First, there is the idea of a spiritual discipline, what it is, how it is beneficial, and how is it practiced. Secondly, how is marriage practiced as a discipline, and what benefits are there to the practice? Third, what are the best practices for marriage? This thesis gives couples several general places where they can start, but couples still need to decide what their specific needs are. There is no one size fits all and no practice can be imposed on people because that defeats the voluntary nature of a spiritual discipline. The spiritual discipline is engaged, not because it is easy at first, but because there are spiritual rewards to be had over time.

The focus of marriage as a spiritual discipline makes churches the natural venue for its dissemination. Many churches already have some type of premarital counseling program. Marriage enrichment is also one of the programs that churches promote. Some churches have counseling programs or otherwise will have some type of intervention for troubled marriages.

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This is what some call the therapeutic church as opposed to the spiritual church.³⁶ Believers want  
spirituality as part of their church experience and traditional Christian spirituality is based on  
spiritual disciplines. What better way to promote marriage and spirituality than by combining  
them?

The ideas presented in this thesis are not to replace church based marriage programs, but  
are meant to supplement them with the insight that marriage and spirituality go together.³⁷ When  
promoting marital happiness anything is better than nothing, but some things work better than  
others. Researchers have found out what makes for a happy marriage, and who is likely to have  
marital happiness.³⁸ The bio-chemical pathways for couples bonding and how couples can  
promote strong pair bonds are well understood. All that is needed is a motivation that couples  
can have both marital happiness and strong spirituality. The potential to positively bless couples,  
their children, extended families, churches, and neighborhoods with both strong marriages and  
spirituality is hard to ignore. Christians who hold marriage in high esteem should be witnesses by  
example to what marriage and spirituality should be, and model it to others.³⁹ If the practice of  
the recommendations presented here are hard then there may be a larger problem with your  
marriage that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Being kind and considerate should be like a  

³⁶ Maureen R. Benjamins, et. al., “Religion and Preventive Service Use: Do Congregational Support and  
Religious Beliefs Explain the Relationship between Attendance and Utilization?” Journal of  

³⁷ Scott Harold Vail, “Reducing the Divorce Rate Among Christians in America: Premarital Counseling a  

³⁸ Gottman, Why Marriages Succeed or Fail, 71.

Theological Seminary, 2004), 60.
second nature, however issues from the family of origin and attachment can stand in the way of easy adoption of these findings. 40 The single best recommendation is for couples to learn how to hold each other and talk. 41


APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
Marriage as a spiritual discipline: Principles and benefits.
Richmond Laney
Liberty University
Baptist Theological Seminary

You are invited to be in a research study of marriage. You were selected as a possible participant because you are in this area. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Richmond Laney, Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes about marriage.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Please fill out the survey front and back. Choose the answer that seems best for you, there are no right or wrong answers. The survey takes about five minutes. If you would like to make comments they are welcome and might be reported in the thesis, but there is no way to connect them with you personally.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks are minimal and no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are to society, in general and to marriage in particular. This research may help increase marital satisfaction.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The records of this study may be destroyed after the mandatory retention period.

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.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Richmond Laney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him by email at rclaney@liberty.edu or at 877-330-7797. The researcher’s faculty mentor is Dr. Charles N. Davidson, and you may contact him at 434-592-4241, or by email at edavidson@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

IRB Code Numbers: 1648.081213

IRB Expiration Date: 12 August 2014

_____ Age.

_____ Male, _____ Female.

_____ Married, _____ Divorced, _____ Widow/Widower, _____ Remarried, if you answered yes to any of these questions, _____ Did you attended premarital counseling or a marriage class?

Marriage attitudes

Check the statement that you agree with most. (Please check only one option underneath each number.)

1.  
a) _____ Marriage is purely a legal matter.
b) _____ Marriage is defined by nature.

2.  
a) _____ Marriage is for life.
b) _____ Marriage has no fixed duration.

3.  
a) _____ Marriage meets basic human needs.
b) ____ Marriage only meets legal requirements.

4.
a) ____ A spouse should be mature and responsible.
b) ____ A spouse should contribute equally to the marriage.

5.
a) ____ I am worthy of love.
b) ____ I am unable to get the love I need.

6.
a) ____ I am capable of getting the love I want and need.
b) ____ I am not worthy of love.

7.
a) ____ I should understand my spouse’s needs.
b) ____ My spouse knows what I want.

8.
a) ____ My spouse should give me the things that I like.
b) ____ My spouse should give me what he or she likes.

When it comes to marriage please rank the following items from 1 to 5 based on its importance to you.

1 is the highest/most important.
5 is the lowest/least important.

9.
____ Affection.
____ Talk – conversation.
____ Trust – honesty and openness
____ Financial support
____ Husband as a good father – family commitment

10.
____ Sexual fulfillment.
____ Recreational companionship
____ An attractive spouse
____ Peace and quiet – domestic support
____ Admiration
FORMULARIO DEL CONSENTIMIENTO
Marriage as a spiritual discipline: Principles and benefits
Richmond Laney
Liberty University
Baptist Theological Seminary

Se le invita a usted a que participe en un estudio sobre matrimonio. Usted fue elegido como un participante posible porque es en el lugar. Se le pide a usted que lea este formulario y que haga cualquier pregunta o duda que pueda tener antes de afirmar estar de acuerdo con participar en el estudio.

Este estudio está siendo realizado por Richmond Laney, Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary.

Información del Trasfondo:
El propósito del este estudio es Actitudes de matrimonio.

Procedimiento:
Si usted decide y afirma estar de acuerdo con participar en este estudio, nos gustaría pedirle que haga las siguientes cosas: llenar el sondeo.

Riesgos y Beneficios de Participar en el Estudio:
Los riesgos son mínimos y no exceden los que se encontraría en la vida diaria.

Los beneficios de participar son a la sociedad en general y del matrimonio.

Compensación:
Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria y no existe ninguna compensación.

Privacidad:
La información sobre este estudio se mantendrá privada. En cualquier tipo de informe que se pueda publicar sobre el estudio, no se incluirá cualquier información que pueda hacer posible la identificación del sujeto. La información de la investigación se guardará de manera segura y sólo los investigadores tendrán acceso a ella. Los sondeos podrían ser destruidos después el periódico obligatorio de retención.

Naturaleza voluntaria del estudio:
Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión si desea o no participar no afectará a su actual o futuro de las relaciones con Liberty University. Si decide participar, usted es libre de no responder a cualquier pregunta o retirar en cualquier momento sin afectar a las relaciones.

Contactos y Preguntas:
Los investigadores que están realizando es estudio esta Richmond Laney. Puede hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga ahora. Si tiene preguntas más tarde, se le recomienda para ponerse en contacto con él al rclaney@liberty.edu o llamando al 877-330-7797. El consejero de facultad del investigador es Dr. Charles N. Davidson, y se puede poner en contacto con él por tel. al 434-592-4241, o enviar email a cdavidson@liberty.edu.

Si usted tiene preguntas o dudas sobre este estudio y si desearía hablar con alguien que no sea el investigador (o los investigadores), se le anima a que se comunique con la Institutional Review Board (la Junta de Revisión Institucional), 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 o mandar un correo electrónico a irb@liberty.edu.

Se le entregará a usted una copia de esta información para guardar en sus propios archivos.

Números de Códigos de la IRB: 1648.081213

Fecha de Vencimiento del Estudio Asignada por la IRB: 12 Agosto 2014

_____ Años.
_____ Hombre, ____ Mujer.

_____ Casado, _____ Divorciado, _____ Viuda/Viudo, ____ Volver a casarse. Si usted contestó sí a cualquiera de estas preguntas ____ ¿Ha asistido a consejería pre-matrimonial o un clase de matrimonio?

Actitudes de matrimonio

Ponga un x al lado de la frase que usted cree que es más verdadera para usted. (Por favor escoja sólo una letra debajo de cada número.)

1.
   a) ____ El matrimonio es puramente una cuestión jurídica.
   b) ____ El matrimonio se define por la naturaleza.

2.
   a) ____ El matrimonio es para toda la vida.
   b) ____ El matrimonio no tiene duración fija.

3.
   a) ____ El matrimonio satisface las necesidades humanas básicas.
   b) ____ El matrimonio sólo cumple con requisitos legales.
4.  
a) ____ Un cónyuge debería ser maduro y responsable.  
b) ____ Un cónyuge debería contribuir igualmente al matrimonio.

5.  
a) ____ Soy digno del amor.  
b) ____ Soy incapaz de conseguir el amor que necesito.

6.  
a) ____ Soy capaz de conseguir el amor que quiero y necesito.  
b) ____ Yo no soy digno de amor.

7.  
a) ____ Debería entender las necesidades de mi cónyuge.  
b) ____ Mi cónyuge sabe (conoce) lo que quiero.

8.  
a) ____ Mi cónyuge debe darme las cosas que me gustan.  
b) ____ Mi cónyuge me debería dar lo que le gusta para sí mismo.

Cuando se trata de matrimonio clasifique los siguientes elementos de 1 a 5 basado en la importancia que tiene para usted.

1 Es el más importante.  
5 Es el menos importante.

9.  
___ Afecto, amor, benevolencia.  
___ Charla – conversación.  
___ Confianza, honestidad y transparencia.  
___ Apoyo financiero.  
___ Marido como un padre bueno – compromiso de la familia.

10.  
___ Realización sexual.  
___ Compañerismo Recreativo.  
___ Una esposa atractiva.  
___ Paz y tranquilo – apoyo doméstico.  
___ Admiration.
APPENDIX B

Chi-square:

\[ \chi^2 = \sum \frac{(\text{observed frequency} - \text{expected frequency})^2}{\text{expected frequency}} \]

Bayes’ formula:

\[ \text{Prob } (A|B) = \frac{P(B|A)P(A)}{P(B)} \]
APPENDIX C

The explanation and code for the MATLAB charts are as follows:

“MALES” and “FEMALES” are matrices where each row corresponds to a participant ordered by age, each column indexes a question, each row-column entry is the value of the response.

`. ' is a regular transpose of the matrix, found in the corr() function.

```
load('MALES')
load('FEMALES')
set(gca,'fontsize',16,'fontname','arial','fontweight','bold');
femRow_malCol = corr(FEMALES.',MALES.'));
imagesc(femRow_malCol)
xlabel('Males')
ylabel('Females')
title('Females correlated with males')
colorbar
set(gca,'fontsize',16,'fontname','arial','fontweight','bold');
```

OrderedByAge is a matrix of all subjects ordered by age:

```
load('OrderedByAge');
CorVals = corrcoef(OrderedByAge.)
set(gca,'fontsize',16,'fontname','arial','fontweight','bold');
imagesc(CorVals);
colorbar
xlabel('Participants ordered by age')
ylabel('Participants ordered by age')
title('Correlation between participants')
set(gca,'fontsize',16,'fontname','arial','fontweight','bold');
```
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Vita

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Brigham Young University, 1984.
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M.A., Theology, St. Mary’s Seminary & University, 2011

MINISTERIAL

Ministry With Out Number, 2005
Lead Pastor Benevolence Church, 2010

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES & ASSOCIATIONS

American Association of Christian Counselors.
August 12, 2013

Richmond Laney
IRB Exemption 1648.081213: Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline: Principles and Benefits

Dear Richmond,

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

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

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

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

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

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling
(434) 592-4054

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