

Copyright © 2021 Ibtissam Nabil Kawar

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING
PROGRAM AT AJYAL CHURCH OF THE
NAZARENE, AMMAN, JORDAN

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
Ibtissam Nabil Kawar

May 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING
PROGRAM AT AJYAL CHURCH OF THE
NAZARENE, AMMAN, JORDAN

Ibtissam Nabil Kawar

Read and Approved by:

Matthew D. Haste (Faculty Supervisor)

Robert D. Jones

Date _____

To my heavenly Father, as a loving service for His glory and purposes.

To my family, this project is the fruit of learning God's ways together.

To Ajyal Church in Jordan and its vision: "To teach generations the godly perspective for relationships for the glory of God."

To the biblical counseling movement, to help restore marriages for the purposes of God.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
PREFACE	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	9
Conclusion	10
2. BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING PROGRAM	11
Introduction	11
Three Dimensions of Marriage Crisis Intervention	12
The Ministry of Christ for Redemption (Eph 1–2; Luke 4:18, 19) ...	13
The Ministry of the Word of God (Isa 50:4)	14
Ministry of Opposition (Eph 6:10-18)	15
Intervention Strategy Based on Ephesians 6:10-18	15
The Letter to the Ephesians	16
Spiritual Warfare (Eph 6:10-13)	19

Chapter	Page
The Full Armor of God (Eph 6:14-18)	22
The Belt of Truth (Eph 6:14)	25
The Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph 6:14)	26
Preparation of the Gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15)	27
The Shield of Faith (Eph 6:16)	28
Helmet of Salvation (Eph 6:17)	29
The Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)	32
Praying (Eph 6:18)	32
Conclusion	34
3. LITERATURE BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE CRISIS INTERVENTION COUNSELING PROGRAM	35
Diagnosis and Intervention	36
Preparatory Stage Based on Ephesians 6:10-13	37
The Intervention Stage Based on the Full Armor of God (Eph 6:14-18)	40
Application on the One-Flesh Relationship	44
Identity in Christ	47
Identity in Connection to Marriage	49
Identity and Issues in Connection to the Gospel of Peace	51
Assessing Strongholds	51
The Gospel and the Family	53
Identity and Issues in Connection to the Breastplate of Righteousness	57
The Christian Walk (Eph 4–6:9)	58
Identity and Issues under the Helmet of Salvation	62
Main Strongholds and Issues	64
Conclusion	69

Chapter	Page
4. TEACHING “MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY” AT AJYAL CHURCH	71
Introduction	71
Description of the Course	72
Course Objectives	72
Demographics of Participants	73
Procedures and Preparations	73
Application Procedures	74
Implementation of the Lessons	74
Weekend 1	75
Weekend 2	77
Weekend 3	79
Weekend 4	81
Mixed Method Evaluation	82
Weekend 1	82
Weekend 2	83
Weekend 3	87
Weekend 4	88
Conclusion	91
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	92
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	93
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	94
Goal 1	94
Goals 2 and 3	96
Strengths of the Project	99
Weaknesses of the Project	100
What I Would Do Differently	101

	Page
Theological Reflections	102
Personal Reflections	103
Conclusion	105
 Appendix	
1. MARRIAGE BATTLE COURSE: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY TEACHER’S OUTLINE	107
2. MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY STUDENT BOOKLET	122
3. ASSESSMENT 1: SPIRITUAL STATUS /SS	150
4. ASSESSMENT 2: THE BELT OF TRUTH/BT FOR TRUTHFUL MARRIAGES	161
5. ASSESSMENT 3: THE GOSPEL OF PEACE/GP FOR PEACEFUL MARRIAGES	173
6. ASSESSMENT 4: THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS/BR FOR RIGHTEOUS MARRIAGES	195
7. ASSESSMENT 5: THE SHIELD OF FAITH/SF FOR FAITH-FULL MARRIAGES	210
8. ASSESSMENT 6: THE HELMET OF SALVATION/HS FOR HOPEFUL MARRIAGES	212
9. ASSESSMENT 7: PRAYER/P FOR PRAYERFUL MARRIAGES	228
10. CONCISE TABLES FOR THE MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING PROGRAM BASED ON THE ARMOR OF GOD/ EPHESIANS 6:10-18	229
11. MIXED METHODS ASSESSMENTS	238
12. EXPERT PANEL EVALUATION RUBRIC	250
13. COURSE SYLLABUS: MARRIAGE CRISIS PREPARATORY COUNSELING	253
BIBLIOGRAPHY	262

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Responses to the self-evaluation survey showing the average answer for each question	85
2. Classification of the answers to the self-evaluation survey per category	85
3. Comparison between the average answer for each question, before and after teaching	90
4. Comparison of answers within each category for each question, before and after teaching	90
5. Expert panel evaluation of the framework, methodology, and the seven initial steps of urgent intervention in marriage connected to the armor of God	97
6. Expert panel evaluation of the assessment tools	98
A1. Preparatory stage, Ephesians 6:10-13	228
A2. Preparatory stage: the full armor of God (Eph 6:10-13)/Code: FAG	229
A3. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the belt of truth (Eph 6:14)/Code: BT	230
A4. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14)/Code: BR	231
A5. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15)/Code: GP	232
A6. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the shield of faith (Eph 6:16)/Code SF	233
A7. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17)/Code: HS	234
A8. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)/Code: SW	235
A9. Intervention stage: intervention step based on prayer (Eph 6:18)/Code: P	235

Table	Page
A10. Expert panel evaluation rubric of the framework, methodology, and seven initial steps of urgent intervention in marriage connected to the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)	235
A11. Expert panel evaluation rubric of the Assessment Tools available in appendix 3-9, prepared to diagnose specific needs and issues of the crisis as pertaining to the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)	235

PREFACE

Above all, I would like to express my deep gratitude and thankfulness to God my Father for allowing me the opportunity to serve the cause of His kingdom by conducting this research. By His grace and purpose, He appointed me to accomplish this project and declare His ways and purposes for marriage and family. By His sovereignty, He orchestrated opportunities and resources for this research. By His provision, He appointed people to support and help me throughout the doctoral journey. By His strength, the writing journey has come to an end. I give this ministry project to Him as my best effort; though it might not be perfect, I trust that God will use it for the benefit of His children. I place this project in God's hands and I pray that it will fulfill His purposes and always be for His glory.

In remembrance of my dear father, Nabil Salim Kawar, with esteem to him for modeling the love of learning, diligence, perseverance, and for always having a vision. I am grateful that he planted these seeds in my life; now it is bearing fruit for the kingdom of God.

I am also grateful to my dear husband, Rev. Fares Kawar. My sincere thanks and appreciation to him for believing in me and for trusting that I could accomplish this project by God's grace. The research would not have been completed without his assistance, encouragement, and patience as a husband. Furthermore, I am thankful to God that He appointed my husband to be the pastor of Ajyal Church to facilitate and support the whole project, believing in its potential ministry to God and His purposes.

Special thanks to my dear mother, Insaf Kawar, for her fervent prayers, patience, and support. Special thanks to both my precious sons, Dr. Sanad Kawar and Zaid Kawar, and to my beloved daughter-in-law, Heidi Kawar, for their support. My

appreciation for Zaid’s support and unique gifts, for his help in the statistical analysis for the goals of the project, and the aesthetical edits he provided during the critical times at the end of the project. Special thanks to my son, Dr. Sanad, and his wife, Heidi, for facilitating my stay and studies in the United States, for their support, love, and the joy they added to my journey.

Moreover, thanks to my family—brothers, sisters-in-law, uncles, and their wives—for believing in me, for supporting me by their continuous prayers, and for their practical help. My sincere appreciation to my brother, Captain Emad Kawar, for continually providing special quality privileges for my airplane trips to and from the United States. Special thanks to my uncle and his wife, Rev. Nader Kawar and Rania Kawar, for facilitating my study visits to the United States and for all their love and service.

Special thanks to my church, Ajyal Church, and all the brothers and sisters who prayed and waited to see this project gets accomplished. Sincere thanks to my sister in Christ, Dr. Majd Batarseh, for believing in me and for being available with insightful edits and her help in the *Marriage Battles* course. Thanks to sweet sister in Christ, Natasha Mazahreh, for her help in typing in times of need. Also, sincere appreciation for my friend and sister in Christ, Amy Melissa Ostrander, her husband, Eric Ostrander, and their lovely children in Louisville, for their prayers, for opening their home and hearts to me during courses, and for doing this as a ministry to God. I learned a lot from their Christian example.

Special thanks to all the faculty who had a role in allowing this project to be accomplished. Thanks to Dr. Wayne Vanderwier for introducing me to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Thanks to my professors and colleagues in the doctoral courses and what I learned from them. In Project Methodology, special thanks to Dr. Shane Parker for recognizing the uniqueness and need for this ministry project. Thanks to Dr. Danny Bowen for his wisdom and the insight to value the project proposal.

Sincere thanks and special gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Haste, for his continuous availability, encouragement, appreciation, and eagerness to see this project come to a completion. His insight, direction, and support facilitated the accomplishment of this project and made a great difference. Finally, I would like to thank my editor, Betsy Fredrick, for her patience and insightful edits, as she added value and clarity to the project. Last but not least, my high esteem to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for keeping the standard and providing learning with authors, also, for keeping the Truth, the legacy, the vision, and faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I leave this accomplished project to all the generations to come, to every counselor who will read this project and aims to help families live according to God's plan and design for marriage: I thank you and urge you by God's grace to always keep your faith in our mighty God, and always acknowledge that there is a wicked enemy. I pray that this project will equip you for the mission of restoring marriages to God's purposes. I pray for wisdom to use this program and spiritual insight to understand it through the Holy Spirit. May the Lord fill any gap that I unintentionally left by His light and guidance. I declare that God is the Lord of Hosts who keeps His Word and gives victory in spiritual warfare. I praise Him and give Him glory forever and ever. Amen.

Ibtissam Kawar

Amman, Jordan

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ajyal ministry started in the year 2000 as a small family ministry aiming to restore relationships to God’s purposes and plan.¹ The name “Ajyal” means “generations” in Arabic. The ministry became a church in 2013, and kept the vision for families. The vision at Ajyal church is “to teach generations the godly perspective for relationships for the glory of God.” Many steps have been taken to fulfill this vision. First, Ajyal taught about God’s design for marriage and relationships to singles, engaged, and married couples. Ajyal then developed a biblical counseling ministry to serve people’s needs at a personal level. In 2014, Ajyal Church formally opened and began establishing a framework for generations, thereafter, adopting the family-ministry model—“family-as-church” and “church-as-family,” as Timothy Paul Jones states it.² This framework became the mission that supported the continuity of the vision. Ajyal Church is committed to building marriages, preserving family life, and fully declaring the glory of God to generations.

Context

The history of Ajyal Church affects its vision and directs its goals. As a family ministry, Ajyal began by teaching married and engaged couples about God’s design for marriage. Later, God led the ministry to continue establishing the family unit by building the biblical perspective for marriage in the younger generation. Ajyal’s ministry gradually

¹ See Isa 58:12. This verse formed the foundation of the calling to build families.

² Timothy P. Jones and John David Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church* (Nashville: Randall House, 2015), 11-13.

developed courses, conferences, and seminars to serve the relational needs of the community. The ministry impacted different groups and ages of people while also leading many to believe in Christ; as a result of the ministry's work, the church was planted. Ajyal Church now teaches all generations about relationships while developing the family-ministry model as a context for this vision. Furthermore, Ajyal Church established a biblical counseling center to train new ministers for the gospel as a strategic goal to serve the vision.

Ajyal Church still aims to become a missional family church—to build up healthy families for the purpose of the gospel. However, a gap remains in ministry and calls for a solution. The ministry has encountered three main weaknesses over the years: (1) pre-marriage programs fall short of helping couples in application in their marriages and does not fully prevent marriage crises; (2) people rarely seek marriage enrichment programs apart from times of crises; (3) marriage crisis interventions are weak, slow, and fall short of corresponding to the intensity and escalation of crises. These issues necessitate solutions from ministry leadership.

Ajyal's soul-care leaders were not equipped with procedures to handle those demanding and difficult problems. Though God is faithful and provides wisdom to meet the needs of people, insufficient procedures for intervention in crisis remained. Available programs did not fully serve different kinds of couples in crises for several reasons. First, the basic teachings about marriage were long, time consuming, and overlooked the hard feelings couples have when crises hit. Cases are easier with couples who have a biblical foundation from pre-marriage programs. Second, for non-educated Christians, it took a longer time to teach foundations of marriage before the intervention could take place. Third, nonbelievers needed pre-counseling, wise evangelism, and parallel discipleship along with intervention in their marriage. Fourth, programs were organized pedagogically and usually dealt with the matter mechanically, which sometimes hindered the process of help. Fifth, programs neglected the strong effect of the physical, emotional, or social

hurts involved in marriage relationships. Finally, marriage counseling programs approached situations cognitively and overlooked the spiritual warfare factor (Eph 6:10-18). In short, available programs were time consuming, pedagogical, cognitive, neglected the intensity of spiritual warfare, and could not compete with the fast escalation of hard feelings, deep wounds, and strongholds.

Observation throughout the ministry shows that Christian marriages are affected by two associated factors. First, the cultural position toward marriage affects couples' perspective in the Jordanian community. In the culture, the marriage relationship is perceived as a contract between a man and a woman, not a holy covenant which involves God; therefore, divorce is permissible. Second, a major Christian denomination in Jordan has a lenient position toward divorce and for many years allowed divorce and re-marriage for various causes. These factors made divorce reachable for Christian families from other denominations whose churches have a more conservative stand toward marriage and divorce. Therefore, the cultural need required the church to protect marriages and help them stand in covenantal truth.

Rationale

Ajyal Church is committed to its vision: "To teach generations the godly perspective for relationships for the glory of God." The vision serves God's purposes for families to disciple younger generations. Since strong marriages are the basis for healthy families, a strong family-equipping ministry ought to focus on establishing unity between husband and wife. Marriage is key in faith transmission across generations³; therefore, the need to intervene in marriage and family crises is crucial.

Malachi 2:15 provides evidence that one of God's purposes for unity in marriage is to raise godly offspring. Husbands are called to love their wives, respect the marriage covenant (Eph 5:22-33), and be responsible before God to raise children who

³ Vern L. Bengtson, Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114.

fear Him (Eph 6:4). This perspective validates the claim that healthy marriages are essential to establish a strong family ministry that aims to disciple younger generations (Ps 78:6). Although Christians in Jordan still hold respect for the sanctity of marriage, believers' perspectives are influenced regarding the value and role of men and women in marriage. The majority in the culture hold the conviction that women are inferior to men, men are dominant, and men have better rights in many aspects of life. Therefore, it is fundamental to teach about godly relationships.

Strategically, understanding the biblical design of marriage and relationships should precede the occurrence of crises and could prevent them. Gabriel Moran called the confusion in understanding the family a “crisis of perception.”⁴ Solving this perception crisis and providing truth about marriage aims to save families from prospective crises through education. At the stage of teaching couples about God’s design for marriage, if possible, risk factors of each family should be considered. Dolores Curran states, “We must do a better job of promoting the idea to our families that parenting, communication, sexuality education, marriage enrichment, and harmonious family life are catechetical in nature as catechisms, doctrines, and classrooms.”⁵ The scope of this project does not cover teaching all these subjects; the project only includes teaching about marriage in connection to the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Crises will arise in many families, and counseling programs are insufficient and time consuming, lack emergency procedures, and are short of intensive intervention practices to protect families when a crisis escalates or breakdown occurs. Neglecting these gaps and the cultural effects mentioned ensure an increase in broken marriages and divided families before biblical counselors are able to repair them. For this reason,

⁴ Gabriel Moran, “The Professions and the Family: Healing the Split,” in *Family Ministry*, ed. Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), 95. I borrow the expression “crisis of perception,” though Moran explains implications and solutions from a different perspective.

⁵ Dolores Curran, “Family Ministry and the Parish: Barriers and Visions,” in Durka and Smith, *Family Ministry*, 17.

establishing timely procedures and intensive care for marriage crisis is crucial to fulfilling God's purposes, preserving families, and discipling generations for His glory (Ps78:6).

Since this intervention in marriage crisis program considers the spiritual warfare dimension in Ephesians 6:10-13, then it also should deal with marriage crises in a concentrated and fast-paced manner following clear biblical procedures correlating to Ephesians 6:10-18, serving like an intensive care unit in a hospital rather than a low pace doctor's clinic. The intervention provides timely procedures and intensive care methodology of assessment and teaching within the structure of biblically counseling in a marriage crisis. Ministers should deal quickly, comprehensively, and intensely with situations, and couples should be under continuous care. Like an emergency room in a hospital, the biblical intervention in a marriage crisis program should include various trained people to intervene, comprehend all the factors included in crises, and be ready for survival actions and methods. Procedures should evaluate main factors and be done as quickly as possible. The intervention must provide continuous care and persistent follow up. In addition, accommodation to monitor one spouse or the couple might be needed and could be provided by the church. This marriage counseling program is called "Intervention in Crisis/Marriage" (ICM), which is meant to sound like ICU (intensive care unit).

Ajyal Church believes that marriage crisis programs should include nonbelievers; therefore, the intervention in crisis program should serve as an outreach tool to serve people's urgent needs through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this program should train a generation of counselors to become able to identify, classify current family problems, and work in a timely process suitable to the intensity of spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-18) and the specific needs of a crisis.

The intervention in crisis program should be followed by marriage counseling and mentoring for couples who survive crises. Counseling serves to follow up on specific issues according to the couple's needs. Mentoring serves to sustain the work that has been accomplished so far, lest the family revert to crisis again. Marriage programs in the

church must include prevention strategies, intervention practices, intensive care procedures, counseling sub-programs for specific issues in marriage, and mentoring polices.⁶

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen families to raise a generation for the purposes of God by equipping the soul care ministry with biblical procedures for intervening in marriage crises at Ajyal Church.

Goals

The following three goals determined the completion and effectiveness of this project. The first two goals incorporated the understanding and application of the Word of God on the crisis in progress. The third goal secured the assessment process to reach the right diagnosis of the case. The first goal assured that teaching the context and application of the Word of God in Ephesians 6:10-18 takes place in families in Ajyal Church. The will of the couples secured the initial change since the renewal of their minds takes time. The third goal ensured that intervention methodology takes place effectively with families in crisis in parallel to the armor of God. Therefore, the intervention process included assessment/diagnosis, initial intervention, and direction to continue working on certain issues for victory.

1. The first goal was to develop and teach a course based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) to strengthen marriages and to lay a foundation for helping families in future intervention in case a marriage crisis occurs.
2. The second goal was to develop a methodology based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) comprised of seven initial steps of urgent intervention in the marriage relationship.
3. The third goal was to develop emergency procedures comprised of assessment tools and teaching material, rooted in Ephesians 6:10-18.

⁶ However, prevention strategies, mentorship, and counseling sub-programs are outside the scope of this project.

The completion of each goal was dependent on the research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to develop and teach a course based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18), to strengthen marriages and lay foundation for helping families in future intervention, in case a marriage crisis occurs. The content of the course mainly depended on chapter 2.⁷ The first goal was considered met when the course was fully presented to families in Ajyal Church and the gathered data showed change in perspective and application in relation to the lesson aims. The course included mixed methods which integrated qualitative and quantitative data gathering; the combined methods provided understanding when data was gathered, analyzed, and compared.⁸ Data was generated through written and oral qualitative questionnaires presented to couples for certain topics, and also through conducting quantitative questionnaires for selected subjects.⁹ Therefore, questions started with “describe how” and “how much,” depending on the subject. Some data was analyzed qualitatively and other data used the convergent design to validate the quantitative findings.¹⁰ The quantitative data helped to show the size of change, and the qualitative showed the dynamic of this change and how it affected perception and application in marriages, and therefore contributed to crisis prevention. Furthermore, observations for halo data and reflections that families expressed were taken into

⁷ Also some parts of chap. 3.

⁸ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 221, Kindle.

⁹ See appendix 11 for the rubric.

¹⁰ John Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), 65, Kindle.

consideration to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.¹¹ The goal was achieved when answers met the aims of lessons and reflected a change of perspective, renewal of minds, and new decisions pertaining to putting on the armor of God in their marriage.

The second goal was to develop a methodology based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) comprised of seven initial steps of urgent intervention in the marriage relationship. These steps were accomplished in two stages: preparatory and intervention.¹² The procedures ended with recovery recommendations for couples. The methodology can intensify the process of marriage counseling and the steps can direct and organize the process. This intervention counseling program aimed to apply the Word of God to different aspects of the relationship to help couples secure victory in spiritual warfare; Ephesians 6:10-18 provides clear evidence for the importance of standing firm during spiritual warfare. This goal was measured by an expert panel using a rubric designed for evaluating the methodology of the intervention in marriage crises. Using the rubric, the expert panel determined the clarity of intervention steps pertaining to the armor of God and whether these steps clearly classified issues under different pieces of the armor. Moreover, the panel measured that steps were organized, directed, and targeted well to be timely. This goal was considered successfully met when 80 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met the desired standard of care, biblically and skillfully.

The third goal was to develop emergency procedures comprised of assessment tools and teaching material, rooted in Ephesians 6:10-18. The tools helped to assess crises and diagnose specific issues in a marriage pertaining to the armor of God. The teaching material counseled and taught couples to wear the armor of God. Emergency procedures included assessment tools, which were connected to the steps accomplished within the

¹¹ Wayne Mack explains that halo data is “information that is communicated in nonverbal ways. This includes both nonverbal behavior and paralinguistic communication.” Wayne A. Mack, “Taking Counselor Inventory: Collecting Data,” in John MacArthur and Master’s College Faculty, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 144.

¹² Certain sub-steps might have been needed to deal with different issues in each crisis, but they were not included in this project.

methodology. These tools help the counselor collect data and diagnose the crisis—the counselor identifies the problems, classifies the issues couples are experiencing, and decides the direction for intervention in a marriage in crisis. These procedures are all in connection to the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).¹³

Procedures must include the gospel for nonbelievers, basic education about marriage to new believers, and teaching about the armor of God to all believing couples to edify and strengthen them to stand in the cosmic battle they are facing in their crisis. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 80 percent of the rubric indicators used by the same expert panel met the standard of care, biblically and skillfully, and showed a well-directed process for diagnosis and sufficient inclusiveness of counseling issues in connection to the armor of God.¹⁴

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definition of *marriage crisis* is used in this project.

Marriage crisis. *Marriage crisis* is a hard situation bordering on desperate or a situation causing danger to the health of the relationship; one spouse or both are hopeless, in pain, or want to separate. Emotions such as sadness and rage are escalating in the lives of couples in crises. Carl Michalson adopts the definition of *marriage crisis* from Otis Rice, who explains that *marriage crisis* is a broken situation of divorce or desertion, or a bent situation: “All marriage exists under some degree of tension, from the slightest strain all the way to the breaking-point. The most serious stage of crisis in this situation is fracture. Not quite broken, yet strained to the breaking-point.”¹⁵ The intervention according to the armor of God for victory in marriage battles (Eph 6:10-18)

¹³ Issues under the armor of God are discussed in chap. 3. Any additional or extended follow up on specific issues is considered outside the scope of this project.

¹⁴ See appendix 11.

¹⁵ As cited in Carl Michalson, “Faith for the Crisis of Marriage,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1957): 194.

can cover all degrees of tension in marriages. Nevertheless, fractured marriages are the focus of this project.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the effectiveness of the course “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” was dependent on the willingness of both spouses to cooperate and fully participate.¹⁶ Second, the accuracy of the collected data depended upon the willingness of the spouses to be honest about their answers to oral questions or surveys using the assessment tools. To mitigate this limitation and to help secure both spouses, the couples approved the participation agreement that their names would stay anonymous. Fervent prayers and wisdom were also needed in case of one spouse refusing to attend or cooperate with the teaching.

The delimitations placed on the participants in the course were as follows: first, spouses who were believers and church members were both required to attend the course. Second, spouses were expected to invest the time to be disciplined intensively. Third, the course was presented to couples or spouses facing marriage crisis at different degrees and were also willing to invest the time and effort to commit and learn.

Conclusion

Ajyal Church remains determined to preserve the family to fulfill God’s purposes, and to maintain its mission with present and future generations. To accomplish this mission, families have to be built by all means of teaching, discipling, and counseling. Over the years, a gap surfaced in the counseling ministry in the area of marriage crisis. The intervention programs fell short of competing with the intensity of crises. Since marriage comprises the fundamental relationship in the family, Ajyal Church needed to develop a marriage crisis intervention program.

¹⁶ See appendix 1. The course is part of this ministry project, the content of the course is dependent mainly on the content of chap. 2 and “seeking forgiveness” from chap. 3.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE
CRISIS COUNSELING PROGRAM

Introduction

Marriage is an important institution that God created to fulfill His purposes. Genesis 1:28 and 2:24 show the creation order and design of the relationship between Adam and Eve and provide clear evidence of a purpose larger than the unity of the husband and wife—God mandated the couple to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Unity is the goal for the marriage relationship (Gen 1:24), but the marriage institution has larger purposes (1:28). God also ordained parents to disciple the next generation (Deut 6:6-9). Genesis 18:19 clearly teaches that Abraham was called to be responsible for training his household to obey the commandments of God. Malachi 2:15 teaches that one purpose for unity in a marriage is to raise godly offspring. A. R. Fausset explains Malachi 2:15, saying, “One object of the marriage relation is to raise a seed for God and for eternity.”¹

Nevertheless, marriage problems are as old as the fall (Gen 3). The sinful state of man affected the marriage institution and therefore marriages fell short of God’s standards: Adam and Eve were fearful and shameful (Gen 3:10, 11) and Adam blamed Eve and God for his sin (Gen 3:12). The consequences of the fall affected their relationship (Gen 3:16, 17). Since the fall, marriages and families have struggled with the sinfulness

¹ A. R. Fausset, “The Book of Malachi Commentary,” in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, *Commentary Critical & Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (n.p.: William Collins, 1871), s. v. “Malachi 2:15,” Logos Bible Software. The context of this verse is about God’s condemnation to His people for divorce and marriage to foreign wives because this kind of marriage will not fulfill His purpose.

of their members facing opposition from the enemy for the ruin of God’s purposes (Eph 6:10-12).

The letter to the Ephesians provides a useful framework for biblical counselors ministering to marriages in crisis. Ephesians 1–3 explains how God saves people, and Ephesians 4:1–6:9 explains to the children of God how they should live righteously. Ephesians 6:10-18 teaches about the armor of God for victory against the enemy. Curtis Vaughan explains that Ephesians 5:21–6:4 singles out different groups with counsel for each, but the section of spiritual warfare is for all (Eph 6:10-18).² Marriages according to Ephesians 5:22-23 cannot survive the cunning wiles of the enemy without spiritual armor. For couples to stand in the evil days, Ephesians 6:10-18 provides strong evidence for the need to put on the whole armor of God when the enemy aims at their marriage. Marriages in crisis must have lost certain pieces of the armor and failed to stand in the evil days. Therefore, crisis is an aspect of defeat in spiritual warfare, which implies the need for intervention based on the pieces of the armor of God.

This chapter explores three dimensions for biblical counseling, but examines the third dimension in depth as the core for a marriage crisis intervention program. The third dimension is based on Ephesians 6:10-18. First, I consult biblical scholars for the meaning and different aspects of the whole armor of God. Second, I acknowledge the implications of spiritual warfare on marriage. Finally, I apply the pieces of the armor of God to the lives of spouses and to the marriage relationship in two stages through seven steps based on the armor of God for intervention in marriage crises.

Three Dimensions of Marriage Crisis Intervention

Marriage crisis intervention has to be a three-dimensional ministry—first, the ministry of Christ for redemption (Eph 1–2; Luke 4:18, 19), because the gospel is the base. Second, the ministry of the Word of God (Isa 50:4), because change happens

² Curtis Vaughan, *Ephesians*, Founders Study Guide Commentary (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2002), 125.

through the Word of God and the power God provides. Third, the ministry of opposition (Eph 6:10-18) because spiritual warfare is real. Predominantly, the core of this marriage crisis intervention ministry is the full armor of God for opposition against the cunning wiles of the enemy (Eph 6:10-18). This marriage counseling program aims to equip counselors for intervention in marriage crises using Ephesians 6:10-18 to help couples put on the full armor of God and stand against the schemes of the enemy for their marriage. Therefore, this chapter will briefly explain the first two dimensions for saving a marriage relationship and then will examine how to restore the health of a marriage based on Ephesians 6:10-18.

The Ministry of Christ for Redemption (Eph 1–2; Luke 4:18, 19)

Ephesians 1–2 speaks about the benefits of salvation as hope becomes available for human beings only through the gospel. Luke 4:18-19 shows how Christ started His ministry to people by introducing the good news first. Joel Green comments on Luke 4:18-19, saying that the mission of Christ “is to blend together healing, proclamation, and a ministry of ‘release.’”³ I. Howard Marshall explains that this release of prisoners is through forgiveness.⁴ Therefore, Christ’s redemption is foundational in any biblical counseling program and must be done on the basis of the gospel through the person of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit;⁵ which becomes the belt of truth in the battle (Eph 6:12). Couples need to receive eternal life, healing of hearts, recovery of sight, and

³ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63. Luke 4:18-19 implies that the gospel is not only about eternal life, but also about healing, recovery of sight, and freedom.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 184. In Luke 19, Jesus announces the year of Jubilee. The message first brings good news to the poor and brings healing frequently to the brokenhearted; the poor are those “people who are most in need of divine help and who wait upon God to hear his Word” (183-84).

⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 176. Jesus is equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit.

freedom through forgiveness.⁶ To summarize, the salvation of the couple must be secured for a proper intervention.

The Ministry of the Word of God (Isa 50:4)

The intervention is an intense discipleship process to restore marriages from the results of personal decisions and lack of wisdom in the lives of the couples. The fast pace and intensity of the intervention can accomplish the goals of counseling through the Word of God (Isa 50:4) to comfort couples in distress and relational chaos.⁷

Discipleship in the counseling process becomes comforting and restorative. John N. Oswalt says that Isaiah 49:2 speaks of the power of the Word of God but 50:4 discloses its function—that the Word calls “those who are weary of their own efforts to justify their living.”⁸ Brevard S. Childs says that Isaiah 50:4 speaks about the ability to comfort weary people with a “suitable word.”⁹ Isaiah 50:4 speaks about the importance of the Word of God, first to be heard, learned, and then to be declared.¹⁰ Second, Isaiah 50:4 speaks of knowing or speaking the suitable words for people’s matters. Third, the verse confirms the function of the Word of God to help all weary people. Therefore, the mission of biblical counseling at a church is to help weary couples through personally ministering the Word of God to meet their specific needs. In sum, the intervention depends on the power of the Word of God to help couples facing an escalation of strife.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, His New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 253-54. “Brokenhearted” is not in some English versions, but it is in the original text in Isa 6:1. It is in the Arabic translation in Luke 4:18.

⁷ Ben Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 235. Witherington confirms that comfort is one of the themes of Isa 40-55.

⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 324.

⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 394.

¹⁰ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 324-25.

Ministry of Opposition (Eph 6:10-18)

Biblical counseling in general is an opposition ministry—opposition to wrong thoughts and counsel, hard feelings, and hopelessness. The opposition ministry is warfare. In a marriage crisis there is severe opposition against extreme selfishness, strife, blindness, and broken heartedness. Moreover, opposition is warfare against the enemy, who uses human sin, blindness, brokenness, and, through deception, tries to catch people to do his will instead of God’s will. The enemy has wiles to oppose Christian lives (Eph 6:11). F. F. Bruce observes that Ephesians 4:27 mentions that one wile of the devil “is his readiness to exploit strained relations and angry feelings between believers so as to damage their personal or corporate welfare and witness,”¹¹ which affects relationships in the family as well. Bruce explains that the armor of God has resources for believers to resist the devil to be able to stand in the evil days (Eph 6:13). The evil day in Ephesians 6:13 is a period dominated by forces of evil, which implies that there is a race against time and an escalation of strife.¹² The understanding of how the armor of God works in couples’ lives and marriage relationships is crucial to preserve or save marriages. Ephesians 6:10-18 speaks about warfare and provides the seven pieces of the armor of God that will lead to the seven steps to restore broken marriages. These steps should help the intervention process to be timely, decrease the escalation of strife, and stand against the enemy.

Intervention Strategy Based on Ephesians 6:10-18

Ephesians is an inclusive letter with a wide outlook on truth.¹³ The letter can help the counselor restore the marriages of God’s children. Above all, the spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-13 can direct the process of intervention in marriage crises,

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 404. “To be forewarned about the nature of his wiles is to be forearmed against them” (404).

¹² Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 406.

¹³ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 126.

while the armor of God in Ephesians 6:14-18 informs the counselor of steps for the restoration of marriages.

The Letter to the Ephesians

The central theme of the letter of Ephesians, as Vaughan suggests, is “the eternal purpose of God and the place of Christ and His people in that purpose.”¹⁴ Ephesians 1–3 teaches about God’s grace, blessings, privileges of redemption, adoption, and sealing by the Holy Spirit. The couple or spouse in crisis must realize the godly resources listed in Ephesians 1–3 to live in peace with God and each other. Ephesians 4–6:9 teaches the children of God how to live righteously, and Ephesians 5:22–6:4 explains the order and roles of the Christian family as God designed it. Ephesians 6:10-18 exhorts believers to live in victory in God’s design, in all that God provided or commanded (Eph 1–6:9), and to stand in the evil days against the enemy by wearing the armor of God. Believers are wrestling against spiritual forces of darkness in Ephesians 6:12. The word *therefore* in Ephesians 6:13 confirms the need to wear the full armor of God due to the kind of spiritual warfare believers face (6:12). Clinton Arnold confirms that Ephesians 6:13 has an exhortation *to take up the whole armor of God* with an explanation of the reason—that the believer may be able to withstand in the evil day.¹⁵

Love and unity are part of the whole letter: in the apostle’s prayer (Eph 3:16-20); the unity of the body of Christ (4:2–6; 5:2); the re-creation of humanity into one family (2:11-22); the mystery of the Church (5:24-32); the love of the husband (5:25, 28, 29, 33); and the home as reflection to the relationship between church and Christ (5:3-29). Arnold confirms that this letter summarizes how to be a Christian—it clarifies the

¹⁴ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 12. Commentators do not fully agree on one main theme.

¹⁵ Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 621, Kindle. Arnold says that the preposition *against* is used six times to describe the spirit beings the believer must struggle with and conquer (622).

Christian faith and the implication of how to live as a believer.¹⁶ The Christian marriage must be holy, loving, sacred, and pure, which can happen in Christ. However, since the beginning, the devil has corrupted marriage and family and caused confusion in the church.¹⁷ John MacArthur confirms, “The faithful Christian life is a battle.”¹⁸

Strength and power from God the Father through His Spirit are clear in Paul’s prayer for believers (3:16), and strength is also the main element in Ephesians 6:10. Paul exhorts believers to be strong in the Lord and calls them to become enabled by wearing the armor of God (6:11), which is a metaphor to show dependence on God. Therefore, the intervention in crisis must totally depend on the power of God in every step for the counselor and the couple.

The letter can generally inform the intervention program. Nevertheless, Ephesians 6:10-18 is the basis for this intervention. Francis Foulkes confirms that the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6:11, 13 is the *panoplia* (1 Thess 5:8),¹⁹ or as Bruce writes, the “panoply of God,” “A complete outfit of personal armor, for defense or attack.”²⁰ God Himself wears the armor in Isaiah 11:4-5, 59:17.²¹ The word *whole* in Ephesians 6:11, 13 gives the understanding of having more than one part, and the process of putting them on should be complete.

The whole armor of God reflects the flow of the entire letter: Ephesians 1–3 teaches what God has done for believers and Eph 3–6:9 teaches what believers must do

¹⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 22.

¹⁷ John MacArthur, *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 279, Kindle.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 331.

¹⁹ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 176.

²⁰ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 404.

²¹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 619. Some commentators refer the metaphor of the armor of God to the Roman soldiers, others, such as Arnold, assure that Isaiah is the context even if the soldier inspired Paul.

as a result. The letter also reveals what God has done through Christ (1:6, 20, 21, 22; 2:5, 7, 10, 13, 15, 20, 22; 4:7). The key phrase *in Christ* or *in Him* is mentioned fifteen times in the letter. First, the armor depends on what God provides for the believer.²² Second, it reflects the believer's role in appropriating Christian virtues and the new identity in Christ.²³ Moreover, the center and the source of blessings and identity are always Christ Himself. The understanding of these three aspects of the armor of God orients the application on marriages in crisis.

Ephesians 6:10-18 can be divided into two parts: Ephesians 6:10-13 and Ephesians 6:14-18.²⁴ The first part in the passage redirects the believer's attention to spiritual warfare, explaining that there is a wrestling against spiritual powers and there are schemes from the enemy; thus, God provides His strength and there is a full armor of God against it. Also, there is an evil day, but the goal is to stand firm in the Christian life designed by God. *Wrestling* is used, according to Foulkes, to personalize the long fierce battle in which every Christian is engaged.²⁵

The second part in Ephesians 6:14-18 presents the armor to the believer. Arnold confirms that the whole armor is needed in the battle.²⁶ Therefore, couples need to put on a complete set of equipment, which is found in Ephesians 6:14-18, to have victory in the spiritual battle and survive the crisis.

This intervention program uses both parts in the marriage crisis. First, it will redirect the couple to the spiritual struggle and the source of strength (Eph 6:10) available in the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:16). Second, the program aims to help couples have victory in

²² Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 176.

²³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

²⁴ Some commentators consider prayer (Eph 6:18) as a third section. See Arnold, *Ephesians*, 623.

²⁵ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 175, 178.

²⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

the battle, as each part of the armor will aid in building up the seven steps of intervention to be done in two stages: the preparatory stage and the intervention according to the whole armor of God. Each step will include diagnosis, counseling, and teaching for the couple in a marriage crisis.

Spiritual Warfare (Eph 6:10-13)

Ephesians 6:10-14 lays the foundation for the armor of God, which can help the counselor prepare the couple in crisis to start wearing the armor to have victory in their marriage battle. The following section will unfold the meaning of the words in these verses so the counselor can apply in the preparatory stage with couples and throughout the intervention.

Finally. The word *finally* in Ephesians 6:10 in the Greek does not mean *lastly*. Frank Thielman explains that it means “‘from now on,’ ‘in the time that remains,’ ‘henceforth.’”²⁷ According to Foulkes, Paul is bringing his letter to an end after giving the Christian community the standards of godly living. Paul wants to tell them that they cannot maintain the Christian design for a family without a battle.²⁸ *Finally* is not an end but rather a “final instruction” to the church as A. Skevington Wood explains.²⁹

Be strong. The phrase *be strong* in Ephesians 6:10 teaches the people of God to be strengthened not by personal might but in the Lord. Foulkes explains that the Greek tense for *be strong* indicates being strengthened constantly, not only once. *In the Lord* indicates a life lived in union with Him. Foulkes explains that *His might* takes believers back to the words in 1:19, which speak about God’s resources for triumph. God’s strength

²⁷ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 417, e-book.

²⁸ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 175.

²⁹ A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 782.

is needed because the “conflict is fierce and long.”³⁰ Paul is calling believers to draw from God’s divine power.³¹ Vaughan says that, “to be strong in the Lord,” the believer “is to be joined to the strength that belongs to His might.”³² Vaughan explains that the multiple expressions of the words give different meanings—*power* means supernatural power, whether satanic or divine. Paul says that this power is available to believers to conquer the evil forces. *Might* means “strength inherently possessed, whether exercised or not.”³³ Thielman says that “believers should ‘grow strong’ in their position in the Lord and in their use of the power God has made available to them by putting on the armor of God.”³⁴ Paul mentions that strength comes through the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 3:16. Foulkes confirms that strength in the Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit.³⁵

Put on. The metaphor of putting on (Eph 6:11) is linked with a new set of characteristics in 4:22-24, and the new self in Ephesians 4:24 is important for the armor of God. The phrase *put on* is used to describe the clothing of Christian virtues (Col 3:10; 1 Thess 5:8), which supports the use of Ephesians 4:24.³⁶ The reason one puts on the armor of God is because the enemy is nonphysical and strong, therefore, believers must protect themselves against him.³⁷ Arnold explains that believers are called “to appropriate

³⁰ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 175-76.

³¹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 626.

³² Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 126.

³³ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 126.

³⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 417.

³⁵ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 109.

³⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

³⁷ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 415, 418, 420.

a set of divine gifts and cultivate some important virtues that will assist them in their conflict with the hostile spiritual forces.”³⁸

Stand. The word *stand* explains the goal of the armor of God (Eph 6:11), which is to stand against the schemes of the enemy. Ephesians 6:13 confirms that the result of wearing the armor is the ability to resist the enemy and then stand firm in spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:14 explains that the way to stand is through putting on the pieces of the armor. Arnold argues that the stance is not only defensive but also offensive in the battle.³⁹ Foulkes describes the word *stand* as “the holding of the fortress of the soul and of the Church for the heavenly King.”⁴⁰ Spiritual battles and marriage crises require standing in truth, standing in decisions, and standing in one’s territory without wavering or giving ground to the enemy. The verb *stand* is mentioned four times in this section and the repetition emphasizes the goal of the battle (Eph 6:11, 13, 14).

Schemes of the devil (Eph 6:11). The devil is the deceiver (2 Cor 11:3), the liar (John 8:44), the accuser (Rev 12:10), the tempter (1 Thess 3:5), and the destroyer (1 Pet 5:8). The devil is scheming a clever opposition (2 Thess 2:9-10; 2 Cor 2:11, 11:14) to hinder the gospel’s progress (1 Thess 2:18).⁴¹ The marriage institution and its purposes are not an exception. The devil fights marriages and churches to destroy unity, so that Ephesians 1:10 will not prevail. Lies, deceit, accusation, temptation, and strife are all tools of the enemy to accomplish his goals (John 8:44; Rev 12:9, 10; 1 Thess 3:5). In Ephesians 4:27, Paul confirms that the devil is willing to take advantage of opportunities, gain a foothold, and exercise his influence over the lives of Christians through anger to harm believers (Eph 4:26-27). He is ready to lead believers into sin (1 Cor 7:5) or to cause them

³⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

³⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 628, 629, 635.

⁴⁰ As cited by Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 176.

⁴¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 419.

pain (2 Cor 12:7).⁴² The devil is battling against the purposes of God because the marriage institution is a tool to reflect Christ’s love for the church (Eph 5:22-32,) and because marriage is a tool for discipleship for the next generation (Deut 6:6-9). Therefore, the battle is worth winning for the devil—he opposes marriages that will reflect Christ’s love to the church, he is also against God’s purposes for couples raising godly offspring.

The Full Armor of God (Eph 6:14-18)

Understanding each piece of the armor makes a difference in the lives and marriages of couples. The whole armor of God has a three-fold meaning: (1) it is about Christ Himself; (2) it is about what God provides; and (3) it is what believers must be doing according to God’s calling. Different commentators favor one of these meanings over the other. Jerome says that “there is no difference between saying ‘Put on the whole armor of God’ and ‘Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.’”⁴³ Peter O’Brien says that the armor of God “can be one of these three—the armor that God provides, or the armor that God wears or “the armor as God himself.”⁴⁴ Arnold favors the second in the context, saying, “The emphasis falls on God’s supplying all the power and strength believers need to stand against the enemy.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the word *put on* implies the role of the believer in the armor of God.

The first dimension of the meaning of the armor is Christ. Jerome explains that Christ is the truth and justice (John 14:6; 1 Cor 1:30); therefore, He is the girdle and breastplate. John 1 declares that Christ is the Word of God. Jerome confirms the armor

⁴² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 419.

⁴³ Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 252.

⁴⁴ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 463. I am aware that this resource has been discredited by the author’s admission to plagiarism; however, I include it here merely to illustrate an additional interpretation of this passage among scholars.

⁴⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 628.

means that Christ is the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. When believers put on the armor, they put on Christ with all His aspects, so they will be able to stand against the enemy.⁴⁶ Also, Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14) and the prince of peace in Isaiah 9:6; He is the author and perfecter of faith in Hebrew 12:2; Christ is the only source of salvation (Ps 95:1; 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 2:5-6).

Romans 13:12-14 uses the same words of Ephesians where Paul exhorts believers to put on the armor of light and put on the Lord Jesus Christ instead of the old works of darkness. Furthermore, the verb *put on* in Ephesians 4:24 is used earlier in this letter to tell believers to “put on the new self that was created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of truth.”⁴⁷ Also, Ephesians 4:20 says, “But that is not the way you learned Christ!” Thus, putting on the full armor of God is putting on Christ Himself.

The second dimension of the armor of God is the specific armor that God provides: truth is given by the Spirit of God (2 Tim 3:16), peace is given by Jesus (John 14:27), and the imperative *take* (6:17) confirms that the helmet is given to believers. Foulkes explains that the helmet of salvation includes the final deliverance from the presence of sin in the future (1 Thess 5:8).⁴⁸ God’s imputed righteousness in the breastplate of righteousness (6:14) is granted in Christ Jesus to win the battle—it is the justification that gives the right standing before God.⁴⁹ Arnold also confirms that righteousness is God’s gift to believers as in Romans 5:17.⁵⁰ Foulkes explains that salvation is God’s gift

⁴⁶ Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 252-53.

⁴⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

⁴⁸ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 176, 181-82.

⁴⁹ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 128. The word may be used here in a general sense of personal righteousness, but the personal righteousness that guards is not possible without God’s justifying righteousness.

⁵⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 640. Arnold confirms both meanings of righteousness, first as God’s gift and also about “cultivating righteous living” (640-41).

from the penalty of sin (past) and the power of sin (present).⁵¹ Therefore, God provides the full armor.

The third dimension of the armor of God reflects the practical role of believers in the Christian life that will help them have victory in spiritual warfare. Under the belt of truth (6:14), Foulkes explains that truth is “in the sense of ‘integrity’ or ‘truth in the inward being.’”⁵² Under the breastplate of righteousness (6:14) the role of believers is to become imitators of God (5:1)—putting off the old self, and putting on the new self; finally, walking in righteousness and holiness (4:22-24). Foulkes confirms righteousness as the “loyalty in principle and action to the holy law of God.”⁵³ Righteousness here reflects the ethical qualities that echo Isaiah 11:5.⁵⁴ Paul uses this verb *put on* for appropriating the virtues and the new identity in Christ as in Colossians 3:10, 12. Paul also expresses these virtues in the image of armor in 1 Thessalonian 5:8. Moreover, the armor of God reflects the responsibility of the believer. The gospel of peace (6:9) means that believers must have peace with God through Christ (Rom 5:1) and grant forgiveness to others as God forgave them (Eph 4:32). Faith (6:16) is at work when believers rely on God to protect them from the evil flaming darts that come in many different forms, as Foulkes describes.⁵⁵ Faith gives believers assurance to receive God’s grace (2:5). The helmet of salvation (6:17) is essentially the new identity in Christ that believers must appropriate (1–2), which secures destiny and provides hope.⁵⁶ Furthermore, when believers use the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17), it separates falsehood from truth (Heb 4:12) and brings judgment (Isa

⁵¹ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 181.

⁵² Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 179.

⁵³ As cited in Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 180.

⁵⁴ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 408.

⁵⁵ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 181. Examples, according to Foulkes, are “people’s arrow tongues, the shafts of the impurity, selfishness, doubt, fear, disappointment.”

⁵⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 650.

11:4, Hos 6:5) and salvation.⁵⁷ Arnold explains, “Knowing the truth of who we are in union with Christ, cultivating the virtues of this new identity, and using the resources available through this new relationship are at the heart of what it means to put on the armor of God.”⁵⁸

The counselor must assess couples and help them practice the three-dimension perspective of the armor of God. The counselor must gradually ensure victory over the enemy and victory in the marriage crisis. The following section is further exegesis for each piece of the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).

The Belt of Truth (Eph 6:14)

Truth is the first in the six weapons because it “describes a preparatory action” as in 1 Peter 1:13.⁵⁹ Ephesians 4:14 teaches that saints should not be tossed by false doctrine and deceitful schemes, which confirms Iain Duguid’s expression that truth is a doctrinal system not nuggets of truth.⁶⁰ Ephesians mentions the truth in verses 1:13; 4:21, 24; 5:9; 6:14, and mentions truthfulness in 4:15, 25. MacArthur explains that truth, *alétheia* (Eph 6:14), can refer to truthfulness as an attitude.⁶¹

Arnold says truth is seen in two ways: the objective, which is “the truth of the gospel and the elements of ‘the faith’”; and the subjective, which is the honest practice of faith and moral integrity. The devil has no truth in him (John 8:44); his wiles are filled

⁵⁷ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 181-82. Foulkes explains that the metaphor of girding is a preparatory action for flowing garments of the old days (179).

⁵⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 627.

⁵⁹ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 179.

⁶⁰ Iain M. Duguid, *The Whole Armor of God: How Christ’s Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 30, Kindle.

⁶¹ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 349.

with lies and deceit about the gospel and integrity. Believers should conduct their lives in consistency with the truth and must not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:25, 30).⁶²

The Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph 6:14)

The breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14) speaks about gaining full knowledge of the new identity in Christ, as pertaining to Him as righteousness since the enemy's strategy is to question the believer's standing with God. Righteousness is both imputed by God and practiced by the believer. The practical righteousness is the pursuit of righteous living that leads to holiness and displays righteousness as fruit, without which the enemy will succeed in his attacks (2 Cor 6:7).⁶³ When the enemy accuses the believer, self-righteousness is not enough in the battle;⁶⁴ only Christ can say that the enemy has no claim on Him (John 14:30). Romans 3:24 teaches about the imputed righteousness that God provides. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that imputed righteousness protects the conscience from the accusation of the enemy, and the heart where feelings, desires, and affections reside.⁶⁵ Second Corinthians 6:7 describes righteousness as a weapon; this imagery of righteousness, as Lloyd-Jones explains that in "this wrestling that we are engaged in with the world, and the flesh, and the devil, there should be no part we should be more careful about in regard to protection than that where the feelings and the affections are controlled . . . the conscience also, and the desires and the will."⁶⁶ Therefore, keeping the heart pure of evil desires and affections is a main part of putting the armor of God.

⁶² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 638-39.

⁶³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 640-41.

⁶⁴ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 352.

⁶⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10 to 20* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 223-26.

⁶⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, 223-24.

Ephesians 4–6:9 teaches about righteous Christian living. First, Ephesians instructs readers to walk in a manner worthy of the calling, maintaining the unity with the family of God (Eph 4:2-6, 15, 16). Second, members of the body of Christ are instructed to put off the old self, renew the mind (Eph 4:22, 23), “and to put on the new self, *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph 4:24). Furthermore, believers must practice righteousness in the heart (4:22, 26, 31, 32), mind (4:17, 23), in conduct (4:17, 26, 28, 30-32), speech (4: 25-26, 29; 5:4, 19-20), purity of the senses (Eph 5:3, 5), resources (Eph 4:28; 5:16), and relationships (Eph 4:2, 3; 5:21–6:9). Believers must walk in unity (Eph 4:3-6), imitate God and walk in love and holiness (5:1-3), they also must walk as children of light (5:8-9), walk in wisdom (5:15), and be filled with the Spirit (5:19).

Preparation of the Gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15)

The third piece of the weapon, borrowed from Isaiah 52:7, is the readiness given by the gospel of peace as shoes for the feet; it is another means to stand.⁶⁷ Bruce explains that it is “secure footing; in the spiritual conflict, this is supplied by the gospel appropriated and proclaimed.”⁶⁸ The gospel lays the foundation for peace with God and peace with others. Thielman confirms that Ephesians prepares Christians for battle by the gospel of peace (2:14-15, 17; 4:3).⁶⁹ The peace given by God is expressed throughout Ephesians: unity in Christ (2:11, 15-17), Christ is the believers’ peace (2:14), preaching peace to all far and near (2:17), peace in suffering (3:13), peace in the unity of having one Father to all (3: 6), and peace as benediction (6:23). “The word translated *equipment*” has two meanings: “preparedness” to go forward with the gospel or “prepared foundation.” The second meaning is in connection to the Greek noun *hetoimasia* in Psalm 89:14. The

⁶⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 641-43.

⁶⁸ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 408.

⁶⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 412.

gospel is the foundation that provides firm footing; therefore, peace in the heart is having a “firm foothold in the conflict” because of dependence on the gospel.⁷⁰ Jerome says that peace is the characteristic of the gospel where “one is prepared to proceed and, proceeding, one arrives at the goal.”⁷¹ Vaughan explains that “the preparation of the gospel of peace” in Ephesians 6:15 (NKJV) is “this heart-peace produced by the gospel that gives the Christian warrior his readiness for combat”—it gives calmness to the heart, readiness, and enables quick movement.⁷²

The Shield of Faith (Eph 6:16)

Faith (“above all” [NKJV] or “in all circumstances” [ESV]) in Ephesians 6:16 teaches that the shield of faith is necessary for all other pieces—as different situations attack different pieces of the armor. Thus, the order of the shield of faith in the middle is important. Faith is written after truth, righteousness, and peace because faith helps the person trust the truth, receive the righteousness given in Christ, believe the gospel, and obey God. Also, faith must be cultivated to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Furthermore, the armor of God needs faith to receive God’s strength, faith to pray, and faith to understand the spiritual warfare.

Wood explains that faith is both “the objective content of faith” and “our faith in action. . . . Believing cannot be divorced from what is believed.”⁷³ F. F. Bruce confirms that faith here is about faith in God (not faithfulness to God [1 Pet 5:8-9]).⁷⁴ The content of this faith is foretold in Ephesians 1:13, 15, and 19. Ephesians 1:19, 2:8 speak about faith as a means for salvation. Ephesians 3:2 speaks about faith as access to God and His

⁷⁰ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 180.

⁷¹ Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 265.

⁷² Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 129.

⁷³ Wood, “Ephesians,” 784.

⁷⁴ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 408.

purposes through Christ. Through faith, Christ dwells in hearts in Ephesians 3:17-18, and faith unites in 4:5, 13. Faith is needed to face the storms of life (Luke 8:25). Specifically, faith that helps face the marriage crisis is faith in the promises and character of God and in God's love (Eph 3:17), as God's love casts fears away (1 John 4:18).

The devil can attack anything to bring doubt and deceit, against which faith is the shield. Bruce confirms that the shield "not only catches the incendiary devices but extinguishes them."⁷⁵ Bruce also writes that it is "carried on the left arm and maneuvered so as to repel attacks of various kinds."⁷⁶ Most commentators highlight the big size of the shield to protect a large area in the soldier. The imagery of standing beside each other to form a "wall of shields," as Wood describes it, implies the importance of the couple standing with each other in faith to face difficulties and attacks from the enemy.⁷⁷

Helmet of Salvation (Eph 6:17)

"Take the helmet of salvation" (Eph 6:17) reflects Isaiah 59:17, as Bruce says that "Yahweh wears it." The helmet is the hope of salvation (1 Thess 5:8), and the victory accomplished by grace (Eph 2:5).⁷⁸ Salvation delivers privileges and provides hope because of the new status it provides concerning the believer's forgiven past, secured position in the present, and protected inheritance and future (Eph 1:3-22; Col 1:12-14).

Ephesians 1–2 include truths about salvation; Ephesians 1:3 refers to every spiritual blessing that God has given believers in Christ.⁷⁹ Through salvation, Christ has secured the status of the believer, because He is already seated in the heavenly places above all powers and believers are seated with Him (Eph 1:22; 2:6). Furthermore,

⁷⁵ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 408.

⁷⁶ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 408.

⁷⁷ Wood, "Ephesians," 784.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 409.

⁷⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 97, 100.

salvation contains the certainty of God’s blessings, the new identity, the inheritance, and the promises God provides for his children (Eph 1–2), which secure the hope for a believer’s life.

Salvation through union with Christ gives the identity as children of God with all its privileges and rights (Eph 1).⁸⁰ Thielman says that Ephesians 1:3-6 shows the first of God’s blessings: “God chose his people in Christ before creation to be his adopted children.”⁸¹ Adoption as a main blessing of salvation describes how God decided to bring believers into a relationship with Himself. Arnold confirms that adoption is mostly about belonging to God the Father and His family (1:5).⁸² Ephesians 1:5 also expresses the love of God and provides believers with status, inheritance, and belonging.⁸³ Therefore, Ephesians 1:5 implies worth and security, specifically, the truth of being chosen imparts importance to the believer (1:4). Bruce explains that predestination reveals the honor that God bestows to His children (1:5).⁸⁴ Bruce also validates the believer’s value that comes from the cost of redemption, which is the blood of Jesus (1:7).⁸⁵ The sealing of the Spirit assures God’s children of their belonging to God and their future (1:13).⁸⁶ Vaughan confirms that an ultimate purpose of being sealed in the Spirit (1:13) is “to the praise of his glory” (1:14).⁸⁷ Therefore, having a destiny and purpose in the kingdom of God implies

⁸⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 650.

⁸¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 44.

⁸² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 102-3. The natural adoption under the Roman Law was common and provided the rights of a natural child. The adopted child acquired the status and name of the new family (103).

⁸³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition* (Bath, UK: Creative Communication, 2012), 18-22, 28. Kindle.

⁸⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 18-19.

⁸⁵ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 19-20. Bruce confirms that “adoption” is about privileges and responsibilities, and also about status (18).

⁸⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 24-25.

⁸⁷ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 29.

significance and a different meaning of life to God's children (1:6, 12). Moreover, being seated in the heavenlies with Christ reveals victory,⁸⁸ therefore, it implies the rank of the believer (2:6).

The acknowledgment and understanding of these blessings of salvation provide the hope for the believer in his Christian walk. Puritan author William Gurnall confirms that this is not worldly hope, it is the hope of salvation.⁸⁹ Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-23 for people who are in faith in Christ so God will give them understanding "so the Spirit will reveal to them their hope and great value to God," as Arnold explains.⁹⁰ Arnold writes that it is important to "understand our new identity in Christ at a deep level and to live out of that new identity as a means of overcoming the impact of various forms of demonic assault."⁹¹ Vaughn explains that "the consciousness of salvation" gives protection to the believer.⁹² In this context, Foulkes refers to Psalm 140:7 that speaks about covering the head in the battle.⁹³ Lloyd-Jones confirms the practical application of the helmet is to draw the attention to the head, to the mind, to understanding certain doctrines.⁹⁴ Gurnall says, "The helmet defends the head . . . so this 'hope of salvation' defends the soul."⁹⁵

Furthermore, the helmet of salvation protects believers against the temptation to abandon the general Christian walk and to keep the hope, which is the anchor of the soul

⁸⁸ As cited in Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 50.

⁸⁹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://a.co/2fkumuH>, 439.

⁹⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 131.

⁹¹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 671.

⁹² Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 130.

⁹³ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 181.

⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, 309-10.

⁹⁵ Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 439.

(Heb 6:19).⁹⁶ Believers can demolish strongholds of discouragement, hopelessness, and defeat using their spiritual weapon (2 Cor 10:4-5). Due to understanding their new status in Christ, strongholds represent strong human attitudes entrenched by evil; they also represent human wisdom that come against the divine plan of God.⁹⁷ Believers can renew their minds by security in Christ because sins are forgiven and the enemy is defeated (Col 2:13-15).

The Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)

Ephesians 6:17 speaks about taking up the sword of the Spirit. Though all the armor of God is based on the Word of God, the sword speaks about the specific Word that the Spirit gives against certain attacks from the devil. The sword is the “relevant Scriptures” that drives away the devil.⁹⁸

Praying (Eph 6:18)

Praying in Ephesians 6:18 is not considered a part of the armor by commentators, but I argue that it is a supportive piece to all other pieces. Praying must be in the Spirit, it is commanded, and it must be continuous. Arnold confirms that prayer is emphasized in Ephesians 6:18-20 “in accordance with the work of the Spirit as a foundation to preparing and engaging in spiritual struggle.”⁹⁹ “Praying ‘in the Spirit,’” as Bruce confirms, “means praying under the Spirit’s influence and with his assistance.” There is also a connection with 1 Corinthians 14:15, praying in Spirit and mind, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “pray without ceasing.”¹⁰⁰ Foulkes explains that praying can be taken

⁹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, 310.

⁹⁷ Murray H. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 690.

⁹⁸ Wood, “Ephesians,” 784.

⁹⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 622.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 411.

with the preceding commands: “Each piece put on with prayer.”¹⁰¹ The word *all* is used four times: “always” (NKJV),” or “all times,” “all prayer,” “all perseverance,” and “all the saints” (ESV). These words indicate the continuous process of praying that supports the “put on” and the “take up”; therefore, the command is continuous. Vaughan explains that “watching” (AV) is a translation to the word that means “to keep awake” and “conveys the thought of never being off guard.”¹⁰² Vaughan explains that this prayer is a “crisis prayer—prayer on every occasion of conflict, prayer in ‘the evil day.’”¹⁰³

The content of the two main prayers in Ephesians 1:17-23; 3:14-21 are essential to wearing the full armor of God. The two prayers emphasize the understanding of the greatness of God’s power and the strength that believers need in their Christian walk with God. In the first prayer (Eph 1:17-23) Paul prays that God might open the inner eyes of the believers’ hearts to the hope of God’s calling, their status as God’s valuable inheritance, and the immeasurable power that God put into effect for all believers. Paul also prays for believers to recognize the victory of Christ over the spiritual beings (1:21).¹⁰⁴ Thus, when believers put on the armor of God, they would acknowledge the inheritance and victory in Christ. The second prayer (Eph 3:14-21) is for the enablement of God’s power in the lives of God’s children. Paul prays that God, by his Spirit, would give His children inner strength to empower them to comprehend the vastness of Christ’s love. Moreover, the inner strength of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ in the believers’ hearts will help them become the people that God intends them to be.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, when the counselor prays for couples, assigns a prayer team, and teaches couples to pray, the Spirit of God will give them the strength they need for victory in crisis.

¹⁰¹ As cited in Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 182.

¹⁰² Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 131.

¹⁰³ Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*. 89.

¹⁰⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 238.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intervention-in-crisis counseling program aims to reach weary couples through the Word of God. The counselor has an Ephesians 6 perspective to diagnose and intervene, and the counselor can help the couple or spouse through putting on the full armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) in seven dynamic steps. Through ministering in two stages, the preparatory stage focuses on helping the couple stand on the truth of the gospel, know God's purposes for their marriage, realize the spiritual battle and the real enemy who has schemes, and recognize the source of strength for believers. Then, the second stage includes the rest of the intervention, which aims to help couples wear the whole armor of God. Prayer accompanies both stages, with the goal of building marriages on the truth of the gospel in view of the armor of God, to restore marriages for the purpose of God.

Chapter 3 further explains the counseling process for marriage crises under the metaphor of the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18). It also details the armor of God application in the life of a believing spouse and in the marriage relationship. The chapter describes the counseling methodology comprising the seven steps and expounds the new identity in Christ as a necessity to overcome crisis.

CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE BASIS FOR DEVELOPING
A MARRIAGE CRISIS INTERVENTION
COUNSELING PROGRAM

There is an abundance of biblical literature concerning marriage and family counseling; nevertheless, there is no methodology for intervention in marriage crisis based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-19). In their book *God, Marriage, and Family*, Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones say, “There is a plethora of material on marriage and the family, as well as a considerable body of literature on spiritual warfare, rarely are those issues treated jointly.”¹ They do not know if any volume deals with the subject of spiritual warfare for families.² I agree with Köstenberger and Jones when they explain that marriage counseling regularly revolves around issues like communication, needs, or resolving conflict. They confirm that in reading any of the marriage counseling books “one would never know that spiritual warfare is a vital issue in marriage and the family. Yet in fact, spiritual warfare is an all-encompassing reality.”³

The perennial cosmic battle in Ephesians 6:12 calls for a treatment of relational crises. This chapter brings the process of counseling for marriage crises under the metaphor of the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18), considers its applications in the life of a believing spouse and in the marriage relationship, and argues that if couples do not place their identity in Christ then their marriages cannot withstand the enemy’s attacks. The chapter presents a methodology built on the foundation of the gospel, to include in the biblical

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 157.

² Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 157.

³ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 157.

counseling movement. This methodology follows the metaphor of the armor of God and presents the application in two stages.

The claim is that when the counselor uses this methodology—diagnoses strongholds in the couple’s lives, counsels them, and teaches truth through the recommended steps corresponding to Ephesians 6:10-18—the couple will live according to their identity in Christ, gain victory in spiritual warfare, and the marriage crisis will come to an end. This chapter explains both stages of the intervention process pertaining to the armor of God and further presents the application to the one-flesh relationship. For the scope of this project, the chapter explores additional functions and issues connected only to three pieces of the armor of God: the gospel of peace, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation. The counselor can diagnose strongholds and teach couples to perpetuate their new identity and virtues in Christ so that he can bring hope to the couple in crisis, reconciliation to their relationship, and victory over the enemy.

Diagnosis and Intervention

The armor of God provides a counseling framework for intervention in marriage crises. To apply this counseling program with couples, the counselor will need to conduct various assessments to explore the weaknesses in the relationship.⁴ He must diagnose issues related to the armor of God by first assessing the general status of the relationship, the spiritual status of the couple, and their understanding of the gospel and Christ. Next, the counselor will conduct assessments with the couple to locate strongholds against their identity in Christ as forgiven, justified, and adopted children of God. The counselor should also check the foundation of truth.

The word *stronghold* is derived from 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, which uses the metaphors of warfare. George H. Guthrie says that in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 “Paul sees the

⁴ See appendices 3-9 for assessment tools.

mind as a spiritual battleground.”⁵ A *stronghold*, according to Colin Kruse, is “the intellectual arguments of unbelievers that have to be demolished so that the truth of the gospel might gain entry.”⁶ Romans 12:2 explains the important aspect of believers to be transformed in their minds. Thus, it is important that the counselor, as part of this counseling methodology, diagnoses strong patterns of thoughts and beliefs that are against the Word of God and then teaches the truth.

Furthermore, using assessment tools the counselor must identify the couple’s Christian walk in righteousness, and the status of their emotions, anger, and bitterness. The counselor also deals with the war of worldly desires and affections in the sinful heart (Jas 4:1-10) under the breastplate of righteousness in marriage crises; the counselor can help the couple submit to God and resist the devil (Jas 4:7). At different stages in the counseling process, the counselor should discover if unforgiveness or untruthfulness are deteriorating the couple’s relationship. The program must be done in two stages: the preparatory stage and the intervention stage. The seven-step intervention will establish the foundation for all the pieces of the armor in the lives of the couple in connection to marriage, using the three-fold meaning of the armor as the following sections explain.⁷

Preparatory Stage Based on Ephesians 6:10-13

Ephesians 6:10-13 informs the counselor about the preparatory work that must be accomplished with couples in crisis.⁸ First, the counselor gathers information about the

⁵ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2015), 475, e-book. Guthrie says that the image in 2 Cor 10:4-5” is “of tearing down fortress walls” (473).

⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthian*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 230, e-book.

⁷ See tables A1-A9 in appendix 10 for quick classification.

⁸ For more information on each element of the full armor of God (Eph 6:14-18), see the full exegesis in chap. 2.

specific crisis and the couple's spiritual status using the first assessment tool.⁹ Then he prepares the couple through teaching them about God's purposes for their marriage and spiritual warfare, so they will become ready to put on the armor of God. This preparatory stage is accomplished in the following manner:

The spiritual status. Couples must be in the Lord before they can be "strong in the Lord" (Eph 6:10). Thus, the counselor must first seek to discern if couples in crises are saved and if they know the blessings of God to His children (Eph 1–2). If they are not yet saved, then receiving the truth of the gospel can be accomplished first or as a part of the belt of truth.

The perspective. Couples in crises are usually limited in their perspective. They often lack a biblical view of the purpose of marriage, the opposing power of the enemy against the family, and the power of the gospel. They blame each other and expect their spouse or their past to change so that the marriage crisis can end. Furthermore, they might not realize that the ministry of Christ includes the healing of hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18-19), which implies the healing of their marriage relationship because when hearts heal relationships can heal too. Therefore, the counselor must help couples learn the purposes of God for their marriage, realize the spiritual nature of the battle and the enemy they are struggling against (Eph 6:12), and understand the ministry of Christ.

The source. Since people in different crises are usually wearied and tend to rely on themselves or others for strength, the counselor must inform couples in crisis about their source of strength (Eph 6:10). They can be made strong and grow in their position in Christ. Ephesians 6:10 speaks about the source of power, it is the strength of His might; therefore, couples can become strong in the Lord not in any other person or

⁹ See appendix 3 for assessment tool 1, "The Spiritual Status/SS."

power.¹⁰ Victory is accomplished through the power of His might available to believers through the Holy Spirit, and through putting on the full armor of God.

The schemes. The counselor's role is to warn couples and explain the different schemes of the enemy (Eph 6:11). These schemes may include many aspects of the couple's differences or sinfulness (1 Cor 7:5). Part of his schemes is to hide himself to deceive people (2 Cor 11:14); his plan is to destroy their lives (1 Pet 5:8), including their marriages. The enemy's schemes succeed when couples focus on each other's shortcomings, blame each other, live in sin, and neglect spiritual warfare. Christ came to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3: 8); therefore, the counselor must help the couple in crisis to put off the old self, put on the new self, and focus on spiritual warfare.

The process. The counselor must help couples in marriage crises expect that the process of restoration for their marriage involves putting on the new self (the armor of God); specifically, according to the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, and the helmet of salvation.

The goal. The counselor must define the goal for the couples so they can all work together toward a biblical target. When couples face struggles, they must stand in truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the hope of salvation, and the Word of God, using the strength of God. Couples must also learn how to stand after each accomplishment in their relationship. Eventually, their goal becomes to stand in the unity of their marriage. Practically, the counselor should be persistent in reminding couples of the truth and encouraging their faith every time they stumble.

In short, couples must be in the Lord, realize God's blessings, and be ready to take from His strength. They need to understand the purposes of God for their marriage, realize the spiritual battle, and understand the schemes of the enemy. Once couples

¹⁰ Gary Burge and Andrew Hill, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1370-71.

understand that this cosmic battle aims to hinder the purposes of God in their marriage and that God has provided victory through wearing the full armor of God, they can become ready to put on this armor to be restored to God's plan. Moreover, they can go through the process of putting on the new self in Christ while keeping their focus on standing firm in the truth and in their marriage.

The Intervention Stage Based on the Full Armor of God (Eph 6:14-18)

According to the cosmic battle mentioned in Ephesians 6:12, couples must be girded with truth and abide in righteousness to keep their unity. Also, couples need the gospel to sustain peace in Christ. Couples need prayer to connect to God's strength for battle, faith as a shield, and the Word of God as a sword against the devil. Essentially, couples must be strong in their new identity in Christ provided through salvation to stand against the spiritual battle. Therefore, each piece of armor in a crisis intervention should be applied in the following ways.

The belt of truth. The lies and deception of the enemy destroy lives, marriages, and lead people to sinful lives when they believe them (Gen 3:4-6). Marriages can survive crises if they are rebuilt on truth. Christ must be at the center of the couples' lives and marriages because Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). Gurnall confirms that truth is comprised of doctrine and heart sincerity.¹¹ The couple's lives must be aligned with truth. Couples must also put away falsehood and be truthful and honest with each other (Eph 4:25). Furthermore, couples must be ready to accept all truth and the Bible must have authority over feelings, traditions, and reason.¹²

¹¹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://a.co/2fkumuH>, 176.

¹² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1977), 203.

As for procedures, first, the counselor must assess the basic truth of the gospel in the couple's lives as preparatory work for the intervention to know the gaps and help them in the process of fastening on the belt of truth (6:14).¹³ Next, the intervention must teach the truth about God, the Bible, human sinfulness, redemption, and call for faith. Moreover, the counselor must discover if untruthfulness is affecting the couple's unity or causing the crisis so he can help them become truthful again, so as to rebuild trust and unity.¹⁴

The breastplate of righteousness. The believer stands in the righteousness of God (Rom 3:24); he is not a slave to sin anymore (Rom 6:6) but he needs to cultivate practical righteousness. Gurnall confirms that righteousness and holiness have power. Moreover, they defend the conscience from wounds of sin so that the couple can have victory over the accusations of the enemy against themselves and their family. He also confirms that righteousness must reflect on the home (Ps 101:2).¹⁵ Gurnall explains that the believer must care for the breastplate of righteousness, "In regard of God, whose great design is, to have his people 'a holy people.' Second. In regard of Satan, whose design is as much against the saints' holiness as God is for it. Third. In regard of holiness itself, the incomparable excellency of which commands us to pursue it."¹⁶ For these reasons, the couple must cultivate practical righteousness in all aspects of their lives, putting off the old self that might be causing disunity and defeat in warfare, and putting on the new self

¹³ See appendix 4, for the assessment tool, "The Belt of Truth/BT." Checking the basic truth of the gospel overlaps between the preparatory stage and the belt of truth—at the preparatory stage I assess salvation, at the belt of truth I assess the understanding of the gospel truth. However, at the gospel of peace I assess the gospel gaps and confirm receiving forgiveness in order to forgive the spouse.

¹⁴ See appendix 4. Truthfulness, this step must be handled with wisdom and care. Confession about untruthfulness must submit to church policies and be sensitive to the culture and weakness level of the marriage, lest it causes more damage. Repentance is a must, but many times general apologies can be sufficient for saving the marriage. The counselor can teach about truthfulness and postpone the assessment of untruthfulness until trust is built between the counselor and the counselee.

¹⁵ Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 247, 249, 265.

¹⁶ Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 249.

(4:23-24). The couple can then start aligning their marriage with the Word of God to be able to resist the enemy (Jas 4:7).

As for procedures of intervention, the counselor can assess the understanding of imputed righteousness, its applications, and the practical righteousness in all sides of the relationship.¹⁷ Additionally, because the devil tempts the heart to deviate believers from living righteously, the counselor must assess the heart's desires causing the conflict (Jas 4:1-3).¹⁸

The gospel of peace. The devil divides but the gospel provides peace and reconciliation. If the couple is firm on the foundation of the gospel, then first they will have peace with God and they will cultivate and develop peace with each other upon what they received from God. Furthermore, they eventually become part of a goal greater than themselves and their relationship—ready to share the gospel by becoming a missional family to conquer the enemy. This is the way to fulfill the purposes of God in creation, and in discipling generations (Deut 6:1-6).

In the intervention process, the counselor must help the couple cultivate this peace in the heart and relationship by receiving the forgiveness of God, upon which they must grant forgiveness to one another. The counselor can also help one spouse if the other is not seeking help. Furthermore, the counselor must assess strongholds against the gospel that prevent the process of reconciliation.¹⁹ At an advanced stage in the intervention, the counselor helps the couple go forward, facing the crisis together and walking toward a larger goal for the gospel.

¹⁷ See section in this chap., “Identity and Issues under the Breastplate of Righteousness,” for further explanation.

¹⁸ See appendix 6 for the assessment tool, “The Breastplate of Righteousness/B.R.”

¹⁹ See section in this chap., “Identity and Issues in Connection to the Gospel of Peace,” for more details. Also see appendix 5 for the assessment tool, “The Gospel of Peace/GP.”

The shield of faith. Faith can defeat doubts and deceit that the enemy brings. Because faith *is above all or in all circumstances* (Eph 6:16), the counselor must help the couple first understand and cultivate faith in God’s character, care, and love; faith in His promises for the future; and faith in the other pieces of the armor of God. The counselor helps the couple through sharing the Word of God in the right context of their problem, and assigning readings about foundations of faith (God, salvation, prayer, the Bible, and the church), marriage (design and purposes), identity, and righteousness. Finally, the couple must build the habit of reading the Word of God.²⁰

The helmet of salvation. Hopelessness is the enemy’s strategy to cause the believer to give up on the Christian walk (Job 2:9); nevertheless, the helmet provides the believer’s hope secured by the Holy Spirit. In application to marriages, the new identity as adopted children confirms the value of each spouse, regardless of personal differences. Salvation provides the new ability for spouses to conform to God’s image in the process of continuous sanctification. Sanctification provides hope in the transformation of the spouse, the relationship, and the future of the marriage.²¹ Therefore, the couple can persevere in their walk with God and with each other.

In the intervention, the counselor must diagnose the couple’s strongholds of hopelessness and locate strongholds of identity.²² He can help the couple hold their thoughts captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5) and encourage them not to lose heart at sufferings and marital struggles (Eph 3:13). Furthermore, the counselor can empower the couple to overcome their past, live a secured present in Christ, and believe in a better future based on the hope of salvation, thus reflecting on having a blessed marriage.

²⁰ See appendix 7 for the assessment tool, “Shield of Faith, SF.”

²¹ Transformation applies on the sinful state of the mind and heart, not the God-given attributes of the spouse’s personality.

²² Strongholds of identity is further explained in the sec. “Identity and Issues under the Helmet of Salvation.” Also, hopelessness includes discouragement, doubt, and fear of the future. See the assessment tool in appendix 8, “The Helmet of Salvation/HS.”

The sword of the Spirit. The counselor must train the couple to hear God in their struggles through reading His Word. Thus, they will be able to have a Word to believe and declare against the enemy when he attacks with deception, helping them at the beginning of counseling with the Word of God for their specific situation.²³

Prayer. Procedures should include the activation of a prayer team to pray for the crisis and pray Ephesians 1:17-20; 3:14-21 for the couple, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit for restoration to occur. The counselor should pray for and with the couple; moreover, the counselor must teach the couple to pray. A practical prayer list can help the couple in crisis pray individually and jointly.²⁴ Prayer secures fruitful procedures for the intervention.

The intervention sometimes has limitations. For instance, if only one spouse is willing to cooperate in the counseling process. The process for the believing spouse is the same in wearing the armor of God. This spouse stays prepared to keep the peace facing the opposition of the enemy even if the other spouse resists the change.²⁵

Application on the One-Flesh Relationship

The one-flesh union in Genesis 2:24 is the outcome of the unity of two people in the marriage relationship. However, the fall affected this one-flesh relationship and disturbed the unity between the husband and wife (Gen 3:2-6,12). This counseling program can help the couple in crisis restore their personal life and their one-flesh covenant relationship (Mal 2:14) when they recognize the implications of the armor of

²³ For example, when disappointment from the other spouse attacks, the spouse can declare that God is able to give them one heart (Ezek 11:19).

²⁴ Andreas Köstenberger and Margret Köstenberger, "How to Pray during Marital Conflict," Crossway, 2014, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-to-pray-during-marital-conflict/>.

²⁵ The Word of God provides direction for the believer in the case of having an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:13-16), or a spouse who does not obey the Word of God (1 Pet 3:1).

God on their marriage. The following section describes the restoration process that will occur once the couples respond to the counselor's intervention in their marriage crises.

Preparatory stage. Intervention in the preparatory stage ensures that the spiritual status of the troubled couple, their perspective, their source of strength, their readiness for the process, and the goal are all aligned with the Word of God. Couples must be in Christ, have received eternal life, and realize the capacity of the redemption ministry to heal hearts, recover sights, and give freedom through forgiveness.²⁶ Couples can then be strengthened in Him to survive the marriage crisis and restore unity in the one-flesh covenant relationship (Mal 2:14). When couples learn about God's blessings and gain a new perspective toward the purposes of God for marriage and the spiritual warfare against it, they can see beyond their relationship struggles. Moreover, when couples learn that there is a prayerful process of putting on the armor of God, they will realize that restoration is a sanctification process that will enable their marriage to stand against the battle. Furthermore, they become ready to put on the armor of God in the second stage.

Second stage. In the second stage, the counselor helps the marriage as follows. For the belt of truth, Christ ought to be at the center of the couple's home (Ps 127:1)—Christ heals, builds, and unites the marriage relationship. The Bible has guidance for their relationship. Furthermore, integrity removes shame, guilt, and untruthfulness that divides. Moreover, truthfulness gradually rebuilds trust. Concerning the breastplate of righteousness, the couple must view their marriage through the imputed righteousness of God. Even if the marriage was defiled by sin (Heb 13:4), it becomes covered by the righteousness of God. The couple must also see each other as redeemed from the past and righteous in Christ. In reference to practical righteousness, the one-flesh relationship can

²⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 183-84.

be renewed daily according to God's design when couples continue the put-off put-on process (Eph 4: 22-24). Furthermore, the marriage can become free of barriers, such as accusations, judgments, bitterness, and anger, that hinder unity. Because of the gospel of peace, when the reality of the couple's relationship causes fear and strife and when the enemy attacks with anxiety, chaos, or division, the couple must stay surefooted in their walk with God and each other. Peace preserves their one-flesh relationship, and their marriage can fulfill the purposes of God.

The shield of faith helps the couple believe in God's promises and His power to unite them, and faith helps them defend the covenant relationship against every hindrance that the enemy uses to disrupt their unity. The helmet of salvation protects the couple's minds from the discouragement and hopelessness they experience within their one-flesh relationship. When rejection and failure in the marriage cause hopelessness, the helmet gives hope for the future so that couples will not lose heart facing relational difficulties. The promises of God enable the survival of defiled marriages, providing that the couple learns to use the sword of the Spirit to fight specific attacks of the enemy in their marriage.²⁷ Most importantly, the couple always unites in prayer for each other and their marriage. Ultimately, the armor of God provides an imagery for couples to keep in mind as they pursue a peaceful relationship, making abstract concepts more concrete.

However, if couples do not place their identity in Christ, then their marriages cannot withstand the enemy's attacks. This truth calls for additional exploration in the gospel of peace, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation because they have additional functions and issues concerning identity. If the counselor can diagnose strongholds and help to perpetuate their new identity and virtues in Christ, then he can bring hope to couples in crises and victory over the enemy. Thus, the following sections

²⁷ For example, if there was the sin of adultery in the marriage and the spouse who committed the sin repented, the other spouse also grants forgiveness. If the enemy accuses the spouses and demeans their marriage, then the couple can refuse his accusation and declare that they are forgiven, washed with the blood of Jesus, and their marriage is cleansed and covered with God's righteousness.

elaborate on identity in Christ, in connection to marriage, and strongholds causing issues in marriages. These sections deal specifically with identity topics in relation to the gospel of peace, breastplate of righteousness, and helmet of salvation.

Identity in Christ

This chapter uses only two terms concerning identity.²⁸ The first term is *identity in Christ*, which expresses the status God has granted to His children as forgiven, made righteous, and adopted in Christ.²⁹ The second term is *identity strongholds* (2 Cor 10:4-5), which describes misconceptions believers have about themselves (Rom 12:3; Gal 6:3).³⁰

In a broad context, a well-built biblical identity is three dimensional and deeply rooted in God’s truth—(1) people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27); (2) people are sinners (Gen 3); and (3) all who believe are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8). These three dimensions are the pillars that hold the biblical identity of believers together. In turn, believers will be filled with hope for the present and future. The awareness of being created in the image of God with all the qualities, abilities, and capacities involved provides for an identity filled with confidence.³¹ At the same time, apprehending human sinfulness, “the noetic effect of sin” on the mind, and the sin in the heart (Mark 6:20-23) must convict believers for humility and dependance on God for

²⁸ Scholars have written about identity and counterfeit identities; they used different names to describe them. Some called identity *self-image*, others called it *self-worth*, or *identity in Christ*. Counterfeit identity is sometimes called *low self-esteem*. I am not speaking of self-love or self-esteem as both are tricky terms and have been used in secular literature to mean different things that are not biblical, as Anthony A. Hoekema explains in *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 103.

²⁹ Martha Peace highlighted that the word *identity* is not in the Bible. Martha Peace, “Identity Language in Counseling: What Does It Mean to Be ‘in Christ?’” August 30, 2018, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/identity-language-in-counseling/>.

³⁰ I chose this term because this program uses the language of spiritual warfare, and because Paul uses these words to describe thoughts against truth.

³¹ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 22. Chap. 3 explains the image of God.

sanctification.³² Comprehending the identity received in salvation with all the privileges pertaining to adoption through Christ (Eph 1–2) provides value, significance, status, security, belonging, and a sense of purpose. In conclusion, believers must receive God’s love and significance in creation, realize the need for God’s grace because of sin, receive their value through the privileges of salvation. This chapter focuses on the third dimension in connection to the armor of God.

The believer’s identity in Christ is central in the armor of God and must be based on truth and established in Christ, which shows that the belt of truth is profound. Furthermore, through the gospel of peace, the believer is forgiven and reconciled with God. In connection to the breastplate of righteousness the believer is justified in his standing with God through Christ. Also, in connection to the helmet of salvation the believer is adopted into God’s family to become a child of God. I agree with Brian Rosner when he confirms that “A biblical theology of personal identity . . . should be a ‘gospel-driven theology.’”³³ For this reason, being forgiven, justified, and adopted are the core of the believer’s identity.

The following implications can be present in the marriage relationship if couples do not anchor their identity in Christ. First, unforgiveness will linger and destroy the relationship if couples do not acknowledge their forgiveness through the gospel. Second, accusation and anger will remain in the marriage if couples do not obtain God’s righteousness in Christ and live accordingly. Third, hopelessness will continue if couples cannot ascertain the future inheritance that salvation provides through faith. These issues will cause division and allow the enemy’s attacks on the marriage to continue. The rest of this chapter focuses on the connection between living the status of a new creation in

³² Robert Jones and Brad Hambrick write, “The noetic effect of sin,” is “that aspect of our total depravity involving the moral corruption of our thinking.” Robert Jones and Brad Hambrick, “The Problem of Sin,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald et al. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 128.

³³ Brian S. Rosner, *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity*, ed. Jonathan Lunde, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 34.

Christ (Eph 1–2) and wearing the armor of God in spiritual warfare to restore marriages in crises.

Identity in Connection to Marriage

“True identity is a gift of God, a surprising discovery, and then a committed choice.”³⁴ Nevertheless, the family also impacts one’s identity. Rosner explains that because a “human being is inherently social,”³⁵ he will need others in a certain capacity to discover a true identity. Timothy Keller confirms that marriage has the power of love “to affirm you and heal you of the deepest wounds and hurts of your life.”³⁶ Keller also confirms that a couple’s positive assessment for each other has high credibility.³⁷ Russell Moore explains that this vulnerability can be hurtful if relationships are not loving; however, God can use vulnerability inside the family to conform believers to Christ.³⁸

Moore discusses two hurtful responses that can occur in a marriage: spouses leave their families to be fulfilled and form an identity elsewhere or they bind up their identities with their families. Both *leave* or *bind* responses indicate that a spouse is exiting a family—some spouses exit by escaping to work, an affair, or something else; others become overinvolved in activities and achievements to form an identity of being a good parent.³⁹ Moreover, they demand the spouse or children to meet a need that only God can meet in a person’s heart. Since both responses indicate an identity rooted in

³⁴ David Powlison, “A Man’s Identity,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 34, no. 1 (2020): 78.

³⁵ Rosner, *Known by God*, 37.

³⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 162.

³⁷ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 163-64.

³⁸ Russell D. Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 20.

³⁹ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 21.

something other than God and can eventually hurt the family, the counselor must observe and assess these exit/bind-responses in a marriage.

Keller discusses another problem concerning identity and marriage, which he calls the “vacuum.” Keller says that a lack of real identity in a couple’s life causes a “vacuum” in marriage, and occurs when “two needy people, unsure of their own value and purpose, finding their significance and meaning in one another’s arms. If you add two vacuums to each other, you only get a bigger and stronger vacuum.”⁴⁰ Each spouse must have already “settled the big questions of life—why they were made by God and who they are in Christ.”⁴¹ Keller also explains the dangers of receiving worth and identity from relationships, including the relationship with one’s own family and children. A person may abuse his children when they displease him or prevent them from having their own life. Also, if a person gets the value for his identity from relationships and people’s approval, then this person will be constantly hurt by criticism and fear of confronting others, and therefore become a useless friend or lose friends.⁴²

Though family and marriage are important, nothing can compensate for what God has given people in creation and redemption (Eph 1). Marriages can survive crises if couples cultivate a biblical identity by receiving their value and significance from God not from their family. Likewise, understanding each other’s identity and status in the Lord helps spouses to accept each other’s sinful nature and avoid running to another human being for satisfaction.⁴³

The counseling framework of the armor of God provides the counselor with biblical concepts to help couples receive their identity in Christ. First, the counselor assesses identity strongholds affecting the marriage and hindering the process of putting

⁴⁰ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 49.

⁴¹ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 49.

⁴² As cited by Rosner, *Known by God*, 63.

⁴³ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 158-59.

on the armor of God. Next, the counselor can help the couple put on the gospel of peace, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation—to live as forgiven, justified children of God. The following sections explain this process and how identity strongholds and issues will continue to cause division, strife, and give further opportunity to the devil. The aim of the counselor is to assess strongholds, understand indicative implications, and build identity under these three pieces of armor.

Identity and Issues in Connection to the Gospel of Peace

The primary focus in connection to the gospel of peace is the identity of the believer as forgiven and reconciled to a peaceful relationship with God. This identity forms the basis for granting and keeping forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace with the spouse. The counselor must help the couples in crises secure their identity in Christ so that they can live in peace. He must also help couples put on the shoes of readiness for the gospel of peace by teaching them the real meaning of the gospel in connection to their family. The counselor must first assess identity strongholds, then work with the couples in five areas pertaining to the gospel: (1) forgiveness, (2) repentance, (3) confession, (4) forbearance, and (5) mercy.

Assessing Strongholds

Counterfeit understanding is deceptive and can hinder the work of the gospel in the couples' lives. Therefore, it is essential that the counselor discover the wrong pattern of thoughts, locate strongholds, and reveal faulty arguments against the truth of the gospel (2 Cor 10:5) before teaching truth. Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp

explain three kinds of blindness and seven replacements of the gospel that the counselor can assess.⁴⁴ Tripp also explains also how to locate strongholds.⁴⁵

Three kinds of blindness. Lane and Tripp explain the three kinds of blindness to the gospel that people can have (2 Pet 1:9). First is blindness of identity—a blindness that overlooks the desperate need for forgiveness and the privileges of being the child of God. The second blindness is a blindness to seeing God’s provision to live the life of godliness. The third is a blindness to understanding God’s process; God works for one’s growth not one’s comfort.⁴⁶

Christian’s replacement of the gospel. Christians can replace the true meaning of the gospel with false notions that prevent them from receiving the real gospel of Jesus Christ; therefore, the right application of the gospel in the couple’s marriage is hindered. Lane and Tripp write about seven replacements for the gospel. (1) Formalism is when the gospel is reduced to participation in ministry instead of realizing the seriousness of one’s personal spiritual condition and the need for God’s grace. (2) Legalism is another gospel (Gal 1:6)—when the gospel is turned to earning salvation by keeping rules, not upon the grace of God. (3) Mysticism reduces the gospel to emotional and spiritual experiences. (4) Activism focuses on external evil causing the gospel to be reduced to participation in Christian causes.⁴⁷ (5) Biblicism decreases the gospel to a mastery of biblical content and theology. (6) Psychology-ism claims, “The gospel is reduced to the healing of emotional

⁴⁴ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 4-6.

⁴⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), appendix 3, 302-17. This strategy can help in putting on the Helmet of Salvation (Eph 6:17).

⁴⁶ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 4-6. The first blindness can prevent the gospel perspective—Christians underestimate the power of indwelling sin and their proneness to replace God.

⁴⁷ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 9.

needs,” instead of godliness.⁴⁸ (7) Socialism focuses on relationships in the church; therefore, acceptance, respect, and position replace communion with Christ.⁴⁹ The counselor must assess the areas in which the couple is blind and the ways they are replacing the gospel, and then the counselor should teach the truth accordingly.⁵⁰

The Gospel and the Family

Couples must learn the complete message of the gospel and understand the connection between the gospel and their family situation; therefore, the counselor must teach that the beginning of a couple’s situation happened in the fall and families are difficult because they live in a fallen world ruled by the devil (John 14:30).⁵¹ The counselor must also teach that peace and unity in the family are only possible through the gospel.

Moore writes, “The old serpent seeks, in every generation, to disrupt the peace of the marriage covenant, of the integrity of the sexual union, of the parent/child bond, of the unity of the church as the household of God.”⁵² The devil still attacks the family design for at least two reasons: to disrupt God’s purposes to raise godly generations (Deut 6:6-9), and to distort the reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church in the family (Eph 5:32). Moore explains how God has embedded pictures and analogies of the

⁴⁸ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 9-10.

⁴⁹ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 7-10.

⁵⁰ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 13-16. The five gospel perspectives are (1) The extent of the sin (Rom 3:10). (2) The centrality of the heart (prov 4:23). (3) Christ is our hope putting the enemies under His feet (1 Col 1:27) (1 Cor 15: 25-28). (4) God’s call for growth and change, as God’s goal is not only to have a better marriage but to become like Him (2 Pet 1:4). (5) Lastly, believers must cultivate a lifestyle of repentance for victory, as there will always be new sins to overcome, and new enemies to defeat. Tripp says, “Only when you accept the bad news of the gospel does the good news make any sense.” Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 14.

⁵¹ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 29-30.

⁵² Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 31.

ultimate truth in creation itself in the family. The family, according to Moore, announces the gospel; therefore, “the demonic powers rage in fury against family order.”⁵³

Couples do not discern the cosmic battle and mistakenly think the problem is only personal. Couples have various points of vulnerability, differences, and sinfulness, therefore the tendency for abandonment, infidelity, and selfishness abide. A willingness to have unity and peace cannot be accomplished without the gospel. Thus, this spiritual warfare needs the work of Christ.⁵⁴ Moore eloquently writes, “Family takes you to the cross.”⁵⁵ He also says, “Our families shape us. We shape our families. The cross should shape both.”⁵⁶

After securing the biblical understanding of the gospel and the family, spouses can grant forgiveness to each other. Then, the counselor must check the understanding of forgiveness, repentance, and confession, and can teach about mercy and forbearance.⁵⁷

Biblical principles for granting forgiveness. Couples in conflict must understand and practice true biblical forgiveness as a fruit of the gospel in their marriage to resolve conflicts. Dave Harvey explains that when Christians practice middle ground forgiveness or conditional forgiveness, they are not practicing biblical forgiveness.⁵⁸ In the context of spiritual warfare, the superficial forgiveness, as Jonathan Holmes describes it, or failing to practice forgiveness in an biblical way, gives the devil an opportunity to

⁵³ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 31.

⁵⁴ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 32.

⁵⁵ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 23.

⁵⁶ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 21.

⁵⁷ See appendix 5, for the assessment tool, “The Gospel of Peace/GP.”

⁵⁸ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*: *Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2010), 71, Kindle.

stir up strife because couples keep a record of the old hurts⁵⁹; therefore, a cycle of strife can keep recurring in the marriage.⁶⁰ Moreover, forgiveness must be based on love that covers offenses (Prov 10:12). Therefore, the husband and wife cease to see each other's offenses whether old or new.

Biblical forgiveness does not stand alone. First and foremost, it is canceling the debt based on the grace of God (Matt 18). However, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about dealing with offences and He lays down different principles beside forgiveness: "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). Jesus also says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:36-37 ESV). As Harvey states, "Forgiveness Releases the Old to Build the New."⁶¹ Finally, on the practical level, the counselor can help couples practice the four promises of forgiveness as taught by Ken Sande.⁶²

Biblical principles for seeking forgiveness. Many marriages are damaged because seeking forgiveness is delayed and conflict remains unresolved. Steps to resolve conflicts are to (1) apply the log-out principle (Matt 7:3-5), (2) confess one's sins to God, and (3) seek forgiveness from the other.⁶³ In the case of having one resistant spouse who

⁵⁹ Jonathan D. Holmes, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 75. Chap. 4 can be helpful to the counselor.

⁶⁰ Positions toward forgiveness vary when it is concerned with reconciliation. The counselor may adopt his own position in agreement with his/her church for counseling. This discussion is outside the scope of this project.

⁶¹ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 72. Harvey provides thorough explanation in chapter 5 and 6 about biblical forgiveness, mercy, and forbearance, it is a good resource for the counselors.

⁶² Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 85. See appendix 5 for the promises, "Devotionals for Peaceful Marriage/G.P."

⁶³ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 124, Kindle.

does not forgive, Robert Jones gives some beneficial direction that the counselor could use in counseling.⁶⁴ Jones advises the forgiving spouse to seek counsel from a pastor, to allow more time for the other spouse to become able to forgive; to pray; to make effort in asking the other spouse about the reasons for unforgiveness; to encourage the other spouse to talk to a pastor or a counselor; and eventually to confront the sin. However, the forgiving spouse must keep the focus on pleasing God.⁶⁵

The seven A's of confession. Confession must be done in a biblical manner for hearts to heal. Ken Sande presents his “the seven A's of Confession,” which the counselor can apply when helping couples.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Jones suggests that certain elements of these seven A's of confession can be reaffirmed if the situation is difficult and the offended spouse does not forgive.⁶⁷

The six ingredients of repentance. Puritan author Thomas Watson defines repentance as “a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”⁶⁸ Watson says that repentance is a spiritual medicine that has six ingredients: “(1) sight of sin, (2) sorrow for sin, (2 Corinth 7:9),⁶⁹ (3) confession of sin, (4) shame for sin, (5) hatred for sin, (6) turning from sin.”⁷⁰ The counselor must follow through with

⁶⁴ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 104.

⁶⁵ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 104-5.

⁶⁶ Sande and Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home*, 52-61. (1) “Address Everyone Involved,” (2) “Avoid if, But, and Maybe,” take full responsibility for one's own sin. (1 Cor.10:13). (3) “Admit specifically.” Do not only say I am sorry, but state what the offense was. (4) “Apologize.” Acknowledge the hurt and state that you regret causing the spouse pain. (5) “Accept the Consequences.” (2 Cor.7:10-11). (6) “Alter your Behavior.” (7) “Ask for Forgiveness.”

⁶⁷ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 104.

⁶⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668), chap. 3, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, chap. 5 is helpful for counselors.

⁷⁰ Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, chap. 3.

couples to confirm repentance. The repentance subject can be embedded within the counseling process and not necessarily accomplished all at once, in order to give the Holy Spirit space to convict and prepare the couples' hearts.

Mercy. Married couples need to deal with mercy in a biblical manner. Self-righteousness according to Harvey is against mercy.⁷¹ Couples need to see each other through God's eyes.⁷² Mercy implies removing judgments (Jas 2:13) and changing unbiblical thoughts against the spouse, which is a process of examining one's own thoughts and replacing them with God's Word. Moreover, being merciful in imitation of our heavenly Father is a command (Luke 6:36).

Forbearance. Couples need forbearance to cover small sins and focus on solving the bigger problems in marriage (Prov 19:11).⁷³ Forbearance does not suppress sins, pretend sins do not exist, or keep a record of sins to be used later.⁷⁴ Harvey says that "forbearance comes into play when we are truly able to cover a perceived offense with God's love not retaining the smallest resentment."⁷⁵

Identity and Issues in Connection to the Breastplate of Righteousness

Under this piece of the armor, the counselor must be concerned with three aspects: (1) the new identity as the righteousness of God in Christ; (2) walking in this

⁷¹ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 59. According to Harvey, if, in any matter, the husband or wife think that his or her sins are not as bad as the other spouse's sin, then the heart of the gospel in Matthew 18 is missing (chap. 6).

⁷² Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 52.

⁷³ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 58.

⁷⁴ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 57.

⁷⁵ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 66.

new identity;⁷⁶ and (3) the connection between walking in righteousness and the spiritual warfare aspect.

The counselor must first assess the couple's emotions, practical problems, and issues. Regarding spiritual warfare, the counselor can first intervene to help the couple live their new identity as righteous people, overcome unresolved guilt, and refuse the enemy's accusations. Second, the couple should stop accusing each other and repent from bitterness, anger, and wrath so as not to give an opportunity to the devil to lead to sin and cultivate strife (Eph 4: 27). Because the enemy is a tempter, the couple must start perpetuating the Christian walk.

The Christian Walk (Eph 4- 6:9)

The counselor can help the couple see practical righteousness as a walk in the new identity. Anthony A. Hoekema emphasizes that believers are foreordained to be in the image of God's son (Eph 1:4), conforming into the image of God's son in their Christian walk (Rom 8:29). He emphasizes that 2 Corinthians 3:18 teaches that the character of the believer changes progressively toward the image of God.⁷⁷ Ephesians 4–5 provides the believer with directions to walk worthy of the Christian calling by walking in unity, walking in the new man, walking in love and holiness, walking in the light, walking in wisdom, walking in the Spirit, and walking according to God's design in family relationships.⁷⁸ The Christian walk includes many counseling issues that the

⁷⁶ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 473, 475, 477.

⁷⁷ Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 23-24. Hoekema confirms that people did not lose the image of God after the fall (15). However, "likeness to God which was perverted when man fell into sin, and is being restored and renewed in the process of sanctification" (32). Chap. 3 explains that the human value in creation being in the image of God, and the new testament confirms the need to restore this image (22). The renewal "consists of growing and ever- increasing likeness to God" (27).

⁷⁸ The paragraph about the Christian walk is not an exegesis of Eph 4–5, it is only a classification that can help the counselor and the couple decide what issues and feelings belong under the breastplate of righteousness. Nevertheless, truth cannot be fragmented or separated, and issues overlap sometimes, as Gurnall explains in *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 248.

counselor must correlate to the breastplate of righteousness.⁷⁹ If the counselor assists the couple by identifying specific weaknesses in their relationship and helps them cultivate their Christian walk, then the couple can survive the crisis and nurture their marriage again, as the following sections explain.⁸⁰

Walk in unity: conflict resolution. Jim Newheiser confirms that conflict is dangerous (Prov 11:9) and being quarrelsome is foolishness (Prov 20:3). He also confirms that heart motives must be checked in conflicts (Jas 4:1-2).⁸¹ Paul exhorts believers to live worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1-5)—which includes a life marked with humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and bearing with one another in love. Couples must keep the unity according to Ephesians 4:3-6 by keeping the bond of peace through having one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one body, and one God and Father. The counselor should call the couple to resolve conflict on the basis of this biblical unity.

Walk in the new man: put on put off. The Word of God describes righteousness as the new identity—Paul exhorts believers to put off all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice, and to put on kindness and tenderheartedness, and to be forgiving (4:31-32). Walking in the new man means walking in the new identity in Christ.⁸² Paul commands the believer not to walk like Gentiles with darkened understanding and futility of the mind, but to walk by truth in Christ, in holiness and righteousness (4:20). The command is to put off the old self of lying, stealing, corrupt

⁷⁹ The counselor can prioritize the issues under the breastplate of righteousness according to the needs of the relationship.

⁸⁰ See appendix 6 for assessment tool, “The Breastplate of Righteousness/BR.”

⁸¹ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 121-23. In chap. 16. “How Can Couples Resolve Their Conflicts?” Newheiser does not address conflict in the perspective of spiritual warfare, but the biblical solutions he mentions can connect to the full armor of God.

⁸² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 406.

words, and to put on the new self of speaking truth, laboring, not sinning when angry, and speaking graceful words for edification, so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit (4:25-30).

The role of the counselor is to assess issues under the put off-put on process. The counselor must assess the old ways of the couple concerning anger as the devil's foothold and the couple's management of their resources, which includes time, work, and proper use of their physical bodies (4:28, 5:16,18). Furthermore, the counselor can assess communication issues, not only as a skill but in relation to heart issues of bitterness and anger, because an angry and bitter heart will produce hurtful interactions (4:31). The counselor can refer to the works of scholars to help the couple in the process. Martha Peace presents the put off-put on process for renewing the mind of a Christian wife.⁸³ Stuart Scott presents the same principles of putting off and putting on for the husband.⁸⁴

Walk in love and holiness: imitate God. God is love and holy; therefore, imitating Him means to walk in love, holiness, and thanksgiving (5:1-4). Loving the spouse reflects God's love to His children. Acts of sexual immorality counter pure love (5:1-3) and hurt the spouse. The counselor must assess the presence of any kind of fornication, uncleanness, filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking. Then, the counselor must teach the couple to give thanks and stay holy.

Walk in the Light: friendships. All sides of the believer's life must be in the light (5:7-13). The fruit of light is goodness, righteousness, and truth (5:9). Therefore, the counselor can observe if the couple has hidden areas of darkness in their lives. The counselor must check the quality of the couple's friendships and he must also check if people outside the marriage affect their loyalty to each other as a couple. The counselor

⁸³ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005), 24. The methods are not connected to the full armor of God, but the counselor can use Martha's method's to help couples put on the breastplate of righteousness.

⁸⁴ Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002), 44.

must warn the couple of worldly friendships and exhort them to examine their lives to please the Lord (5:10) to be able to walk in goodness, righteousness, and truth (5:9).

Walk in wisdom: resources, knowledge of God's will. According to Ephesians 5:16-18, children of God must walk in wisdom and not in foolishness. Wisdom in this passage is comprised of making the best use of time, understanding God's will because days are evil, and avoiding drunkenness. By implication, lack of wisdom causes problems in marriages. First, waste of time implies laziness and idleness in doing one's duties (4:28), which causes problems in marriages. Second, drunkenness is foolishness (Prov 20:1); it is a "senseless waste," as Arnold describes it.⁸⁵ Drunkenness is a waste of physical and mental capacities and produces corruption (5:18). Therefore, to appropriate walking in wisdom in a marriage, the counselor can assess the couple's conduct in relation to proper use of time as a resource and of health as a physical resource (5:16-18). The counselor may look for idleness or drunkenness causing trouble in a marriage relationship. Next, the counselor can help the couple walk in wisdom. Essentially, the couple must cultivate a life of prayer to understand God's will (5:17), use their time in a useful way in the will of God, stay away from drunkenness, and, lastly, be filled with the Spirit as the next point explains.

Walk in the Spirit. Being wise also means walking in the Spirit and bringing everything under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit can guide speech; therefore, a believer should speak psalms and give thanks (5:19). As a result, the desires of the heart can be transformed in order to stand against temptation. Newheiser says that the gospel must transform a quarrelsome heart, and the solution for the quarrelsome heart is to walk in the Spirit.⁸⁶ Speaking about the power of marriage, Keller describes "Spirit fullness" as "a loss of pride and self-will that leads a person to humbly

⁸⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 495.

⁸⁶ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 123.

serve others.”⁸⁷ The counselor must teach couples that the Spirit of God fills the believer’s emotions and thinking, and subjects their desires under the Law of God instead of the lust of the flesh (5:19-20).

Walk in God’s design for family relationships. Couples need to submit to God’s design for their relationship when they are filled in the Spirit (5:21), thus, the counselor must teach couples to walk in that design (Eph 5:21-30; Gen 2:24).

In sum, under the breastplate of righteousness, the counselor must assess, counsel, and teach about the new identity and the Christian walk. The counselor can diagnose issues like conflict and accusation, communication and speech, anger and bitterness, sexual purity, stewardship of resources, friendships, heart attitudes, and application of family roles. Consequently, the counselor decides the focus of counseling and directs couples for further follow up according to the identified issues.⁸⁸

Identity and Issues under the Helmet of Salvation

The general aim with couples in crisis is to bring them back to the purposes of God for their marriage. Yet, identity must precede purpose.⁸⁹ God provides identity through salvation; consequently, couples can connect to the right purposes for their lives when they realize the new identity they received in Christ (Eph 1:5-12).

Many times, crisis occurs when human relationships fail to provide identity needs. Rosner also confirms that relationships “fail to deliver on their promise to give us the lasting sense of significance, security, and satisfaction that each of us craves.”⁹⁰ The couple must realize that the spouse is not their God—only God is God. The spouse can be

⁸⁷ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 47.

⁸⁸ See appendix 6 for assessment tools for diagnosis, “The Breastplate of Righteousness/BR.” Follow up on specific issues is outside the scope of this project.

⁸⁹ Rosner, *Known by God*, 36.

⁹⁰ Rosner, *Known by God*, 62.

a resource, but he can never be the source. God is the one who provides love, significance, status, and hope (Eph 1–2). The couple will focus on God’s provision instead of the marriage relationship when they realize that “a true and enduring identity is a complex gift of Christ’s grace.” as Powlison explains.⁹¹ Arnold explains, “Because of the redemptive work of Christ, our adoption as God’s children, his sealing of us with his Holy Spirit, and our future as God’s inheritance, we are entirely new people.”⁹²

Concerning the helmet of salvation, two main concepts are important to build in the couple’s life and marriage: adoption (1:15) and inheritance (1:11; Col 1:12).⁹³ In sum, the helmet of salvation includes adoption as a main blessing, which provides identity and inheritance to the believer. As a result, the believer receives God’s love in Christ, acquires new status, obtains significance, value, purpose, and a sense of belonging. In addition, salvation secures assurance for the future through the sealing and power of the Holy Spirit. All of these privileges are the cause of the believer’s hope in a better future. As a result, the helmet protects the believer’s thoughts from discouragement and hopelessness that the enemy can use to hinder the walk of the couple in their Christian life, ministry, and marriage. Arnold confirms that the new identity “assures believers of their future destiny and provides hope, but it also connects them with the supreme source of power for deliverance.”⁹⁴

Moore speaks about the devil fighting the Christian’s identity and inheritance with his lies.⁹⁵ He explains how demonic powers come against the family as a revolt

⁹¹ Powlison, *A Man’s Identity*, 79.

⁹² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 671.

⁹³ Some commentators interpret 1:11 as “the believers’ inheritance” as cited in Arnold, *Ephesians*, 114. Arnold prefers that the meaning refers to “God’s inheritance in believers” (114). Col 1:12 confirms that believers have inheritance. Both meanings provide status to believers.

⁹⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 650.

⁹⁵ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 32.

against God himself.⁹⁶ Moore writes, “Family is an aspect of spiritual warfare.”⁹⁷ Powlison confirms that spiritual warfare is a “conflict over who you are, what you believe, and how you live.”⁹⁸ The counselor must understand how the couple’s identity strengthens them to withstand in warfare.

The role of the counselor in this counseling program is to help spouses realize that only God the Father provides for the souls of His children through the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He can assure spouses that God is faithful to fulfill His promises and to fill the believer’s soul with His love. But before the counselor teaches, he must discover strongholds against the new identity in Christ and assess the level in which the couple depends on each other for the security that only salvation can provide.

Main Strongholds and Issues

The helmet of salvation is the hope of salvation (1 Thess 5:8), and the main issues in crises are discouragement and hopelessness that cause spouses to end the relationship. Hopelessness is experienced because believers, with endorsement from the enemy, cannot see the value of being saved. The couple cannot realize how God keeps His promises for a better future. Identity strongholds are against the provision of God made available through salvation (Eph 1–2). It is crucial to identify the identity strongholds that prevent seeing the truth of God by taking up the helmet of salvation. These strongholds are affected by the way believers perceive themselves.

Hoekema confirms that “the Christian life involves not just believing something about Christ but also believing something about ourselves.”⁹⁹ He teaches about the

⁹⁶ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 30. Moore’s chap. 3, “The Family as Spiritual Warfare,” is helpful for the counselor.

⁹⁷ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 20.

⁹⁸ David Powlison, *Safe and Sound: Standing Firm in Spiritual Battles* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2019), 13.

⁹⁹ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 110.

“twofold perversion” in the sense of self that happened at the fall of Adam and Eve in sin. The first is pride, which appeared when they disobeyed God because they thought highly of themselves.¹⁰⁰ The second is shame expressed through discovering their nakedness and hiding with fear from God.¹⁰¹ Both senses of self are self-centered instead of God-centered.¹⁰² Any stronghold that puts down the status of the believer is based on shame. On the other hand, strongholds that inflate a sense of self are based on pride. Shame produces hopelessness and discouragement in perceiving oneself, while pride makes relationships hopeless. The counselor must discover which sinful sense of self is affecting the marriage relationship or creating idols in the heart.¹⁰³ Hoekema teaches, “Man’s relationship to himself . . . is a relationship that underlies all the others”¹⁰⁴ The counselor must evaluate shame, pride, and perfectionism in connection to marriage.¹⁰⁵

Pride. Pride is about self-sufficiency, or sufficiency in something else other than God (Luke 18:9-14). Pride distorts the way human beings perceive themselves (Gal 6:3). Hoekema defines pride as “exaggerated sense of self-importance,” and dependence on achievement not on God.¹⁰⁶

Pride hurts relationships. The individuals’ identities can take pride in or against their families.¹⁰⁷ Keller explains, “If you build your life and identity on your spouse or partner, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person’s

¹⁰⁰ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 104-5.

¹⁰¹ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 104.

¹⁰² Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 56.

¹⁰³ Dealing with the subject of the idols is outside the scope of this project.

¹⁰⁴ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 102. Man’s relationship to himself “makes possible a person’s proper performance in his or her relationships toward God, others, and nature” (102).

¹⁰⁵ See appendix 8, for assessment tool, “The Helmet of Salvation/HS.”

¹⁰⁶ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 26.

problems will be overwhelming to you.”¹⁰⁸ However, pride causes spouses to be against their family, feel superior, look down on other family members, and hold them in contempt (Ps 123:4). Pride causes quarrels (Prov 13:10), violence (Ps 73:6), injustice (Ps 119:78), and oppression (Ps 10:2).¹⁰⁹ Moreover, pride promotes selfishness (Jas 4:1-3,10) and can create hopelessness in relationships.

Shame. Shame is the state of feeling inadequate and unworthy of respect because of failure to meet certain acquired standards. Stephen Pattison defines shame as “an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self-judging the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound.”¹¹⁰ He also confirms that a person feels inadequate and worthy of rejection.

Shame is a result of the fall. Shame is also reinforced within unloving and disrespectful family relationships. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed (Gen 1:25). After the fall, the first couple was ashamed, which was revealed “in the effort of our first parents to cover their nakedness” (Gen 3:7, 10), as Louis Berkhof explains.¹¹¹ Though shame is ontological in human beings, it is strengthened by the rejection of the parents or spouse. Shame fosters the inner cause for spouses to exit their families or run to an affair to find worth and significance in something else.¹¹² Keller writes, “Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value

¹⁰⁸ As cited in Rosner, *Known by God*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Rosner, *Known by God*, 208.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71.

¹¹¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 184. Berkhof continues, “This change in the actual condition of man also reflected itself in his consciousness. There was, first of all, a consciousness of pollution, revealing itself in the sense of shame” (184).

¹¹² Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 21.

on we essentially ‘deify.’”¹¹³ As a result, the counselor must recognize the spiritual and relational causes behind shame.

Shame is different from guilt or fear—the word *shame* in the Bible is the opposite of glory, or the opposite of honor; it is disgrace.¹¹⁴ However, *guilt* comes from breaking the laws of God, which is the state of deserving punishment. Guilt expresses itself in accusing the conscience and causes fear from God (Gen 3:10).¹¹⁵ Furthermore, fear is different from shame and guilt. Fear is rooted in the separation from God as the source of love (Gen 3:10). Fear is also a fear of death as the punishment of sin (Gen 2:17).¹¹⁶ Thus, the love of God is what casts fear out (1 John 4:17,18). The counselor must be sensitive to these differences when he conducts assessments.

In a crisis, the shame status may be a reason for hopelessness, discouragement, finding identity in a family, or exiting the family to find identity.¹¹⁷ The helmet of salvation is the provision of God to conquer the spiritual warfare involved in a crisis. Only the work of Christ on the cross can heal this shame (Heb 12:2). The only hope is in salvation (Col 1:27). Only through Christ can a believer receive the love, acceptance, value, significance, belonging, and status that a fallen being is looking for in life. In this context, the counselor must assess the shame status of spouses and discern the difference between fear, guilt, and shame.¹¹⁸ Then, the counselor can present the redemption privileges that provide hope.

¹¹³ As cited in Rosner, *Known by God*, 61. At this point, the subject is about idolatry, which is outside the scope of this chapter.

¹¹⁴ The Greek word in Septuagint translation in Ps 44:9 (κατησχύνας), Ps 53:5 (κατησχυνθήσαν), Ps 34:5 (κατασχυνθή), Ps 1:1 (κατασχυνθείην), Ps 31:17 (ατασχυνθείην), and Ezra 9:6 (ησχύνθην), have the same root for the word used in Gen 2:25 (ησχύνοντο) to describe the emotional condition of Adam and Eve before the fall.

¹¹⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 184, 190.

¹¹⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 573.

¹¹⁷ Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family*, 21.

¹¹⁸ See appendix 8 for assessment tool “The Helmet of Salvation/HS.”

Perfectionism. Perfectionism is a stronghold that includes shame and pride.¹¹⁹

Shame occurs when a person does not like who he is; pride exists in a person's life because of a self-sufficiency and performance-based identity. Perfectionists have a performance-based identity and seek acceptance in relationships based on their high performance. However, seeking excellence is not the same as perfectionism—excellence is based on using gifts faithfully, while perfectionism is a performance seeking acceptance rooted in fear of rejection.

First, in relation to pride, a person gains acceptance from God and expects worth from others through performance. Jesus judged the proud heart behind spiritual performance (Luke 18:14). Ecclesiastes 7:16 teaches, “Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?” (ESV). This verse speaks about trying to achieve perfect performance based on personal wisdom and righteousness; the verse is about “forbidding a self-made righteousness of outward performances,” as Faussett explains.¹²⁰ By implication, this verse can apply to practical and relational matter as well as spiritual.

Second, in relation to shame—Michael Brustein teaches that perfectionists perceive others as not accepting based on lack of self-acceptance. He confirms that research illustrates that perfectionists lack self-worth.¹²¹ Perfectionism has been conceptually and empirically connected to shame.¹²² The counselor must assess if the identity of the couple is performance-based, locate the stronghold of perfectionism, and

¹¹⁹ The word *perfectionism* is known culturally and in research, but it is not biblical. Tripp speaks about the mask of holiness—it has similarities to perfectionism. Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, appendix 1, 277-87. The counselor can benefit from this appendix.

¹²⁰ A. R. Faussett, “Ecclesiastes or the Preacher Commentary,” in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Faussett, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (n.p.: William Collins, 1871), s. v. “Eccl 7:16,” Logos Bible Software.

¹²¹ As cited in Michael Brustein, *Perfectionism: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2013), 9.

¹²² Jeffrey S. Ashby, Kenneth G. Rice, and James L. Martin, “Perfectionism, Shame, and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 84, no. 2 (2006): 150.

diagnose shame, pride, and fear. Lastly, the counselor can introduce salvation privileges and the new identity in Christ (Eph 1-2).¹²³

Conclusion

Unity between a couple is re-established, first, through the new identity in Christ while rebuilding their life on the basis of truth and maintaining truthfulness with each other. Second, unity is protected through imputed righteousness and strengthened when they continue walking together in righteousness. Furthermore, unity is maintained through forgiveness and reconciliation. Unity is extended through the new hope and faith, and through reaching out to become a missional family with a purpose. Finally, unity is preserved through fervent prayers that strengthen the marriage against spiritual warfare. Crisis is division, and unity is about peace. Ephesians 2:14 teaches believers, “For He Himself is our peace.”

The counselor should help the couple achieve what I would like to call a *triumphant marriage*, which is a marriage relationship having victory in spiritual warfare and marital crisis. This marriage fits in the framework of the metaphor of the armor of God and connects to every piece of the armor in the following manner—the marriage becomes truthful because it is built on the foundation of the gospel, Christ is the cornerstone, and the Word of God is the base. Furthermore, this triumphant marriage is covered with Christ’s righteousness and is lived through practical righteousness; thus, marriage becomes free from bitterness, is not controlled by anger and fear, and is without accusation. This peaceful marriage is full of forgiveness. A triumphant marriage is also one that is full of hope because the couple grows in the knowledge of their new identity as God’s children. Therefore, a missional marriage is the result because the couple can go forward with the gospel to new generations to keep the purposes of God. The marriage is triumphant when it is empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to continue to stand. When

¹²³ See appendix 8 for devotionals.

marriages arise to become triumphant, crises turn into opportunities for victory in Christ.
“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen” (Rom 11:36 ESV).

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING “MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY” AT AJYAL CHURCH

Introduction

The pandemic in 2020 modified people’s agendas in many ways. As a doctoral student, I had to adjust my methods and timeline as I applied this ministry project. Yet, under God’s sovereignty, this change was for the advantage of the church.

The course “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” was originally scheduled for the end of November 2020 on Ajyal Church’s calendar, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalation of case numbers in the first week of November in Jordan, the government announced a three-day quarantine in addition to continuing a lockdown every weekend. In this context, alongside prayers and discussions with the pastor, the church decided to redeem this quarantine time for the Lord and teach the course over Zoom to families. Crisis management necessitates *fluidity* as a basic skill, and this calendar shift gave a better opportunity for more participants because of the lockdown. The course was already designed, and I was ready; however, the students’ booklet and the mixed methods assessments needed further preparation. Therefore, some work had to be done quickly. Despite all the challenges, the course progressed smoothly and was filled with God’s blessings.

Chapter 2 and 3 of this ministry project laid the foundation for creating the course curriculum of “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory.” This chapter will focus on the description and objectives of the course, preparation process, implementation, and data collection and analysis using the couples’ interactions and responses. This chapter will include the expert panel evaluation, which was required to meet the second and third goal in the research methodology of this project.

Description of the Course

The “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course was designed to help couples gain a biblical perspective on marriage crises based on Ephesians 6:10-18 and to equip them with a strategy based on the armor of God to have victory in their spiritual battles. Many marriages are in crisis, and saving marriages starts by acknowledging God’s original purposes for families and the spiritual warfare against these purposes. First Corinthians 2:11 teaches, “So that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

The eight-week course presented seven steps pertaining to the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) for saving a marriage. The steps included the following subjects: (1) a biblical perspective on the purposes of marriage, (2) spiritual warfare and marriage battles, (3) the source of strength for perseverance in crisis, (4) the process and goal for victory in spiritual warfare, (5) the whole armor of God, (6) the application to marriage, and (7) the art of seeking forgiveness.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, couples were expected to:

1. Enrich their marriage and have a stronger relationship with Christ.
2. Understand the biblical perspective for the purposes for marriage in God’s larger plan.
3. Form a biblical perspective on conflicts and marriage crisis based on Ephesians 6:10-18.
4. Understand the biblical perspective for spiritual warfare and the devil’s schemes in general, and in connection to marriages.
5. Discover the source of power for the spiritual battle.
6. Understand the armor of God and how to put it on for a stronger marriage.

Demographics of Participants

Ten families experiencing some kind of marriage struggles participated in the course.¹ A total of 17 people participated, which included 5 couples, 5 single spouses, and some irregular attendees. The age range of the couples in the course was mid-thirties to late sixties. All couples had been married for at least eight years and had children. Two older couples were grandparents, two different spouses were separated, and four ladies attended without their non-believing husbands.

Procedures and Preparations

I prepared this course as part of the *Foundations of Teaching* doctoral class in summer 2020. This course represented a summary of chapter 2, and one subject from chapter 3. When it was time to implement the course with families, I aimed to enrich the teaching experience, motivate participants, increase interaction, decrease distractions, and maximize their learning by accomplishing the following preparations:

1. The social media team at church prepared attractive posts that spoke to the needs of the families. This promotion informed families about the course to motivate and encourage them to redeem their quarantine time for the benefit of building their homes.
2. Sunday school teachers prepared a parallel program through Zoom to limit distractions from children during the teaching. They also sent videos, activity papers, and art for the children to use during the course, so their parents could focus on learning.
3. I explained my expectations for the Zoom class to increase interaction and enrich the experience. For instance, opening the personal video camera for better communication and clearer halo data. Moreover, I required a commitment to fully attend the course for maximum benefit.
4. I prepared students notes in a booklet with a butterfly design on the front cover to represent change and shared it through WhatsApp.² I gave the lessons poetic titles instead of academic ones to stir the curiosity and interest of the participants. The booklet included the lesson outline along with blank spaces to ensure that participants remain focused by writing notes.

¹ I know the state of their marriages due to my prior relationship with them as congregation or counselees.

² WhatsApp is a mobile messaging app that allows users to text, share media, including voice messages and video, with individuals or groups.

Application Procedures

The course consisted of eight lessons; each lesson was an hour and a half long. I taught the sixteen-hour course to couples over four weekends. The first weekend included three classes, the second and third weekends had morning and evening classes, and the fourth weekend had one morning class. The six hours of teaching in the first weekend utilized the participants' quarantine time for their benefit and also helped them renew their minds.

Technology served the course well. The lessons were conducted over Zoom, which allowed me to record all the lessons and discussions. Furthermore, because WhatsApp is frequently used in Jordan, I asked participants to reply to my oral questions by texting their answers. The lessons were interactive; I only asked the couples to be muted during the teaching time. Each lesson started with questions, reflections, and brainstorming. The lessons ended with reflections and decisions that participants wrote in their booklets.³

Implementation of the Lessons

The implementation of lessons depended on the course syllabus.⁴ I followed most of the details in the course. At the beginning of every lesson, I read Ephesians 6:10-18, reviewed information, asked general questions, and named the enemy's strategy concerning the specific piece of the armor I was about to explain. Next, I began to describe the metaphor of the pieces of the armor. Then, I explained the content and application on the personal and family life. At the end, I asked for reflections and personal decisions in connection to the lesson. Lastly, I ended with prayer.

³ See appendix 2, "Marriage Battles: The Armor of God" booklet, "Revisions and Decisions."

⁴ See appendix 1 and 2.

Weekend 1

The challenge in the first lesson was to raise people's interest not only for the lesson at hand but for the entire course. I also wanted participants to realize their need to receive this teaching. I needed to help them feel connected, personally addressed, and accepted in the context of having marriage struggles.

In the first half hour, before the lesson, the pastor began with prayer and families sang a song to prepare their hearts to receive the Word of God. Next, I started the lesson by asking spouses three questions about their families to help them comprehend their need to learn new truth: (1) Why did they get married, or what were their personal purposes to establish a family? (2) Who created and established the family institution? I referred them back to Genesis—the book of beginnings and explained that God created the family, and He designed its purposes. (3) What are God's purposes for the family?

The Holy Spirit led me to make every person comfortable and included in the teaching by defining two foundational words in the course—*family* and *crisis*. These definitions were inclusive of everyone attending the course; I explained that the functional definition of the *family* includes a single parent, an empty nester, a single spouse, and a couple with or without children. The definition of a *crisis* includes any bent in a relationship.⁵

Lesson 1: Spiritual warfare against the purposes of God. The aim of this lesson was to change the participants' perspective about the purposes of the family and to help them recognize the spiritual warfare they face.⁶ The main passage was Ephesians 6:10-13. I explained that the cosmic battle in Ephesians 6:12 aims to hinder the purposes of God in marriages. I also described the spiritual wrestling in which believers engage. I

⁵ Rice says that "*marriage crisis* is a broken situation of divorce or desertion, or a bent situation." Cited in Carl Michalson, "Faith for the Crisis of Marriage," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1957): 194. See also chap. 1 of this project.

⁶ See chap. 3 for exegesis; appendix 1 for curriculum; appendix 2 for student booklet.

encouraged them to acknowledge the real enemy instead of considering their spouse as an enemy. I also helped families see the context of the letter of Ephesians—the blessings of God (Eph 1–2), the practical life according to God’s calling, and the warfare against standing in God’s truth.

Lesson 2: Introduction to the armor of God and the belt of truth. Having explained the purposes of God for the family and the spiritual warfare against these purposes, it was time to introduce the armor of God as a whole, God as the source of strength, and truth as the central piece of the armor. I used an object lesson of boxing gloves to demonstrate that a boxing glove gives power and protection to the boxer.⁷ One participant asked a question at the beginning of the lesson that reflected understanding for the urgency of spiritual warfare and set the stage to teach about the armor of God. She asked, “What do we do now?” This was a suitable question at that time, so I started explaining that Ephesians 6:10-18 is divided into two parts: warfare (Eph 6:10-13) and the full armor of God (Eph 6:14-18). I presented the three-fold meaning of the armor.⁸ Next, I explained the command to put on the armor to be able to stand against the enemy. The belt of truth is the first weapon against the enemy. Believers must not be tossed by false doctrine and must also be truthful with each other. My aim was that participants would have confidence in God’s strength and His whole truth; also, that they would want to stand against the enemy by understanding what the truth teaches concerning their marriage, and by raising truth above their personal reasoning or feelings. Ultimately, the goal of the application of the belt of truth is to have Christ at the center of their lives and live with integrity and honesty. At the end of the lesson I asked participants about the lesson’s main points and listened to their responses. Their responses reflected understanding. Moreover, I asked them to write the application of the belt of truth in their

⁷ See appendix 1.

⁸ Appendix 1 explains that the full armor of God is about Christ, what God provides, and is about the role of the believer.

booklet and I explained three practices that can hinder putting on the belt of truth.⁹ I also stressed the fact that lies are the currency of the enemy and can never bring unity to homes. I ended the lesson with prayers to allow the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts.

Lesson 3: The breastplate of righteousness. Three main ideas were the focus of this lesson: imputed righteousness, practical righteousness, and living the new identity as individuals, spouses, or couple. The pedagogical idea of the lesson was that couples must respect each other's identity in Christ; they must not condemn each other. Moreover, because the enemy is an accuser, they should not accept any accusation from him, especially over their forgiven past. Couples must also walk worthy of their new status as children of God in unity, love, and holiness, putting off the old and putting on the new self. As an implication, couples must see their marriage as righteous, not defiled. To confirm achieving these aims I first reviewed the lesson and then asked participants to reflect on the teaching to evaluate their understanding. At the end of the lesson I prayed for the participants.

I ended the weekend by doing three things. First, I asked participants to reflect on what they learned by writing in their booklet about their new perspective on struggles, the enemy, and warfare. Then, as a home assignment, I asked them to read the letter of Ephesians. I also told them to read more about the meaning of the heart and the enemy's strategy included in their booklet.¹⁰ Finally, I prayed for new strength and new understanding for all the participants.

Weekend 2

I began the second weekend by reflecting on the first three lessons. I asked participants some questions that they answered orally and in writing. I aimed to discover

⁹ Three practices that hinder putting on the belt of truth are (1) lack of knowledge, (2) raising traditions, opinions, and feelings above truth, and (3) selectivity in believing the Bible.

¹⁰ As referred to in appendix 2, the student booklet.

what specific concepts were life-changing to participants. To my amazement, the fact that God has purposes for their marriage was the main concept that caught most participants' attention. Most agreed that they did not know about the spiritual dimension of marriage before the first weekend. Nine out of fourteen participants confirmed that they gained a completely new perspective toward the family institution and spiritual warfare. This discussion at was encouraging jumpstarting the teaching.¹¹

Lesson 4: the gospel of peace. This lesson was about the gospel as the foundation of the believer's peace with God and with one another as a family. Also, God's peace provides steadfastness in the spiritual battle. The aim of the lesson was to explain how couples must first have peace with God through the gospel and then they can be in peace with each other. They can extend this peace through forgiving each other for any offence. Couples must keep their peace even in the middle of relational chaos. Furthermore, couples must proceed as a family with the gospel of peace, which is the greater purpose for marriage. In this lesson I put forth two important concepts: believers receive forgiveness through grace and then they must grant this forgiveness to each other freely. If believers have trouble granting forgiveness, then there might be a misunderstanding of the gospel or the concept of forgiveness. To evaluate if there was a misunderstanding about the gospel, I asked participants to answer questions from their booklet.¹² I explained the gospel elements in detail after I received their written answers. I then explained the four promises of forgiveness by Ken Sande.¹³ Finally, I ended with prayer. I looked at

¹¹ The following are some participants' answers about their favorite concepts from the first weekend teaching: "To apply the armor of God on the family life is different and much better than to apply it only individually"; "The enemy is not my spouse, there is a real enemy"; "I am amazed to know about the stewardship of fatherhood"; "I loved the girl and we got married, but I never knew that God has purposes for my marriage"; "We never realized that there is spiritual side for the marriage."

¹² See appendix 2.

¹³ Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 84-85. This was taught in the context of repentant spouses.

their answers to find any gaps in understanding that could hinder peace in their marriage relationships. The analysis of participants' answers, which I show in the following section, showed that I achieved the aim of the lesson.

Lesson 5: The shield of faith. In lesson 5, I focused on the mobility of the shield of faith. The implication of this mobility is the ability to defend any kind of satanic attack. I also highlighted the order of the verse as it is in the middle of the armor of God, explaining that the words *above all* indicate the importance of faith for all the pieces of the armor. I explained the definition of faith (Heb 11:1), the content of faith (Eph 1–2), and how faith must be used as a defense weapon in the battle. I encouraged participants with the imagery of couples holding their shields together and standing beside each other in faith for victory. Finally, because faith comes by hearing the Word of God, I asked if they recognized that they could cultivate faith by reading God's Word. I ended with a challenge to choose between the doubts that Satan throws at them, the reality of their relationships, or the promises of God for victory. In Arabic it rhymed well; Satan (*Shaytan*), reality (*Ayan*), or faith (*Eman*)—believers can choose what they want to follow. I ended the lesson with prayer.

Weekend 3

Lesson 6: The helmet of salvation. I started the lesson by reviewing concepts about faith learned in lesson 5. I wanted lesson 5's information to sink in before reviewing understanding—a strategy I came to appreciate as a teacher. In this lesson, I connected to the culture to make sense of biblical truth by using an idiom that says, "May your head be saved." People in Jordan use this idiom to offer condolences to people who lose a loved one, and it means, may God continue to give you life. I used this symbolic expression to explain that the head of the believer must be protected to continue living the life of faith.

I began this lesson by asking participants to write down what gives value to their identity. Then, I explained that salvation includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation provides inheritance and new identity in adoption (Eph 1–2). I also explained that the helmet covers the mind and secures thoughts from discouragement and doubt. The helmet is the hope of salvation (I Thess 5:8); it is the victory accomplished by grace. Therefore, it helps the believer walk in faith, abandon the past, and live a secured present and a hopeful future.

At the end of the lesson, I aimed to confirm that participants developed a new perspective for their identity built on the foundation of adoption. I surveyed their understanding by asking about the foundation of their identity as believers. I analyzed the difference between the participants' answers before and after the teaching.¹⁴ As explained in the analysis section below, the answers show that I achieved the lesson's aims.

Lesson 7: The sword of the Spirit and prayer. In this lesson I combined the sword of the Spirit and prayer together. I commenced by reviewing the previous lesson and some important thoughts to show them the whole line of thought we had followed thus far. Then, I asked participants about the difference between the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit. After the participants responded, I clarified that the belt of truth is about the whole truth of God. The whole armor is based on the Word of God. However, the sword is about a specific word that the Holy Spirit gives against the enemy's specific attack. I reflected on Jesus' temptation (Matt 4:2-10) to explain how the Word of God can defend against satanic attacks. Lastly, I gave practical examples on how to defend the marriage relationship using the Word of God when Satan attacks with false thoughts and accusations. For instance, when spouses are attacked with thoughts to leave their marital relationship because of unmet needs, the sword of the Spirit at this moment would hold

¹⁴ For appendix 11, "Qualitative Assessment 5, Identity," the pre-teaching question was, "What are the things that make you feel valuable as a person, give you a sense of importance, and make your Identity?" The post-teaching question was, "What are the things that give foundation to your real identity as a believer?"

on to the following truths: God will meet all their needs (Ps 23), they are in a covenant relationship (Mal 2:14, Eccl 9:9) that cannot be broken, and they will only follow the ways of God (Ps 19). Such words can help couples defend their marriages and stop the attacks of the evil thoughts. At the end of the lesson I reviewed the main points to confirm the participants' biblical understanding of the sword of the Spirit and ended with prayer.

For the second part of lesson 6 I spoke about prayer. I first asked if participants pray together as couples and then I emphasized the urgency and need for watchfulness in prayer. I highlighted the word *all* in Ephesians 6:18 and the two prayers in Ephesians 1:17-20; 3:14-21. At the end of the lesson participants agreed to pray as a couple at least twice a week and to pray together as church families once a week. To create some anticipation, I informed participants that the next lesson would be about biblical confession and the healing of relationships.

Weekend 4

Lesson 8: confession. All participants were looking forward to this lesson because I foretold them that relationships heal when spouses learn and practice the art of biblical confession. Since the goal of this teaching was to change lives, I began the lesson by asking participants about their personal ways of confessing sins and apologizing. I also collected some data before and after the lesson in order to analyze it later.¹⁵ Humility is at the heart of confession; therefore, I warned against pride—the opposite of humility, a cause of strife (Prov 3:10). I also taught the “Seven A’s of Confession” from Ken Sande.¹⁶ I focused on seeking forgiveness as an important element to heal broken relationships. The timing of the lesson was appropriate at the end of the course; participants

¹⁵ See appendix 11.

¹⁶ Sande and Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families*, 53-58.

were eager to learn and their hearts were ready. I ended the course with prayers and thanksgiving. The pastor concluded with blessings too.

Mixed Method Evaluation

Conducting educational evaluation in the church aims at honoring Christ and reflects good stewardship. Evaluating the outcomes helps teachers and counselors determine if objectives are being reached. Evaluation also allows teachers to improve methods and develop the teaching material to reach goals.¹⁷ Therefore, in teaching the “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course, I aimed to evaluate the outcomes of the course and used mixed methods to gather data qualitatively and quantitatively, orally through Zoom, and in writing through WhatsApp. At the beginning of each lesson, I reflected on previous sessions and listened to their thoughts and reflections. I also reviewed each lesson by asking questions and listening to participants’ answers expressing their understanding. All lessons and discussions were recorded on Zoom, and many answers were collected through (1) oral questions and answers that were recorded on Zoom; (2) reading a question and receiving answers in writing through WhatsApp; and (3) answering qualitative and quantitative surveys in writing before and after the teaching and then sending both through WhatsApp. Though there were seventeen participants, a few did not provide answers. The following sections analyze the qualitative and quantitative questions and answers. The sections follow the same order of the lessons:

Weekend 1

In this course I conducted considerable amount of brainstorming, reflections, and discussions. However, because of the church’s calendar shift, I focused on preparing the student booklet and was not prepared to gather enough information for analysis on the

¹⁷ Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*. rev. and expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 310.

first week. I collected data by asking families to write down their answers for two questions. The first question was about their own purposes for marriage prior to learning God's purposes, and the second question concerned their new perspectives about the purposes of God, the spiritual battle, the real enemy, the source of power, and the goal of the armor of God in their course booklet. These two questions allowed me to gather better information in the second weekend.

Weekend 2

I focused more on data gathering in the second week and I began the lesson by asking two questions, orally, about the first week's teaching. Following are the questions, the participants' answers, and the information analysis.

Data gathering in connection to the first week. I asked participants to share (1) one main idea that changed their perspectives (2) their own purposes for their marriage. I also examined the difference in their perspectives about the main points by requesting a self-evaluation to compare what they knew prior to the teaching and after the first weekend. The points that I measured were (1) the similarity between their purposes and the purposes of God for their marriage, and (2) their knowledge about spiritual warfare, the satanic dimension behind human struggles, the full armor of God, and the devil's foothold and his strategies.

Next, I asked them to complete a self-evaluation survey by which they compared their knowledge before and after teaching.¹⁸ They responded to the survey with a scale from one to ten. Lower numbers indicated a greater degree of unfamiliarity with the topics before the teaching and a higher need for it.

Participants' answers. Answers regarding the big ideas that renewed their perspectives, as recorded on Zoom, were (1) that their marriage was redeemed along with

¹⁸ See appendix 11.

their life, (2) marriage is a holy institution, (3) they will give an account to Christ for their families, (4) family unity within the new standpoint of warfare, (5) there is a real enemy, (6) the stewardship of parenthood, (7) the purposes of God, (8) and the spiritual aspect of marriage. The last two points were agreed upon by most participants to be completely new concepts. Furthermore, four participants said they did not know about the foothold of the enemy (Eph 4:26, 27), and most participants affirmed that the teaching provided new perspective.

I grouped the participants' answers to the second question regarding the spouses' purposes for their marriage as follows: (1) social—following society, imitating the model in their families, (2) physical, (3) only getting married as part of life, and (4) getting settled. Six out of fourteen people expressed a sense of awe when realizing that their marriage has kingdom purposes.

Analysis. The couples' answers about the main ideas that they learned indicate that they grasped the main concepts of the teaching; the course contributed to their biblical understanding about family and spiritual warfare.

Their purposes for marriage portrayed that each family operated differently and not in alignment with the purposes and design of God. This implies that the lack of knowledge in the purposes of God weakened the belt of truth in their lives. Moreover, if this lack of knowledge remained, it could deteriorate the marriage and take it to the crisis point.

For the self-evaluation survey, I recorded participants' answers to five questions in table 1.¹⁹ I considered a response of 1 to 3 to mean a person had a lack of knowledge in the subject, 4 to 7 to mean a person had some knowledge in the subject, and 8 to 10 to mean a person had extensive knowledge in the subject. To get an overall impression of their level of understanding, I calculated the average of their answers, which indicated

¹⁹ See appendix 11 for questions.

limited knowledge in these topics. The overall average was less than 4. In fact, the average answer for each question was also under 4. To gain better understanding, I calculated the frequency of answers within each category for each question as indicated in table 2. For example, in question 1, 8 people gave an answer from 1 to 3 (had a lack of knowledge), 5 people gave an answer from 5 to 7 (had some knowledge), and no one gave answer from 8 to 10 (no one had extensive knowledge). These initial survey results confirmed the need for this class within Ajyal Church families.

Table 1. Responses to the self-evaluation survey showing the average answer for each question

Question Participant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
A	4	7	6	10	7
B	5	6	5	5	3
C	3	2	3	1	3
D	5	0	6	6	6
E	3	4	3	2	2
F	4	8	5	5	5
G	4	1	1	1	3
H	3	1	1	4	1
I	3	2	2	1	3
G	2	2	3	4	3
K	0	1	1	2	2
L	0	4	4	1	1
M	3	5	4	1	5
Average	3.00	3.31	3.38	3.31	3.38
				Overall Average	3.28

Table 2. Classification of the answers to the self-evaluation survey per category

Question Scale	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Lack of Knowledge (1 to 3)	8	7	7	7	9
Some Knowledge (4 to 7)	5	5	6	5	4
Extensive Knowledge (8 to 10)	0	1	0	1	0

Data gathering: the gospel of peace. Ultimately, the gospel is the foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation in families; therefore, it was crucial to measure the families' understanding of the gospel. Families wrote four qualitative answers before and after the teaching about the gospel, which I studied to evaluate their understanding of the elements of faith and the Christian life. In their answers, I looked for the definition of four phrases: sinful nature, grace of God, the condition of the human heart, and description of Christian life.

Participants' answers. The answers before the teaching reflected that they do understand the sinful nature of human beings without a clear understanding of imputed sin, inherited sin, and the corruption of sin to all capacities of man. Also, all participants expressed their need for grace but only 2 expressed that they get saved by grace. As for the heart, 2 spouses said that the heart is the place of affections, and 1 added attitudes. Two others said it is a place of affection, will, thoughts, and a place where believers communicate with God. One spouse said it is a place of temptation, sin, conviction, decisions, and affections. Another said it is a weak part of the human being and it needs faith. Four participants said that the heart is the source of sin and 1 mentioned the idols in the heart, which was the answer I was looking for. Participants reported that the Christian life is a life of commitment, obedience, and walking in the law of the Lord. Lastly, 2 said that they live life for the glory of God.

Analysis. I only received answers from 10 people, and although they did not bluntly say it, those who did not answer conveyed a message to me that they lack the ability to articulate their faith life. Nevertheless, only 4 people expressed the answer I was looking for, which was that the heart is the source of sin. However, though the participants' answers about the Christian life were biblical, they did not mention the life of righteousness, holiness, fruitfulness, love, and unity, nor living in the Spirit. They also did not speak about living the new life by putting off the old self and putting on the new

(Eph 4:22-24). After the teaching, families gave precise and truthful answers. However, the answer of one participant stirred my concern about the assurance of his salvation. As a teacher, the families' answers in the course helped me teach the elements of faith and Christian life more precisely. I also realized the need to follow up on one person for assurance of salvation. Finally, I became more aware that the church must define Christian life in better terms.

To conclude the gospel of peace, I surveyed their priorities concerning five subjects in their Christian life—according to Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp these can replace the real gospel.²⁰ I did measure those five subjects, but warned each person about the ways these priorities can replace the real gospel.

Weekend 3

Data gathering for the helmet of salvation and prayer. I surveyed the topic of identity by gathering written answers, before and after teaching, about adoption and the privileges of salvation. Prayer was surveyed orally by asking about the families' practice of prayer. The question about identity focused on identifying the things that contribute to the sense of value and importance for each participant. Furthermore, after the lesson, I asked participants about the new foundation of their identity in Christ.

Pre-teaching answers. The participants' answers regarding what gives value to their identity were not based on a biblical foundation. I grouped their answers in the following way: (1) 3 answers focused on the achievements of work and degrees, (2) 2 answers focused on motherhood, (3) 2 answers focused on their goodness to others, (4) 1 answer focused on family, (5) 1 answer emphasized income, work, and the position, (6) 1 emphasized personality, and (7) 1 answer highlighted faith.

²⁰ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 7-10. The teacher or counselor can use the statements (1-6) in appendix 5, to assess the tendencies of people to replace the gospel with (1) formalism, (2) legalism, (3) mysticism and psychologism, (4) activism, (5) socialism.

Post-teaching answers. The participants' post-teaching answers were truthful. Couples understood the importance of receiving their identity as being adopted children by God, and realized their inheritance as children of God and being sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1–2).

Analysis. Though it might seem presumptive to measure someone's sense of identity in one question, I only meant to discover if this sense of value as a person is built on earthly or eternal foundation. Because the source of the participants' identity can affect their marriage relationships if not built on a biblical foundation, the answers could be predictive of marriage crisis. The results prior to teaching reflected a weak foundation that can be shaken by any struggle or difficult circumstance. Thankfully, participants were convicted by the teaching and reported afterwards that the biblical foundation of adoption along with its privileges should be the source of value for the children of God. Therefore, the teaching raised the bar of biblical knowledge in families to fulfill the purposes of God.

I also measured how many times the couple prayed together. Only one family said that they sometimes prayed together, but the rest said they did not. I asked if they would be willing to pray together as much as their weekly schedule allows, and they all agreed and committed to praying together twice a week. Furthermore, I asked church families if they could meet weekly to pray together, and they also agreed.

Weekend 4

Data gathering: confession. I used mixed methods for data gathering in this lesson. I aimed to include more of Sande's Seven A's of Confession in the practice of seeking forgiveness and to helping families commit to practicing biblical confession. The goal was to evaluate how families practice confession before and after the teaching. Therefore, as a qualitative measurement, I asked participants to describe the elements of their apologies in writing to compare their statements of confession before and after the

lesson. Moreover, the first question was about the willingness to seek forgiveness. I also conducted a quantitative survey, which included the Seven A's of Confession, before and after teaching the lesson. Participants answered on a scale from 1 to 10 to express how much they practiced the Seven A's principles of confession.

Pre-teaching answers. According to the Seven A's of confession, the qualitative answers reflected that only three participants address everyone involved when they apologize. Eight out of fourteen people depend on the word *sorry* for apology without addressing the hurt. One wife did not use apology but instead alters her behavior to be kinder, to make it up to her spouse. Only six people acknowledged and stated their wrongdoing by saying, "I was wrong." None of the participants acknowledge the hurt they caused. Furthermore, none of them asks for forgiveness. I recognize that the exclusion of seeking forgiveness in the apology is a cultural factor, as the general trend is to only say "sorry."

Post-teaching answers. I grouped participant statements of confession according to the Seven A's of Confession and found that out of 12 answers, 5 included addressing everyone involved; 5 included avoiding if, buts, and maybe; 4 included acknowledging the hurt, 3 included accepting consequences, 1 included altering behavior, and 4 asked for forgiveness. This reflects more biblical principles for seeking forgiveness in their apologies.

Analysis. I had two sets of fourteen answers, the difference between them was obvious—the set of answers before the teaching lacked the elements of the Seven A's, but most of the answers after the teaching contained some of the Seven A's. Moreover, all participants approved seeking forgiveness, which reflected the desired change.

When I surveyed the confession practices among families on a scale from 1 to 10, the average answer for the survey before teaching was 5.46 (see table 3). However, after teaching, the average became 8.91, which represents an increase of 63 percent. I

classified the scale in this way: answers from 1 to 3 are considered to be rarely; 4 to 7 to be sometimes, and 8 to 10 to be always. I also compared the answers per question before and after teaching by classifying the answers according to the categories: rarely, sometimes, and always (see table 4). When I compared the number of answers within each category to understand the impact of teaching, I found that after the teaching, none of the participants answered “rarely,” only 3 answered “sometimes” in one of the questions, and the rest answered “always” (see tables 3-4).

Table 3. Comparison between the average answer for each question, before and after teaching

Questions ²¹	Before	After
Question 2	4.71	9.07
Question 3	5.64	8.50
Question 4	5.64	9.14
Question 5	6.86	9.21
Question 6	4.43	8.64
Average	5.46	8.91

Table 4. Comparison of answers within each category for each question, before and after teaching

	Question 2		Question 3		Question 4		Question 5		Question 6	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Rarely (1-3)	5	0	3	0	3	0	1	0	7	0
Sometimes (4-7)	6	1	6	1	7	1	6	1	4	3
Always (8-10)	3	13	5	13	4	13	7	13	3	11

Some inconsistency was apparent between the participants’ qualitative and quantitative answers in the survey. The quantitative questions revealed better results. Qualitative questions that required participants to state their apology revealed many missing factors; therefore, I believe they had a conviction to practice biblical confession

²¹ See questions in appendix 11.

but need more training to include all the biblical elements of seeking forgiveness. I certainly hope that intentions bear fruit in their lives, but it is impossible to know based on a survey conducted immediately following the teaching. The contribution of this lesson might not be instantly seen, but it is a predictor to bring healing to marriages if families start practicing biblical confession.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the implementation of the “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course to fulfill the first goal of this ministry project. The course was based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) to educate families about spiritual warfare and the armor of God in connection to their marriages. The purpose of educating families was to prevent prospective marriage crises and establish a foundation for marriage counseling for families that go through crises. The course was comprised of the purposes of God for marriage and family, spiritual warfare against families that hinders these purposes, and the armor of God to have victory in spiritual warfare and to stand when facing relational crises. The course consisted of eight lessons. The first lesson was about the purposes of God for marriage and the continuous spiritual warfare against it. Lesson 2 to 7 were about the different pieces of the armor of God. Lesson 7 also tackled the subject of adoption as the foundation of identity. The last lesson was about biblical confession, which is important for reconciliation and healing relationships.

The results of the participant data showed that most families were prone to severe crisis if left without biblical teaching. The Word of God highlights the detrimental effects of lack of knowledge in Hosea 4:6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Raising the bar of biblical knowledge about marriage and spiritual warfare was the first prevention from marriage crisis and divorce in Ajyal church. Chapter 5 will provide a formal evaluation of the project’s goals as well as personal reflections on conducting the course and this ministry project.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

God is the creator of the family and the designer of its purposes. Marriage is the first institution God created and designed (Gen 2:18, 22-25). Unity is the goal for the marriage relationship (Gen 1:24), but the marriage institution has larger purposes (1:28). God mandated Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. He also ordained parents to disciple the next generation (Deut 6:6-9; Mal 2:15). The devil sought to undermine the purposes of God (Gen 3:1-5), and since the fall of Adam, marriages and families have struggled with the sinfulness of their members and opposition of the enemy (Eph 6:10-18). Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones explain that families do not know the cosmic battle in which they are engaging—the devil uses marriage and family as a “key arena” to oppose God’s purposes.¹ Marriage counselors cannot overlook the reality of spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-13) and only concentrate on certain counseling issues to try to resolve marriage crises. Therefore, a biblical counseling program for intervention in marriage crises should consider the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18 to minister to couples and help them restore marriages to accomplish the purposes of God. When a crisis occurs in a marriage relationship, a diagnosis for issues pertaining to the armor of God can facilitate a faster intervention.

Counselors must have a counseling methodology with a good standard of care to diagnose issues as fast as possible and to reclaim the couple’s victory by standing against the enemy (Eph 6:10-18). Steps and tools must be ready to help the counselor to be timely and to stay directed toward the goal of having a triumphant marriage while

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 15.

facing a specific spiritual warfare. The methodology must facilitate the counseling process to correspond to the pace of emotions and the spiritual urgency of warfare in a crisis. This ministry project accomplished a counseling methodology using the armor of God to minister to couples in crises in this manner.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen families to raise a generation for the purposes of God by equipping the soul care ministry with biblical procedures for intervening in marriage crises at Ajyal Church. The purpose was achieved because this ministry project provides the soul care ministry at Ajyal Church with a marriage counseling framework and methodology based on the armor of God. This project also provides a classification for counseling issues alongside tools to assess those issues. Teaching material is also ready for families to prevent crises, and for couples in crises. In detail, this marriage crisis counseling program consists of:

1. The “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course to teach and strengthen families and marriages at the Church.
2. A framework for counseling marriage crises pertaining to Ephesians 6:10-18—a counseling methodology parallel to the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) that consists of two stages of counseling: preparation and intervention. The intervention includes seven steps for counselors to follow for urgent intervention. The counselor would diagnose, counsel, and teach couples to put on the armor. The counseling would also decide if there is a need for further counseling and mentoring.
3. Classification for counseling issues as they relate to the armor of God is part of the methodology for counseling couples in marriage crises. The counselor uses the lens of the armor of God to deal with marriage issues classified under different pieces of the armor.
4. Assessment tools to diagnose issues in couples’ lives according to the armor of God to decide the root cause of each specific crisis, along with a concise table to help the counselor in the application of the armor of God program. Moreover, I assigned codes to represent the preparatory stage and each piece of the armor to use in training counselors.²

² For example, BT for the belt of truth. HM for Helmet of salvation. See appendix 10 for table and codes.

5. Teaching material for couples in crises, including devotionals and recorded videos, in order to facilitate faster learning for couples and correspond to the intensity of spiritual warfare in a crisis.³
6. A syllabus for a basic course to train counselors on the Ephesians 6:10-13 perspective for counseling.⁴

The soul care ministry at Ajyal church is now equipped with these six components of the marriage crisis counseling program to teach families and counsel couples, which accomplishes the three goals of the project as the next section explains. Furthermore, the soul care ministry can train other biblical counselors to strengthen families and raise a generation for the purposes of God.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1

The first goal for this ministry project was to develop and teach a class based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) to strengthen marriages and lay a foundation for helping families in future intervention, in case a marriage crisis occurs. Developing and teaching “The Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course accomplished this goal.

Comparisons of answers before and after the lessons indicated that the course contributed to participants’ biblical understanding about family and spiritual warfare. The participants’ answers and overall average in their self-evaluation on the second weekend indicated limited or even a lack of knowledge before the course about the purposes of God for marriages and the spiritual warfare.⁵

³ The devotionals and videos will be part of a biblical counseling website, so it will be accessible to counselees, when needed.

⁴ I designed the syllabus as part of *Foundation of Teaching* doctoral course summer 2020. The training syllabus for counselors is an outcome of this ministry project but is outside the scope of this ministry project. It could be considered an extension for this project. An additional syllabus based on this counseling program to train biblical counselors to apply Eph 6:10-18 methodology will be accomplished as an extension for this project.

⁵ See table 2 in chap. 4. See appendix 11 for questions.

All through the course, participants' answers before the teaching concerning the purposes of marriage, the definition of gospel elements and the Christian life, the value of their identity, and their personal ways of apology showed a lack of biblical knowledge, an absence of biblical elements of faith, and worldly value for their identities. Furthermore, the qualitative answers about the subject of confession showed an absence of biblical elements before teaching, which implied a high risk of prospective crises and confirmed the need for this teaching. However, after the teaching, participants' responses were aligned with biblical truth in all areas and included the elements of faith more clearly. Participants defined *adoption* as the foundation of their new identity. Moreover, they were convicted to use biblical confession and to seek forgiveness. All responses showed improvement in biblical knowledge after the teaching. An example worth mentioning is when I asked participants to describe the elements of their apologies in writing to compare their statements of confession. The element of asking for forgiveness was missing in their stated apologies before teaching, while many answers included asking for forgiveness after the teaching. In addition, when I asked participants if they would practice asking for forgiveness, they all agreed.

When I surveyed the confession practices to see how much families practiced biblical confession as related to most elements of the Seven A's of Confession on a scale from 1 to 10.⁶ I classified the scale in this way: answers from 1 to 3 were considered "rarely"; 4 to 7 were "sometimes"; and 8 to 10 were "always." I compared the answers per question before and after the teaching by classifying them according to the categories: rarely, sometimes, and always.⁷ After I analyzed the data gathered from "Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory," I concluded that teaching this course and analyzing its findings consummate the fulfillment of the first goal.

⁶ See appendix 11 for questions.

⁷ See table 4 in chap. 4.

Goals 2 and 3

The second goal was to develop a methodology based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) comprised of seven initial steps of urgent intervention in the marriage relationship. The counseling framework and methodology that comprise the two stages of counseling and seven steps of intervention pertaining to the armor of God were developed to fulfill the second goal of the project. This methodology can intensify the process of marriage counseling and the steps can direct and organize the process. Thus, the methodology equips the counselor to minister skillfully in a directed, organized, and timely process.

This goal was measured by an expert panel using a rubric designed to evaluate the methodology of the intervention in marriage crises. Using the rubric, the expert panel determined the clarity of intervention steps pertaining to the armor of God and whether these steps clearly classify issues under different pieces of the armor. Moreover, the panel measured that steps were organized, directed, and targeted well to be timely. The research methodology required that the expert panel confirm achieving this goal when 80 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met the desired standard of care, biblically and skillfully.⁸

According to the first panelist, 2 percent of the rubric indicators exceeded the standard care, 88 percent met the standard of care, and 10 percent failed to meet the standard of care. According to the second panelist, 100 percent of the rubric indicators exceeded the standard of care. According to the third panelist, 64 percent of the rubric indicators exceeded standard of care and 36 percent met standard of care (see table 5). Therefore, goal 2 was accomplished.

⁸ I shared the rubric, assessment tools, a concise presentation for the project, and a concise table to summarize the counseling program to the expert panel. See appendix 12 for the rubric.

Table 5. Expert panel evaluation of the framework, methodology, and the seven initial steps of urgent intervention in marriage connected to the armor of God

Expert Panel \ Evaluation	1: Fails to Meet Standard of Care	2: Meets Standard of Care	3: Exceeds Standard of Care
First Expert Panelist	10 percent	88 percent	2 percent
Second Expert Panelist	0 percent	0 percent	100 percent
Third Expert Panelist	0 percent	36 percent	64 percent

The third goal was to develop emergency procedures comprised of assessment tools and teaching material, rooted in Ephesians 6:10-18. The tools help to assess crises and diagnose specific issues in a marriage pertaining to the armor of God. The teaching material counseled and taught couples to wear the armor of God. Classifying counseling issues under the armor of God and creating the assessment tools to equip the counselor to diagnose and counsel biblically was developed to fulfill this goal. These tools alongside the accessible teaching material and the organized devotionals facilitate the process of counseling. These procedures can accelerate the counseling process, keep the pace with the spiritual warfare, and provide a good standard of care to the counseling process.

The completion of this goal was dependent on the research methodology. Goal 3 was considered successfully met when a minimum of 80 percent of the rubric indicators used by the same expert panel met the standard of care, biblically and skillfully, and showed a well-directed process for diagnosis and sufficient inclusiveness of counseling issues in connection to the armor of God.⁹

The expert panel completed the rubric and the results are shown in table 6. According to the first panelist, 100 percent of the rubric indicators met the standard of care. According to the second panelist, 100 percent of the rubric indicators exceeded the standard of care. According to the third panelist, 70 percent of the rubric indicators exceeded standard of care, 22.5 percent met standard of care, and only 7.5 percent failed

⁹ I shared the rubric, assessment tools, a concise presentation for the project, and a concise table to summarize the counseling program to the expert panel. See appendix 12 for rubric.

to meet the standard of care. Since all panelists agreed that at least 80 percent of rubric indicators met or exceeded the standard of care, goal 3 was accomplished.

Table 6. Expert panel evaluation of the assessment tools

Expert Panel \ Evaluation	1: Fails to Meet Standard of Care	2: Meets Standard of Care	3: Exceeds Standard of Care
First Expert Panelist	0 percent	100 percent	0 percent
Second Expert Panelist	0 percent	0 percent	100 percent
Third Expert Panelist	7.5 percent	22.5 percent	70 percent

In addition to completing the rubric, panelists provided comments in support of the assessment tools in goal 3.¹⁰ One panelist, who is an associate professor of biblical counseling, said the following:

This is quite a significant work! I did not realize that the final product would be eighty-two pages long! Overall, these seem like they could be helpful tools in the hand of a counselor. They are biblically-rooted and very thorough. The armor of God provides a nice outline for evaluating various issues and the devotional material seems like it would be particularly helpful.

He also said, “At times, the questions seem so thorough that I wonder if they might overwhelm some counselees, particularly those in crisis, but I understand that you are trying to provide tools that would provide a thorough diagnosis for the couple.” In addition, he suggested changing the format of some questions and simplifying some theological language to make it easier for counselees to understand the concept of some questions. I used these suggestions to revise the tools.

Another PhD panelist, who is a biblical counselor and is a worldwide trainer, expressed, “The assessments are excellent and will be very useful. Your identification of potential problems to consider and look out for is outstanding.” He continued, “More work needs to be done in the area of prayer. You mentioned helping them know how to

¹⁰ See appendices 3-9 for assessment tools.

pray, but you didn't do much in the area of what potential issues may be faced except that act of praying and praying together." I will take his recommendation into consideration to further develop the assessment tools because prayer issues were beyond the scope of this project, as I explained in chapter 3.¹¹ As part of improving my project, I will address all the indicators that failed to meet expectations according to the panelists.

Strengths of the Project

This project had several notable strengths. The implementation of the course "Marriage Battle: The Armor of God for Victory" with families increased biblical knowledge, and as a result decreased the risk factors for prospective marriage crises at Ajyal Church. Fulfilling the purposes of God for marriage has a larger chance to prevail in families. The course strengthened the mission of Ajyal church; therefore, the church's vision—"to teach generations the godly perspective for relationships"—will continue to thrive. This course can continue to serve families and protect them against marriage crises.

The marriage crisis counseling program is a strength for the soul care department and the counselors therein to serve couples who are facing crises. The comprehensiveness of the counseling program is a strength for the counselor. The biblical framework, methodology, classification of counseling issues, assessment tools, and teaching devotionals and videos are assets to the church. The soul care department is now equipped to aid counselors and to help them deal quickly, comprehensively, and intensely with situations. Thus, couples can be under constant and intensive care.

Moreover, the methodology prevents the counseling process from being side-tracked by the instant needs of the couple in strife, which can sometimes happen in the intensity of marriage crisis. Arriving at desired goals can be hindered if counselors prioritize according to the apparent need of the couple in crisis instead of dealing with the

¹¹ For this project I focused on issues connected to three pieces of the armor: the gospel of peace, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation.

root spiritual cause of strife. Thus, the counseling issues as they are classified serve the counselor by helping him categorize and prioritize issues faster according to the armor of God.¹² Furthermore, the methodology, readiness of the tools, and teaching material save time in the counseling process.¹³ Conclusively, this counseling program solved the ministry gap mentioned in the rationale.¹⁴ For this reason, this marriage counseling program was called “Intervention in Crisis/Marriage” (ICM), which was meant to be equivalent to ICU.¹⁵

Another strength was the clarity of this counseling program’s goal. This clarity assists counselors in helping couples restore victory in a marriage crisis, to attain a triumphant marriage pertaining to the armor of God, not a happy marriage that fulfills the needs and wants of the couple. Sometimes the intensity of counseling a couple in crisis can often overwhelm the counselor and divert his focus to specific issues instead of focusing on foundational truth. Ephesians 6:13 confirms that wearing armor is the ability to resist the enemy and stand firm in the spiritual warfare. While there is still more to learn about spiritual warfare, this counseling program will be able to restore marriages in crises insofar as couples can perceive crises as defeat in spiritual warfare and be ready to put on the armor of God for victory.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project had few weaknesses. Concerning the first goal, teaching the content of the course “Marriage Battles” was effective; however, data gathering started

¹² For example, if anger, communication problems, and untruthfulness affect the couple, then the counselor can fit these issues under the armor of God and deal with them accordingly. Second, the counselor will prioritize issues if he is directing them to more counseling.

¹³ Devotionals and teaching videos will be more accessible when they become part of a website material in the near future.

¹⁴ The gap is that counseling programs are time consuming, lack emergency procedures, and are short of intensive intervention practices to protect families when a crisis occurs.

¹⁵ (ICM) is an abbreviation of Intervention in Crisis for Marriage, to be equivalent to or sound like ICU: Intensive care unit in the medical field.

on the second week, which should have occurred before the first week's teaching. Since participants were not surveyed prior to the teaching, instead of a teacher evaluation I had to ask the participants for a self-evaluation, as explained previously, and then I analyzed the answers. This method affected the accuracy of the comparison between participants' answers before and after teaching concerning the first weekend's teaching. Moreover, I could not prepare a PowerPoint presentation because of shortage of time when the course was rescheduled and because using a PowerPoint while teaching on Zoom limits interaction with participants.

As for the second and third goals, the evaluation of the assessment tools depended on the expert panel, because the scope of the project did not allow implementing the assessment tools with couples. Though the expert panel who revised and evaluated the tools added a great value to them, the evaluation is theoretical; therefore, theoretically, they are excellent tools but practically they may need amendments and updates for better effectiveness, which can only happen during applied counseling.

What I Would Do Differently

There are many skills to learn in a doctoral research project—planning and research skills, academic writing skills, and teaching skills. Because I experienced progress in all these areas through the process of research and writing, I have learned lessons. Therefore, I realize now that if I had done some things differently, I would have experienced a smoother process and perhaps better results.

First, I could plan further in advance and prepare more thoroughly for the research. I would write the research problem, decide the research questions, and follow a clear outline, specifically for chapter 2, before starting my research. In chapter 3, I conducted the research using a better planning method. I learned from my new supervisor to look at the sections of the chapter as having empty buckets that I needed to fill, which was an easier method to follow in research.

Second, I would change my approach by being slower in taking notes, citing, and organizing information, which would facilitate an easier writing process. I created a slogan for myself saying that “slower is faster” in research, meaning that if I am slower in planning and organizing the information and resources, then the process of writing and citation would become easier and faster.

Third, I would have invested more time to refine my academic writing skills before beginning the actual writing instead of doing this during the process, which consumed a lot of time. Having a good command of English as a second language does not always create natural sentence structure. For this reason, it took extra effort to write fluently when the language is not a mother tongue.

Lastly, concerning teaching “Marriage Battles,” I would have been more prepared for conducting the course in terms of having measurement tools ready ahead of time. Also, the booklet could have been more engaging and included more information. In the future, especially in face-to-face teaching, I will prepare an illustrative PowerPoint presentation. Furthermore, during the teaching itself, the subject of the gospel gaps—what can replace the real meaning of the gospel—needed more clarity.¹⁶ I would also add more practical examples or a case study if time would allow. As a teacher, I would like to see the cognitive side of teaching being accomplished. Therefore, I will create more revisions and thinking questions to reinforce proper understanding.

Theological Reflections

As I reflect on how God worked to make this project happen, I am astonished by the faithfulness and sovereignty of God in the way He orchestrates circumstances and people to fulfill His purposes through His children. When I started the research, I was amazed to discover that the Spirit of God called Köstenberger and Jones to deal with

¹⁶ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 4-6.

marriage in the context of warfare.¹⁷ Though I was not directly answering this call, the Spirit of God worked to bring this project to pass for the benefit of His kingdom.

Concerning the research, in reading in the historical resources I was amazed to discover that Puritan authors spoke about the practicality and application of the armor of God in the believers' life and furthermore on the family life, much more than today's generation. Researching the scholars' commentaries and the three dimensions of the meaning of the armor of God was glorious to me. The armor of God has many implications on the life, marriage, and family of the believer.

I also realized how God used this Doctor of Educational Ministry program to renew my vision to be part of Christian education in Jordan and in the Middle East. God calls some people for higher education to serve His kingdom in an academic way. Now, I understand that doctoral research is about loving God through education. Finally, God used the Family Ministry doctoral concentration to refine my vision to the original design of His church and to fill my heart with new love for His family. He is always faithful to provide resources and declare His purposes. He uses circumstances and our personal journeys to reveal His calling.

Personal Reflections

God ordained divine appointments with some of His children to introduce me to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He opened doors, provided for all the needs, and led me to be in the Doctor of Educational Ministry in Family Ministry. Every detail was a part of the larger plan in my life as God's daughter. Amazingly, along with finalizing this ministry project, I can say that I am a transformed person with a refined vision, and better equipped to serve the church of Christ.

Writing the proposal was an interesting process, as it revealed to me that God implanted this vision deep in my spirit and it would have been difficult not to pursue it. In

¹⁷ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 15, 157.

articulating the proposal, many pieces were put together to paint a bigger picture for the ministry and for God's kingdom. I learned that all that I have been through prior to writing the proposal was part of allowing the vision of this project to come together. I loved the proposal as a piece of my heart and I realized the sovereignty of God in all the details, divine arrangements, and opportunities he has opened to bring this vision to the fulfillment of His will. Writing the vision of the church created a deeper love for God's kingdom for generations to come. Moreover, expressing the gap in ministry stirred a deeper need to do everything I could to resolve it. The great anticipation for the project increased my motivation to walk forward in faith to see it come together as a marriage crisis counseling program.

The second chapter of this project was challenging to me. Although I have good understanding of the Word of God, going through the exegesis process was difficult, especially since I live in Jordan and the library was not accessible to me all year long. While studying the main passages for the project deeper I learned that the Word of God is magnificent, rich, and always useful to minister to souls. Finally, I was filled with a sense of awe when I saw the outcome of studying the armor of God: the accomplished counseling program and the potential impact it will have upon the counseling process.

The third chapter achieved the goal of research when the application process worked well under the armor of God framework. Every biblical application had its proof in my life and it was obvious how God gave me practical experience before giving me the opportunity to write for the benefit of others. This fact reminds me of a piece of wisdom one professor planted in my life—he told me not to start from scratch because God has worked in my life to bring me this far.

I marveled when I defined the triumphant marriage. My marriage walk with Christ has been marked with victory. My husband and I were forgiven and made righteous after ten years of marriage. We started to live by faith, Christ became our savior, peace, and righteousness. The following twenty-five years of marriage, God

continued to perfect our faith and marriage and gave us victory over the enemy. He also gave my family a purpose to extend the gospel to generations, declare Him and His majesty, and proclaim His ultimate love and His glorious ways. God transformed my life and marriage to make it triumphant; therefore, “for from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

Moreover, the doctoral journey is a daily learning of many other things than books, learning self-control, holding thoughts captive to obey Christ, and managing emotions and time. This journey is also about learning the art of patience, perseverance, and labor by keeping one’s eyes on God’s purpose. However, paradoxically, I also learned that the needs of my family are as important as reaching the project goals because I do not want to achieve them alone, and I do need loved ones around me. Certainly, the doctoral journey necessitates watchfulness for spiritual warfare, prayer, and Christlikeness. This journey was a daily reminder of the ultimate purpose for my life. Many times I had to choose between comfort and purpose, between loosing heart or perseverance, and between selfishness or serving generations through research and education. My calling is about training teachers, biblical counselors, and children’s ministers rather than merely doing counseling. I currently have more passion to serve my generation in education, help them develop understanding and passion toward the Word of God, and fulfill God’s purposes for His glory.

Conclusion

This is the end of my ministry project, but it is not the end of my research in the Word of God. Ecclesiastes 12:12 says, “Of making many books there is no end”—therefore, the research will continue beyond this project whether through me or someone else, with the purpose of understanding and applying the Word of God to people’s lives. I am humbled to be given the ability and opportunity to accomplish this research this far by His grace and to His glory. As I see this ministry project coming to an end, I remember that consummation is better than the beginning (Eccl 7:8); even if ministers begin the

work of ministry it is not guaranteed that they will continue and reach the desired goals. As a Covid-19 survivor and a researcher who fought many spiritual battles to get to the end of this project, I thank God that the goals for this research were fulfilled by His grace. In the context of this ministry project, I say, “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you” (Jer 1:19).

Now, I can say that there is a body of knowledge put together to serve this generation and generations to come to preserve the purposes of God for families—the armor of God counseling framework, methodology, and assessment tools are ready for the soul care department to use at Ajyal Church. It will also be available in the biblical counseling literature as a doctoral research, and as publication in the future by God’s grace. Also, the “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course is ready to be used to teach families for the greater purposes of reaching generations for the glory of God. A syllabus to train counselors is also ready to achieve God’s purposes and fulfill the vision of Ajyal Church: “To teach generations the godly perspective for relationships, for the glory of God.” Amen

APPENDIX 1

MARRIAGE BATTLE COURSE: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY TEACHER'S OUTLINE

This appendix details the course outline for the teacher to use with families facing marriage struggles at Ajyal Church in Jordan, an implementation of the ministry project “Developing a Marriage Crisis Counseling Program at Ajyal Church of the Nazarene, Amman, Jordan” to build a foundation for counseling and prevent crises.

MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY

“So that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor 2:11)

Course Description

Many marriages are in crisis. Saving marriages starts by acknowledging God’s original purposes for families and the spiritual warfare against these purposes. In this course, couples will get ready for victory in their battles. This course is designed to help couples gain a biblical perspective on marriage crises based on Ephesians 6:10-18 and become equipped with a strategy based on the armor of God. This eight-week course presents seven steps for saving a marriage. The following content is included: (1) a biblical perspective on the purposes of marriage, (2) spiritual warfare and marriage battles, (3) the source of strength for perseverance in crisis, (4) the process and goal for victory (5) the whole armor, and (6) application.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, couples should

1. Have an enriched marriage and a stronger relationship with Christ.
2. Understand the biblical perspective for the purposes of marriage in God’s larger plan.
3. Form a biblical perspective on conflicts and marriage crisis based on Ephesians 6:10-18.
4. Understand the biblical perspective for spiritual warfare and the devil’s schemes in general as well as in connection to marriages.
5. Discover the source of power for the spiritual battle.
6. Understand the armor of God and how to put it on for a stronger marriage.

Session Outlines

Target Group

All married couples with a focus on couples with troubled marriages.

Sessions

Eight sessions, duration: 1:30 each session with a fifteen-minute break.

Lesson 1: Spiritual Warfare Against the Purposes of God

Content.

1. Ephesians 6:10-13
2. Genesis 1: 24, 28, 2:24, Genesis 3
3. Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Malachi 2:15, Genesis 18:19, Ephesians 5:22-25

Context. The Letter of Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-18

Exegetical ideas.¹

1. Perspective: God has purposes for marriage, but the enemy opposes them.
2. Spiritual status: the letter of Ephesians explains the blessings of God's children and the walk of the believer as an individual and within the family. Ephesians explains the spiritual warfare and the armor of God to stand against this warfare. God provides strength and a full armor.
3. Warfare: the enemy is spiritual, and there is an evil day.
4. Some main schemes of the enemy are (1) lies and deception against the belt of truth; (2) accusation and temptation against the righteousness of God; (3) division, chaos, and keeping unforgiveness against the gospel of peace; (4) doubt, deceit, and fear against the shield of faith; (5) lies to throw discouragement, doubt, and temptation to abandon the whole faith against the helmet of salvation; and (6) misinterpretation of the Word of God against the sword of the Spirit.

¹ See chap. 2 of ministry project: Introduction, ministry of opposition, the letter of Ephesians, Spiritual Warfare (Eph 6:10-13).

Pedagogical idea. Every marriage faces warfare because the enemy wants to hinder the purposes of God for marriage. Couples must see their personal struggles through the perspective of spiritual warfare and must learn the process of putting on the full armor of God to be able to stand in the battle.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples become aware of God's purposes for marriage, the opposing power against it, and the schemes of the enemy by acknowledging truth in the Bible passages.
2. Affective/heart: couples will be convinced of a larger purpose for their marriage and the spiritual warfare against this purpose; therefore, couples will start focusing on this warfare.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples commit to the process of putting on the armor of God by committing to learning the Ephesians 6:10-18 strategy.

Lesson structure.

Hook. Questions are (1) Why did you get married? (2) Who created marriage? (3) Do your personal goals for marriage agree with God's purposes for marriage? (4) Do you ever feel you are wrestling in your relationship?

Book.

1. The creation of marriage and the fall: Genesis 1: 24, 28, 2:24, Genesis 3
2. The purposes of God for marriage and family: Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Malachi 2:15, Genesis 18:19, Ephesians 5:22-25.²
3. The letter of Ephesians and Ephesians 6:10-18 as the context for the believer's warfare.
4. The warfare: Ephesians 6:10-13.
5. Application: couples have the right perspective for marriage and get ready to put on the armor of God.

² See Russell D. Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), chaps. 2, 3.

Look.

1. Write down the main struggles in marriage.
2. Decide to remove the focus from spouse and move to the enemy.
3. Start getting strength from God.

Took. Start perceiving family struggles as warfare from the enemy. Anticipate new strength and strategy for victory.

Method. Brainstorming and discussion, writing, engaging lecture, PowerPoint.

Lesson 2: Introduction to the Armor of God and the Belt of Truth

Content. Ephesians 6: 13-14.³

Context. The letter of Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-18

Exegetical ideas.

1. The armor of God has a three-fold meaning: (1) Christ himself, (2) what God provides, and (3) the role of the believer.
2. Ephesians 6:10-18 has two parts: (1) the warfare (Eph 6:10-13) and (2) the full armor of God (Eph 6:14-18).
3. The command is to put on the armor to be able to stand against the enemy (Eph 6:13).
4. The belt of truth is the first weapon against the enemy. First, it is about Christ as the Truth. Second, it is the truth of God in the Bible. Finally, the believer must follow the whole truth.
5. Truth is a complete doctrinal system; therefore, believers must not be deceived by false doctrine (Eph 4:14).
6. Objectively, truth is the truth of the gospel, truth about God, self, others, the Bible, and marriage; subjectively, truth is personal integrity.

³ See chap. 2 of ministry project, “The Full Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)” for exegesis of the pieces of the armor.

Pedagogical idea. The couple must have Christ at the center of their marriage.

They must rebuild their marriage on the truth of the Bible above reason, opinions, feelings, or traditions, and must be truthful with each other.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples will become familiar with the three-dimension meaning of the whole armor of God, the belt of Truth, God's attributes, the importance of God's Word, and faith elements by examining their struggle under the perspective of the armor.
2. Affective/heart: couples will have confidence in God's strength and truth. Also, couples will want to stand against the enemy by receiving truth for their life and marriage.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples will commit to Christ by putting Him at the center of their lives and by raising the whole truth above feelings or reason. They will live with integrity by being honest with each other.

Lesson structure.

Hook.

1. The boxing gloves demonstrate that the source of strength is from the person, not the gloves.
2. The demonstration of an incomplete belt explains how it loses its purpose and effect.
3. The question: would you like your children to tell you half-truths?
4. If I tell you a half-truth, will you be happy?

Book.

1. The full armor of God: three dimensions of the armor of God.
2. The truth: truth about marriage, God's attributes, identity in Christ, and main elements of faith can support this session. Some devotionals can be provided for the couple with self- measurement questions.
3. Truthfulness: living as a truthful person with integrity; also, with honesty and transparency with each other.

4. **Application:** couples need to know that they have to follow the whole truth and be truthful with each other.

Look. Couples can examine if their lives are centered around Christ. For example, if they say, “I believe the Bible but . . .” Couples can also think of one example of tradition, feeling, or opinion that is more important than truth.

Took.

1. Couples start examining their opinions against truth.
2. Couples think of dishonesty in their marriage, cooperate with the counselor to amend it.
3. Couples start living honestly with each other.

Method. Object lessons, PowerPoint, questionnaire, and brainstorming about half truths. Also, lecture and group work to discuss when couples elevate opinions, feelings, and traditions above truth.

Lesson 3: The Breastplate of Righteousness

Content. Ephesians 6:14

Context. Ephesians 4–6

Exegetical idea. The breastplate metaphor explains protection over the heart. Christ is the believer’s righteousness. Righteousness is provided by God through Christ (Eph 1–2); it is also the personal pursuit of righteousness required by God (Eph 3–6:9). Therefore, Christ provides the identity of being justified by faith to the believer, and the believer becomes righteous by having right standing with God (Rom 3:24).⁴ When the enemy condemns the believer, imputed righteousness protects the believer.

⁴ See chap. 3 of ministry project, under “Identity and Issues Under the Breastplate of Righteousness,” which says, “The new identity as the righteousness of God in Christ. Second, walking in this new identity.”

Pedagogical idea. The couple must respect each other's identity in Christ, and they must not condemn each other nor accept any accusation from the enemy, especially over their past.⁵ As an implication for imputed righteousness, couples must see their marriage as righteous, not defiled. Couples must also walk worthy of their new status as children of God, they must walk in unity with each other and the body of Christ (Eph 4:3-6), put off the old and put on the new self (4:22-24), imitate God in love and holiness (5:1-4), and walk in the light discerning what pleases God (5:7-13). They must also walk in wisdom using time and resources according to the will of God, being filled in the Spirit (5:16-18).

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples will know Christ as their righteousness and know the difference between imputed righteousness and personal righteousness by defining them. Couples will realize that their marriages are covered by righteousness by knowing their new standing in Christ.
2. Affective/heart: couples will appreciate imputed righteousness by refusing accusation from the enemy for themselves, their spouse, and their marriage. Also, they will commit to walk in personal righteousness according to their new identity in Christ.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples will repent from accusing each other. They will imitate God by walking in love and holiness. They will practice walking in unity, in light, in wisdom, and in the Spirit. Also, couples will practice putting off the old self and putting on the new self daily and stay aware of their hearts' desires.

Lesson structure.

Hook. What is the heart? Why does it need protection?

Book. Imputed and personal righteousness.

Look. What is in the couples' heart? Condemnation, accusation, bitterness toward the spouse?

⁵ See chap. 3 of ministry project under "Identity in Christ," which says, "This chapter uses only two terms. The first is *identity in Christ* to express the status that God has granted to His children as forgiven, made righteous, and adopted in Christ."

Took. Couples think of putting off the old and putting on the new in specific areas in dealing with the spouse.

Method. General discussion, lecture, and small group discussion. Each group can give an example of practical righteousness that must change the marriage.

Lesson 4: The Gospel of Peace

Content. Ephesians 6:15

Context. Ephesians 6:10-18

Exegetical idea. The gospel is the foundation of the believer's peace with God and with each other. The believer's identity as forgiven through the redemption of Jesus on the cross provides peace with God and oneself; therefore, the believer must always be ready to share the gospel of peace with others.⁶ God's peace provides steadfastness in the spiritual battle.

Pedagogical idea. Couples must first have peace with God through the gospel, and then they must be in peace with each other. They can extend this peace through forgiving each other for any offense. Couples can learn the art of biblical principles for seeking and granting forgiveness.⁷ They must keep their heart peace in the middle of chaos. Furthermore, they must proceed as a family with the gospel of peace as a greater purpose for their marriage.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples will realize that the gospel is the foundation that provides peace with God and others by cultivating peace with each other, and also by proceeding with the gospel as a family.

⁶ See chap. 3 of ministry project under "Identity and Issues in Connection to the Gospel of Peace," which says, "This identity forms the basis for granting and keeping forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace with the spouse."

⁷ See chap. 3 of ministry project under "Biblical Principles for Granting Forgiveness," and "Biblical Principles for Seeking Forgiveness."

2. Affective/heart: couples will receive peace in the heart by receiving God's forgiveness, granting forgiveness to each other, and keeping faith in God and His peace when facing anxiety. They will be ready to stay firm-footed in the battle and ready to go forward.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples will keep the peace when they experience division by staying peaceful with God and by maintaining reconciliation with each other, and also, by proceeding with the gospel of peace.

Lesson structure.

Hook.

1. The object lesson is about the concept of the shoes—every mission needs different shoes in life.
2. Hook questions: If you want to run, which kind of shoe is better?
3. Do you remember an emergency where you have kept your peace and handled the matter properly?
4. Do you wish you kept your peace in a sudden situation where you could have handled the matter in a better way?

Book. Couples will understand reconciliation with God through the gospel and forgive each other based on God's forgiveness. They must keep peace with God, themselves, and others when facing the chaos, division, and the fear that the enemy causes. Moreover, couples must proceed toward a greater purpose.

Look. Couples must consider the following plan in a difficult situation: (1) Keep the peace with God without grumbling back at Him. (2) Keep the peace in the heart by refusing fearful thoughts. (3) Grant forgiveness for their spouse. (4) Keep the focus on the mission.

Took. Choose a certain kind of a reminder to be ready for battle if the evil day catches a spouse off-guard. It can be an index card, a verse on the fridge, or an accountability partner. Also add "maintain the peace" to the prayer list.

Method. PowerPoint, pictures for different shoes, brainstorming, self-evaluation, and take-home papers about forgiveness.

Lesson Five: The Shield of Faith

The content. Ephesians 6:16

The context. Ephesians 1:13,15,19; 2:8; 3:17,18; 4:5,13; Luke 8:25; 1 John 4:18.

Exegetical ideas. The order in which Ephesians 6:16 is written and the words *above all* indicate the importance of faith for all other pieces of the armor of God. The definition of faith (Heb 11:1) and the content of faith from Ephesians 1–2 are important to teach. Faith is to receive all truth as the devil attacks anything to bring doubt. Also, faith must be in action for defense in the battle.

Pedagogical ideas. Ephesians 3:17 is important for marriages as God’s love will cast the couple’s fears from the future of their marriage. The imagery of couples holding the shields together encourages couples to stand beside each other in faith for victory. Because faith comes by hearing the Word of God, the couple must cultivate faith by reading God’s Word and focusing on God’s love, character, and promises, and also on their new identity in Christ and God’s design for marriage. Couples must read more about any specific concern in their relationship.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples will define faith and understand the meaning of the words “above all” in Ephesians 6:16 by realizing the content of faith from Ephesians 1–2 and the action of faith in connection to the armor.
2. Affective/heart: Couples determine to live by faith, not by sight or fear, by confessing faith and encouraging each other to live by faith. Furthermore, couples must keep the faith in their new identity in Christ and obey the purposes of God for their marriage.
3. Behavioral/hands: Couples interpret circumstances through faith by reading the Word of God and believing God’s attributes, love, promises, and truth above all circumstances. Furthermore, couples must join their faith together for a larger shield.

Lesson Structure.

Hook. What is faith? Why do you need it in your marriage? Can faith add to the health of a marriage relationship? How?

Book. The meaning of the shield of faith, and the definition and the content of faith necessary for victory in the spiritual walk.

Look. Couples write down fears and concerns about the relationship to discover where fear is in action instead of faith. Couples connect how faith can protect their marriage relationships from fears.

Took. Couples will have a reading plan to cultivate their faith.

Method. PowerPoint, self-evaluation, small group discussion about fears, brainstorming, and lecture.

Lesson Six: The Helmet of Salvation

Content. Ephesians 6:17

Context. Ephesians 6:10-18, the letter of Ephesians.

Exegetical ideas. Salvation includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation provides blessings, new identity in adoption, secured inheritance, and special promises from God for the believer (Eph 1–2).⁸ The helmet covers the mind and secures the thoughts from strongholds of discouragement and doubts. The helmet is the hope of salvation (1 Thess 5:8), and it is also the victory accomplished in grace. Therefore, the helmet helps the believer to continue the walk of faith, to abandon the past, and to live a secured present and a hopeful future.

Pedagogical idea. The couple must know about salvation. They must also refuse discouragement and keep the hope in the promises, inheritance, and blessings of salvation. Couples must get established in their new identity as adopted children of God.

Aims

1. Cognitive/head: couples will become aware that God's secured salvation provides hope in Christ. Couples will also recognize God's blessings, identity, inheritance, and promises in Christ (Eph 1–2).

⁸ See chap. 3 of ministry project under "Identity and Issues Under the Helmet of Salvation."

2. Affective/heart: couples will develop identities in Christ, keep the hope as the anchor for their souls, and have confidence in God for their future by deciding to continue walking with God.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples will continue walking in faith, hope, and God's love toward a better future by taking their thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, eventually breaking strongholds.

Lesson Structure.

Hook. How do you define a company that secures the future? Would you prefer a company that provides contracts? Do you prefer a title with a clear job description, and why?

Book. Salvation, blessings of salvation, new identity, hope, and victory.

Look. Couples examine areas of discouragement and find answers from the hope of salvation in a group setting. In other words, they can find what makes them lose heart in their life and relationship, and then find what the promises of salvation say about it.

Took. Couples decide to stay focused on the promises of God for their marriage and future.

Methods. Thinking questions, brainstorming, lecture with PowerPoint, and groupwork. Case study application.

Lesson Seven: The Sword of the Spirit

Content. Ephesians 6:17

Context. The Word of God

Exegetical idea. All the armor is based on the Word of God, but this is a specific Word that the Holy Spirit gives against the enemy's specific attack.

Pedagogical idea. Couples must read the Word of God and learn how to receive the specific Word for their situation, believe it, and declare it for victory.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples will realize the power of a specific Word from the Bible relevant to the enemy's attack.

2. Affective/heart: couples expect to receive from God's specific Word against the enemy.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples will be able to declare God's Word in faith.

Lesson structure.

Hook. Share Jesus's temptation (Matt 4:2-10). Do believers need a similar strategy in their battles?

Book. A specific Word from the Spirit of God against the attack of the enemy.

Look. In a small group, couples think together about the following statements, connect them to the temptation of Jesus, and pray for answers from the Word of God:

1. My needs are not met in the marriage. My old girlfriend is better than my spouse. I will be more comfortable if I leave my relationship.
2. Answers can be: My God will meet all my needs (Ps 23). I am in a blessed covenant with my spouse (Mal 2:14, Eccl 9:9). I will only follow the ways of God and He will bless me (Ps 19).

Took. Couples start examining the attacks on their relationship, pray and read to receive a Word from God, and get the help of a friend or counselor.

Method. Brainstorming, lecture with PowerPoint, and group exercise.

Lesson Eight: Prayer

Content. Ephesians 6:18

Context. Ephesians 1:17-20; 3:14-21

Exegetical ideas. Ephesians 6:18 indicates a continuous prayer, staying awake.

The first prayer in Ephesians 1:17-20 is for the believer to acknowledge the power of God. The second in Ephesians 3:14-21 is about the enablement of this power in the believer's life. Lastly, the armor of God starts by the command to be strengthened, and prayer is one way to do that.

Pedagogical idea. Couples must start to pray without ceasing individually, as a couple, and collectively with the church. The prayer must include the goal to be empowered, be filled with God's love, and to receive understanding for the truth.

Aims.

1. Cognitive/head: couples comprehend the command of a continuous prayer life by realizing the different kinds of prayer.
2. Affective/heart: couples turn their anxiety to prayers and supplications to God.
3. Behavioral/hands: couples start uniting through prayer by praying together and for each other.

Lesson structure.

Hook. Imagine that there is a command that says *eat without ceasing*. How fun would that be?

Book. Meaning of prayer, prayers in Ephesians, kinds of prayer, and praying continuously. The importance of uniting in prayer as a couple.

Look. Couples define prayer as they see it. Couples must also decide what changes must be done in their lives to pray more.

Took. Spouses can find an accountability partner and have a practical plan to pray as a couple.

Method. Lecture, the individuals share their definition about prayer, and small group of two couples working together to develop a practical plan for prayer and become accountable to each other.

Further Preparation

While the course has these strengths, it can benefit from the following: First, more practical examples. Second, prayer meeting for families at Church. Third, follow-ups with ideas, quotes, or encouragements over WhatsApp or email. Fourth: home devotionals or readings for couples. If the teacher assigns readings from Ephesians, Colossians, or other Christian material about marriage and warfare, participants will be better able to understand and apply the principles from Ephesians 6:10-18.

APPENDIX 2

MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY STUDENT BOOKLET

This appendix includes the student booklet to be given to course participants. The booklet includes a lesson outline along with blank spaces that ensure that participants remain focused by writing their notes. It also has spaces for reflections and personal decisions. Furthermore, it has an outline for revision, and finally some appendices.

MARRIAGE BATTLES: THE ARMOR OF GOD FOR VICTORY
STUDENT BOOKLET

FIRST LESSON

God's Purposes and Spiritual Warfare

Introduction:

References:

The Perspective:

The Enemy:

The Battle:

The Source:

The Goal:

Question: What were your purposes for your marriage when you decided to get married? _____

God's Purpose to Establish the Family

- Genesis 1: 24, 28
-

- Genesis 2: 24
-

- Deuteronomy 6: ...
-

- Malachi 2: 15
-

- Genesis...
-

- Ephesians...
-

Reflection:

Decision:

Spiritual Warfare

References:

Ephesians 6: 10-13

1. The enemy and his schemes:¹

2. The day of evil:

3. The source of power and strength (Ephesians 6: 10):

Reflection:

Decision:

¹ Priscilla Shirer, *The Armor of God* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2015), 21.

SECOND LESSON

Preparing for the Battle: Winning Your Family

References:

Ephesians 6:...

1. The three dimensions of the full armor of God.

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

2. The Belt of Truth:

- The three dimensions of the full armor of God.

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy:

- The applications on my life and my family:

1.

2.

3.

Reflection:

Decision:

THIRD LESSON

Protecting the Heart: The Source of Life

References:

Ephesians 6:14

-The Breastplate of Righteousness:

-The three dimensions of the full armor of God.

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy:

-The Heart²

² Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, *Parenting Is Heart Work*, Workbook (Lawrenceville, NJ: National Center for Biblical Parenting, 2012), 14-15.

-The breastplate of righteousness:

1. Imputed Righteousness

2. Practical Righteousness

A. Walk in

B. Walk in

C. Walk in

D. Walk in

E. Walk in

F. Put off

G. Put on

- The application on my life and my family:

Reflection:

Decision:

FOURTH LESSON

Relational Struggle and Eternal Peace

-References:

Ephesians 6: ...

1. Shoes for your feet

2. Readiness

3. The gospel of peace

-The three dimensions of the full armor of God.

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy:

The application on my life and my family.

Three problems that hinder the application.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Reflection _____

Decision _____

The Gospel³

What do you know about the sinful nature of man?

How do you describe the human need for grace?

What do you know about the centrality of the human heart and its nature?

How do you describe the Christian life that God asks to live in two sentences?

³ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 13-16.

Four Promises of Forgiveness⁴

1.

2.

3.

4.

⁴ Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 85.

The Gospel Gap⁵

Which of the following sentences best describes the meaning of Christian life for you? Sort the following sentences according to their importance to you. Arrange the sentence numbers according to priority in the table below.

1. The commitment to all church meetings and activities.
2. Focusing on works that please God, such as fasting, praying, giving, and others.
3. Focusing on your emotional and moral experiences with God, and focusing on the Holy Spirit to affect feelings and cause inner healing, peace, and joy.
4. Focusing on serving others, people in need, volunteering, and the desire to reform society.
5. Focusing and emphasizing on the Christian view of the evil that is in the world.
6. Focusing on the position in the church, serving God, social relationships, and fellowship with brothers.

Priority	Sentence Number
First	
Second	
Third	
Fourth	
Fifth	
Sixth	

⁵ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 7-10. The teacher or counselor can use the statements (1-6) to assess the tendencies of people to replace the gospel with (1) formalism, (2) legalism, (3) mysticism and psychologism, (4,5) activism, (6) socialism.

FIFTH LESSON

Reality, The Devil, or Faith: What Do You Choose?

-References:

Ephesians 6: ...

1. The shield

2. Above all

3. Faith

-The three dimensions of the full armor of God.

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy:

-The application on my life and my family:

Reflection

Decision

SIXTH LESSON

Your Identity in Your Marriage

-References:

Ephesians 6:...

-The Helmet of Salvation

The Helmet _____

Salvation _____

-The three dimensions of the full armor of God:

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy:

-Blessings of salvation:

A. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

-Strongholds (1 Corinthians 5: 10):

-The application on my life and my family:

Reflection:

Decision:

SEVENTH LESSON

Offense and Defense

-References:

Ephesians 6: ...

Hebrews 3: 16

Matthew4: ...

- What is the difference between the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit?
-

- The sword of the Spirit: The sword that the soul provides.
-
-

-The three dimensions of the full armor of God:

First dimension:

Second dimension:

Third dimension:

-The schemes of the enemy

-Example:

The Temptation of Jesus / The schemes of the enemy (Matthew 4: 1-11)

The Tempter	Jesus
Said	Written
Written	Written
Said	Written

-The application: Can you receive the sword of the Spirit from the Word of God?

Reflection:

Decision:

LESSON EIGHT

Your Weapon in Your Prayers

References:

Ephesians 6: ...

Ephesians 1: ...

Ephesians 3: ...

All: ...

All: ...

All: ...

For:

-The schemes of the enemy:

-The application on my life and my family:

Reflection:

Decision:

Seven Steps for Admitting Mistakes
Seven A's of Confession -- by Ken Sande⁶

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

⁶ Sande and Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families*, 52-61.

REVISIONS AND DECISIONS

Spiritual Warfare

Our battle

Our source of power

The full armor of God

The Belt of Truth

A. Three words that describe the truth:

B. Three practices that hinders putting on the belt of truth:

C. Three ways to live in the truth:

D. The schemes of the enemy:

The Breastplate of Righteousness

1. Three dimensions of righteousness:

2. What is the difference between imputed and practical righteousness?

A. Six aspects that describe the life of righteousness:

B. The schemes of the enemy

The Gospel of Peace

1. Three problems that hinder the application of forgiveness and reconciliation within the family:

2. What are the promises of forgiveness?

What is Faith?

1. What are the characteristics of the shield of faith?

2. What does it mean to place the shield of faith side by side with your partner and also with the body of Christ?

3. Why do you need faith in your marriage and your family?

4. State three ways to strengthen your faith.

5. What is your plan for developing your faith?

6. Do you have a plan to read the Word of God?

The Helmet of Salvation

1. What are the Main blessings of Salvation from Ephesians 1–2?

2. How can you apply the Helmet of Salvation on your life and marriage?

3. What does the enemy aim at in this area of my life and family?

The Sword of the Spirit

1. What is the difference between the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit?

2. Why is it called the Sword of the Spirit? What must you be doing to receive this sword in the battle?

3. What are the schemes of the enemy against all pieces of the armor?

God Bless You All

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibtissam Kawar.

APPENDIX 3

ASSESSMENT 1: SPIRITUAL STATUS/SS

Basic Information:

Name: ----- Age: -----

Spouse Name: ----- Age: -----

Years of marriage: -----

Children / Ages: -----

Status (circle one): Married Divorced Separated Single Parent

Phone Number: -----

Email: -----

Work: -----

Education: -----

Dear -----, when you focus to answer the following questions objectively and honestly, you will be helping the counselor to evaluate the situation biblically, the counselor will then be able with the grace of God to help you renew your life according to God’s design.

Strongly	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Strongly
Disagree		Somewhat	Somewhat		Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Initial Questions (can be done orally)¹

1. “Tell me about yourself. Give me the ten-minute autobiography of your life.”

2. “How did you come to faith with Jesus Christ?”

3. “How long have you been experiencing trouble in your marriage?”

4. “On a scale of one to ten (ten being ‘we’re filing for divorce’), (one will be we are having some disagreements), “where would you put yourselves?”

1-----5-----10

5. “What have you done already to help solve the various issues you are facing?”

6. “Who else knows there is trouble in the marriage?”

7. “Am I the last person you’ve reached out to or the first? Why?”

¹ Johnathan D. Holmes, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 105.

8. "What do you hope to gain from our time together?"

9. "If you could write out a best-case scenario for this counseling, how would it read?"

10. "Is there anything else I need to know to help me better understand the two of you?"

11. "Was there anything I said that didn't make sense or was unhelpful to you?"

Marriage

- When did you get married?

- Did both of your parents agree on your marriage?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Did your church bless your marriage?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- How did you get married?

- What were your purposes for marriage?

The Current Situation in Your Marriage²

Self-View for the Situation³

1. “What was going on in the situation?”

2. “What did you do in response?”

3. “What did you want, or what were you seeking to accomplish by what you did?”

4. “What was the result?”

5. “What were you thinking and feeling as it was going on?”

God in the Situation⁴

1. “Where have you been tempted to think that your situation is unique and that you have been singled out for particular suffering?”

2. “Where have you tended to believe that God has been unfaithful to his promises to you?”

² Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 308-14, Kindle.

³ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 308-9.

⁴ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 311-12.

3. “Where have you thought that you have been given more than you can handle or that the extreme pressures of the situation have caused you to sin?”

4. “Where have you tended to feel trapped, with no reasonable way to deal with your situation?”

Thoughts in the Situation⁵

Complete the following statements.

“I thought about it and decided that I should . . .”

“I know exactly why this keeps happening to me . . .

I think the right thing to do here would be...

The most important matter to me when that happened is...

What did you think was true or false in what your spouse said to you?

Did you think the situation impossible? Tell me why?

⁵ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 312.

Means for Spiritual Growth⁶

You need to become spiritually fit to be able to confront the spiritual warfare you are facing. When you focus on answering the following questions honestly, with the help of your counselor, you will be moving toward your spiritual fitness and the right stand for the spiritual battle.

Do you have daily personal devotion with God?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Do you read the Bible?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

“Do you receive teaching for the Word of God?”

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Do you attend church meetings regularly?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

“Do you have Christian friendship and fellowship?”

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

“Do you participate in corporate worship?”

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

⁶ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 311. Tripp uses the phrase *means of grace*.

Salvation⁷

1. Who is Christ for you?

2. Do you believe that Christ is God? Do you believe in the Trinity?

3. Do you have present faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation?

4. “Does the Holy Spirit testify with your spirit that you are a Christian?”

5. Is there evidence in your life that your conduct is different because of your faith?

6. Are you born again? What does that mean to you?

7. Do you Love God? How?

8. Is Christ the center of your life? Clarify.

9. Do you believe in eternal life?

10. Do you have a clear expectation of where will you go after your life is over?
How do you know?

11. Do you submit to the authority of the Bible? Explain.

⁷ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 194, questions 3-5, Kindle.

Home Devotionals for Strength/SS

God in the Situation⁸

- A. Have you agreed to any of the following questions?
1. “Where have you been tempted to think that your situation is unique and that you have been singled out for particular suffering?”
 2. “Where have you tended to believe that God has been unfaithful to his promises to you?”
 3. “Where have you thought that you have been given more than you can handle or that the extreme pressures of the situation have caused you to sin?”
 4. “Where have you tended to feel trapped, with no reasonable way to deal with your situation?”
- B. Kindly meditate on the following declarations in 1 Corinthians 10:13, and compare to your answers:
1. “Declaration: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.”
 2. Declaration: “God is faithful.”
 3. Declaration: “He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”
 4. Declaration: “He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”⁹

Salvation

Kindly meditate on the following verses and answer the following questions.¹⁰

Bible Verses.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

⁸ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 311-12.

⁹ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 311-12.

¹⁰ Translation is ESV.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7).

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin” (Col 1:13-14).

“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom 4:5).

Questions for discussion.¹¹

- “Do You Want to Go to Heaven?”

- “Do you want to receive God’s righteousness as a free gift!”

- “What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ (Acts 16:30, 31).”

- “Salvation = Faith + Nothing. It is free to you because Jesus Christ paid the price. Do you believe that? Have you fully trusted in that alone for salvation?”

- “Will you trust in Christ Jesus alone as your personal Saviour? I hope you will accept God’s offer today.”

¹¹ Shawn Brasseaux, “Do You Want to Go to Heaven,” September 6, 2014, <https://forwhatsaiththescriptures.org/do-you-want-to-go-to-heaven/>. Some of the Bible verses in the preceding section are also taken from this article.

Means for Spiritual Growth

1. Read the Bible daily because the Word of God is
 - Bread in Matthew 4:4.
 - Sword in Hebrews 4:12.
 - Fire in Jeremiah 23:29.
 - Hammer in Jeremiah 23:29.
 - Light in Psalm 119:105.
 - Mirror in James 1:22 -24.
2. Attend meetings, listen to teaching, and be with the body of Christ.
 - The meetings in Hebrews 10:25.
 - Main church practices in Acts 2:42.
 - The Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
 - The unity of the Body of Christ in Ephesians 4:3-6.
3. Prayer
 - Praying all the time in Ephesians 6:18.
 - Praying with thanksgiving in Philippians 4:6.
 - Perseverance in prayer in Romans 12:12.
4. Fellowship and friendships
 - Friendships affect us for good or bad in Proverbs 27:17.
 - Effect of bad company in 1 Corinthians 15:33.
 - Effect of relationships in the body of the Christ in Ephesians 5:11;
 - Hebrews 10:24; Colossians 3:16.

Purposes of God for Marriage

Kindly listen to the assigned teaching videos and meditate on the following verses and compare to your own purposes for your family.¹²

1. The creation of marriage and the fall in Genesis 1:24, 28; 2:24; 3.
2. The purposes of God for the one-flesh relationship in Genesis 2:24.
3. The purposes of God for marriage:
 - A. Genesis 18:19
 - B. Deuteronomy 6:6-9
 - C. Malachi 2:15
 - D. Ephesians 5:22-25
4. Spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-13.

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibtissam Kawar.

¹² See the “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course, “Purposes of Marriage and Ephesians 6:10-13” videos.

APPENDIX 4

ASSESSMENT 2: THE BELT OF TRUTH/BT FOR TRUTHFUL MARRIAGES

Your life must be aligned with truth. The devil has no truth in him; only Christ gives a better life (John 8:44). Christ heals, builds, and unites the marriage relationship. The Bible guides your life and marriage. Moreover, integrity removes shame, guilt, and untruthfulness that divides. A truthful marriage is built on the foundation of the gospel, where Christ is the cornerstone, and the Word of God is the base. Therefore, let us assess your marriage together to discover if it is aligned with truth.

1. Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). He must be the center of your life and marriage in order for your marriage to be restored (Ps 127:1). So, is He?

A. Yes

B. No

2. The Bible is the Truth (2 Tim 2:15). Your life must be aligned with truth. The Bible must be your reference in everything; the truth of the Bible must have authority over your feelings, traditions, and reason. So, is the Bible your final authority?

A. Yes

B. No

3. Truth is a sincere attitude; therefore, you must put away any falsehood and be truthful and honest with each other (Eph 4:25). So, do you live in truthfulness and honesty?

A. Yes

B. No

The Bible

1. Do you read the Bible?
Never Sometimes Mostly Always
2. Do you aim to obey and practice the Word of God?
Never Sometimes Mostly Always
3. Do you have good biblical knowledge?
None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely
4. Do you submit to the authority of the Bible? Explain.
 A. Yes
 B. No

5. Do you believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?
 A. Yes
 B. No
6. Do you trust the Bible more than your feelings, traditions, and reason?
 A. Yes
 B. No

God

1. Can you describe your perception of God?

2. Mention some attributes that you know about God.

3. Have you ever doubted God?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

4. God is always faithful.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. God is always just.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. God is always powerful and able.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. God is loving.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. God always punishes and disciplines people.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. How much is God at the center of your life?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Christ

1. Who is Christ?

2. Is He God?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

3. Is He Human?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

4. Is He the Truth?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

5. Is He at the center of the home? Explain how.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

The Gospel

1. What do you know about the sinful nature of human beings?

2. How do you describe people's need for grace?

3. What do you know about the centrality of the human heart and its nature?

4. How do you describe the Christian life that God asks you to live, in two sentences?

TRUTHFULNESS

Kindly answer the following questions to help the counselor diagnose if truthfulness issues are affecting the marriage unity. You might need some explanation for terms to be able to answer, therefore I added the following functional meaning of the main words:

Honesty is the openness and readiness to share all sides of your life without being asked, at the level of facts, opinions, and feelings. It is openness to share.

Truthfulness means you do not lie, you are correct when you share concerning facts, opinions and weaknesses.

Transparent means that you do not hide secrets.

Practices of Truthfulness in My Marriage Relationship

Kindly refer to the definition explained above for the words— honesty, truthfulness, and transparent to answer the questions below.

Pre-Marriage Honesty

A. How would you describe your honesty during your engagement? (past)

B. In what ways did you expected your fiancée to be honest with you?

C. In what ways did you consider yourself to be honest in the engagement period?

D. I pretended to be someone different than who I really was.

SD D DS AS A SA

E. We shared everything together.

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

F. I shared past traumas.

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

G. I shared past relationships.

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

H. I shared past and present weaknesses.

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

I. I shared my goals and plans.

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

J. I didn't have any hidden agendas. (such as leaving parent's house, proving something to others, greed in family riches...etc)

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

K. How do you think your honesty in the engagement affected your relationship then?

Truthfulness in Your Marriage

A. How are you truthful in your marriage? (present, or before you separated- circle one)

B. I lie if I have to.

Never sometimes mostly always

C. I tell only half truth.

Never sometimes mostly always

D. I keep things to myself, Give examples.

Never sometimes mostly always

E. I truthfully share news, information.

Never sometimes mostly always

F. I truthfully share plans.

Never sometimes mostly always

G. I truthfully share decisions.

Never sometimes mostly always

H. I truthfully share feelings.

Never sometimes mostly always

I. I truthfully share weaknesses or temptation after marriage.

Never sometimes mostly always

J. I truthfully share my daily matters (what happened with you during the day).

Never sometimes mostly always

K. I keep relationships that compete with my marriage without the consent of my spouse.

Never sometimes mostly always

Transparency in My Marriage Relationship.

A. I am transparent at all levels of my marriage. (general)

A. Yes

B. No

B. I am transparent in my opinions and feelings.

A. Yes

B. No

C. I am transparent in my finances.

A. Yes

B. No

D. There is a lie or a hidden secret that my mate does not know about.

A. Yes

B. No

E. I fear that my spouse will discover certain facts about my past or present.

- A. Yes
- B. No

F. I have guilt because I have not shared the right or complete information with my spouse at any stage of our relationship.

- A. Yes
- B. No

G. I have shame of some facts in my life and cannot share these facts certain information with my spouse.

- A. Yes
- B. No

Perspectives of the Spouse on the Effect of Truthfulness on Marriage

- How do you think your honesty or lack of it impacted the trust level in your relationship with your spouse?

- How do you think truthfulness or lack of it impacts the level of communication with your spouse?

- How you think your level of transparency affects your unity with your spouse?

- How does transparency, or lack of it, influence your feelings in the relationship concerning fear, shame, and guilt?

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibtissam Kawar.

Home Devotionals/BT for Truthful Marriages

Kindly write these verses down, and tell me what do you see in them next meeting?

1. Truth in Ephesians:

Ephesians

1:13 -----

4: 21 -----

4: 24 -----

5:9 -----

6:14 -----

2. Truthfulness

Ephesians

4:15 -----

4:25 -----

Proverbs

12:19 -----

12:22 -----

3. Building the Home on

Truth:

Matthew 7:24-27 -----

Proverbs 24:3 -----

4. Christ as Truth

John 14:6 -----

Psalm 127:1 -----

5. The Bible as Truth

2 Timothy 3:16 -----

Ephesians 1:13 -----

Psalm 119: 16 -----

James 1:18 -----

6. God

Romans 15:13 -----

Romans 16:20 -----

1 Peter 5:10 -----

1 Timothy 1:17 -----

Isaiah 28:29 -----

More Resources

<https://www.gospelproject.com/wp-content/uploads/tgp2018/2018/03/99-Essentials-Booklet.pdf>

Ibtissam Kawar, *Marriage Battles: The Armor of God in your Marriage* course, second lesson videos. Available in Arabic, counselors can develop in their own language.

APPENDIX 5

ASSESSMENT 3: THE GOSPEL OF PEACE/GP
FOR PEACEFUL MARRIAGES

The gospel is the foundation of the believer's peace with God and with each other. The believer's identity as forgiven through the redemption of Jesus Christ on the Cross provides peace with God and oneself; therefore, couples must first have peace with God through the gospel, then they must be in peace with each other. They can extend this peace through forgiving each other for any offence.

Kindly answer the following questions so the counselor can discover any hindrances for this peace. As couples you can learn the art of biblical principles for seeking and granting forgiveness. You can then keep your heart peace in the middle of struggles.

Identity as a Forgiven Child of God

1. Are you saved from the punishment of your sins?

- A. Yes
 B. No

2. Are you a child of God? If yes, can you give a biblical reference to support your answer.

- A. Yes
 B. No

3. If your life ends at any time, do you know where will you go?

- A. Yes
 B. No

4. If yes, can you tell me why and use a biblical reference to support your answer?

5. Were you forgiven as a sinner?

A. Yes

B. No

6. Explain the difference between being forgiven as a sinner and being forgiven for your daily sins.

7. Are all your sins forgiven and washed away? Use a biblical reference to support your answer.

A. Yes

B. No

8. What do you do with your daily sins? Can you use a biblical reference to support your answer?

9. Do you have relationship with God? Explain.

A. Yes

B. No

10. Do you perceive God as your heavenly Father? How do you connect to this truth?

A. Yes

B. No

Conflict and Quarrels

Quarreling comes out from the heart and tears marriages apart. “The gospel must transform a quarrelsome heart.”¹ The book of Proverbs teaches about quarrels, saying that keeping away from strife is an honor for a man (Prov 20:3).

To help you live in peace, kindly help me assess your marriage by carefully answering the following questions:

1. Are there quarrels over old hurts and offenses?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

2. Are there quarrels over minor offenses?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

3. Do you believe conflicts are completely avoidable?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

4. Is quarreling a godly behavior?

A. Yes

B. No

5. Do you think peace in your marriage is possible? Why or why not?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

6. Can you glorify God in the midst of conflict? If so, how?

A. Yes

B. No

¹ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage, Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 123. Kindle.

7. Why do you think there are conflicts in marriages? (Gen 3)

Our God is a God of peace and Jesus promised
to leave us His peace (John 14:27). Therefore,
being quarrelsome is not godly.²

² Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19, Kindle.

Granting Forgiveness

Without biblical forgiveness, a cycle of strife keeps recurring in the marriage. Let us examine together the atmosphere of biblical forgiveness in your marriage, to discover some causes of repeated strife.

1. Have you received forgiveness from God? As a sinner or for your daily sins? Explain.

A. Yes

B. No

-
2. What do you understand about forgiveness? Explain.

3. Have you forgiven your spouse?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Have you forgiven your spouse the same way that God has forgiven you?

A. Yes

B. No

5. When you are offering forgiveness to your spouse, what would be the expectation in your heart?

-
6. Do you feel your spouse owes you because you have forgiven him or her?

A. Yes

B. No

7. When you forgive, do you set your spouse completely free?

A. Yes

B. No

8. Do you remember the old offenses when you deal with your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

9. Do you pray for your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

10. Do you bless your spouse? Explain.

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

11. Do you do good for your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

12. Do you recognize how much you usually contribute to quarrels?

A. Yes

B. No

13. Do you believe that forgiveness can happen in a moment when deep wounds are concerned?

A. Yes

B. No

14. Do you realize that forgiveness is a decision of obedience and is not feeling?

A. Yes

B. No

Seeking Forgiveness

Even if your spouse is ninety percent wrong, acknowledging one's own sin will give you better sight. Matthew 7:3-5 should be applied first—removing the log of one's own eye and confessing one's sins to God, then seeking forgiveness from the other are all important steps. Many marriages are damaged because seeking forgiveness is delayed. Unresolved conflict is like weeds that kills the good plants.³

Help me assess your practices in dealing with conflicts, hurts, and confession, so we can resolve matters.⁴

1. How do you practice confession?

2. Do you use “ifs” and “buts”?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

3. Do you seek forgiveness immediately?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

4. Do you repent and alter your behavior?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

5. Do you acknowledge the hurt?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

6. Are you specific in your apology?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

7. Do you address the people involved?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

8. Do you focus on right or wrong or do you offer mercy?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

³ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriages*, 124.

⁴ Most confession questions are based on the 7 A's of confession of Ken Sande. Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 52-61.

9. How much forbearance do you practice?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

10. Do you deal properly with conflicts or leave them unresolved?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

11. Do you remove punishment?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

12. Do you offer love and blessing?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Biblical Repentance

Biblical repentance is like a spiritual medicine that has six ingredients.⁵ Help me assess if you have it right by answering the following questions:

1. How do you describe your relational sin biblically?

2. Do you have remorse or sorrow for your sins?

3. Did you confess your sins to God?

- A. Yes
 B. No

4. Do you consider your sin as normal or shameful? Explain.

- A. Normal
 B. Shameful

5. Have you turned back from sin, explain how?

- A. Yes
 B. No

⁵ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 1668, chap. 3, Kindle.

Mercy

The Word of God says in James 2:13 “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Being merciful to imitate our heavenly Father is a command (Luke 6:36). Mercy means removing the just judgment that our spouse deserves.

Forbearance

Forbearance based on Proverbs 19:11 is needed if you as a couple do not want to allow small sins to hinder solving the bigger problems in marriage. However, forbearance does not mean suppressing sins, pretending they do not exist, or keeping them for later.⁶

Practical Mercy and Forbearance

1. Do you think that your sins are not as bad as your spouse’s sin?

A. Yes

B. No

2. Do you practice kindness with your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

3. Do you practice patience with your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

4. Do you practice forgiveness with your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

5. Do you see your spouse through God’s eyes?

A. Yes

B. No

6. Do you remove judgments against your spouse?

A. Yes

B. No

⁶ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2010), 57-58, Kindle.

7. Do you change unbiblical thoughts against the spouse and try to replace them with God's Word?

A. Yes

B. No

8. Do you realize that being merciful to imitate our heavenly Father is a command? "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

A. Yes

B. No

9. How much mercy do you offer to your spouse when he/she deserves judgment?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

10. Do you practice forbearance?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

11. Do you overlook some offenses from your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

12. When you are right and your spouse is truly wrong, what do you do?-----

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibtissam Kawar.

Devotionals for Peaceful Marriages/GP

Conflict and Quarrels

What the Bible Teaches about Conflict and Quarrels

- A. Sin is the real cause of conflict (Gen 3).
 - B. Conflict is not Godly (Rom 15:33).
 - C. Peace is possible because of Christ (John 14:27).
 - D. It is an honor to avoid of strife (Prov 20:3).
1. Conflict is inevitable as long as we have relationships. It is expected in any kind of relationship. The Bible from Genesis through Revelation records conflicts.⁷ Marriages face assorted conflicts because they involve sinners.
 2. Our God is a God of peace, and Jesus promised to leave us His peace (John 14:27). Therefore, being quarrelsome is not godly.⁸
 3. Conflict is dangerous as it usually includes hurtful words which damage the people involved. Proverbs 11:9 teaches “with his mouth a godless man would destroy his neighbor.”⁹ Jesus spoke about the seriousness of hurtful words and anger in Matthew 5:21-22.
 4. Conflict can be an opportunity to glorify God if we resolve the conflict in a Christlike manner.¹⁰ Therefore, though conflicts are inevitable, peace is possible in marriages.
 5. The real problem in our relationship is sin; sin causes war and separation from God first, then from each other (Gen 3).
 6. The Bible teaches that the heart is the source for quarrels (Jas 4:1-3). James 4:1-3 asks a question “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” then the rest of the passage gives an answer to this question addressing sin in the heart. In James 4:8 he says, “Purify the heart.” It is vital to any couple who aim to work

⁷ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 18, 30, Kindle.

⁸ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 19.

⁹ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 122.

at their marriage to focus on their hearts and to become peacemakers by the grace of God.

7. Romans 12:18; 14:19; Ephesians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14 all command believers to work diligently to keep the peace in relationships.¹¹
8. Jesus offers the solution to quarrels, which is to become peacemakers. Jesus taught in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

¹¹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 35-36.

Important Quotes and Teaching from Scholars about Conflict

1. Jim Newheiser explains that a controlling heart desires in the heart and the love of being in control makes the heart quarrelsome.¹²
2. Dave Harvey warns couples not to think that the gospel is only good for evangelism assuring that “the gospel is an endless fountain of God’s grace in your marriage.”¹³
3. Harvey also affirms that “the cross makes a stunning statement about husbands and wives; we are sinners, and our only hope is grace.”¹⁴
4. Martha Peace, the author of *The Excellent Wife*, presents three reasons for conflicts: differentness, selfishness, and righteousness. It is important to handle each conflict by examining the cause and dealing with it.¹⁵ Therefore, cultivating an attitude of humbleness, gentleness, patience, and forbearance is important to solve conflict.
5. Newheiser says quarrelsome means “to keep correcting others even over minor issues”¹⁶ Quarreling tears marriages apart as it comes out from a foolish heart (Prov 20:3). Therefore, being quarrelsome is not godly.¹⁷
6. Robert D. Jones confirms that conflicts are caused by sin and they produce “distance, disunity, and disharmony,”¹⁸ Conflicts do not please God, therefore, God expects us to resolve them. Jones explains that resolving conflicts should be done “actively, diligently, and immediately.”¹⁹
7. Jones confirms that Jesus commands us believers to go and reconcile if we offend someone (Matt 5:24) and also to go and confront someone if that person sinned

¹² Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 122-23.

¹³ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 14.

¹⁴ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 25.

¹⁵ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005), 198-200.

¹⁶ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 122.

¹⁷ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 19.

¹⁸ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 35.

¹⁹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 35

against us (Matt 18:15-16). This means that Jesus commands believers to actively do something and resolve issues.

8. Quarreling tears marriages apart as it comes out from a foolish heart. Newheiser confirms “the gospel must transform a quarrelsome heart.”²⁰

²⁰ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 123.

Devotionals for Peaceful Marriage/GP

Granting Forgiveness

Kindly meditate on one or two principles as a part of your daily devotional.

Read the biblical references many times and memorize them if possible.²¹

1. Biblical forgiveness is a step of obedience to God as a response to receiving God's free forgiveness. Matthew 6:12 teaches "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Also, Matthew 6:14-15 teaches, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."
2. Biblical forgiveness is a decision and not a feeling. You might still feel hurt after you forgive your spouse. Therefore, feeling good about the person or being healed of the wound can follow, because only God heals hearts when we obey Him. Luke 4:18 teaches, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (NKJV)."
3. Biblical forgiveness is canceling the debt of your spouse and to be considered small in comparison with how much God has forgiven. If we refuse to forgive one another our heavenly father will not forgive us (Matt 18:23-30).
4. Biblical forgiveness is a bundle and does not stand alone. Forgiveness is accompanied with doing good to all who hate us, blessing those who curse us, praying for those who abuse us. Luke 6:27, 28 commands "but I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."
5. Biblical forgiveness is based on love that can cover offenses; therefore, when the husband and wife see each other, they do not see the offense whether old or new. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses."

²¹ As further preparation, which is beyond this project, I would like to prepare Bible readings for forty days.

6. Biblical forgiveness is not the fast emotional response, it is the “true forgiveness that sees the another’s sin for the evil that it is, addresses it, then absorbs the cost of that sin by the power of God’s abundant grace. Such forgiveness sets the sinner free; the account is closed, cancelled, blotted out, just like in Mathew 18.”²²
7. Biblical forgiveness is not about losing your rights but giving your rights to God and he will take care of it, because He is your heavenly Father. Romans 12:19 teaches “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, say the LORD.’”

You must know that when one or both spouses are not offering forgiveness to the other person in a godly way, big quarrels over minor issues keep recurring in the relationship causing real damage.²³

²² Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 71.

²³ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* chaps. 5-6.

Important Quotes/Forgiveness

- Newheiser says, “Seeking and granting forgiveness will be frequent in a strong marriage.”²⁴
- Newheiser says, “Forgiveness does not involve merely withholding punishment. God calls us to show love to those whom we forgive.”²⁵
- Jonathan Holmes says, “For a couple to tell a story of redemption in their marriage (Eph 5:31-32), they must be a couple who forgives one another”²⁶
- Paul Tripp says, “I cannot think of a more essential ingredient in marriage than forgiveness.”²⁷
- Biblical forgiveness is costly. Dave Harvey says that it “requires the willingness of the one sinned against to absorb the cost of the sin.”²⁸
- Timothy Keller says, “Forgiveness is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.”²⁹
- Winston T. Smith says, “God invented forgiveness, and his love is its foundation.”³⁰
- Tripp explains that “forgiveness is a vertical commitment that is followed by a horizontal transaction.”³¹

²⁴ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 128.

²⁵ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, 127.

²⁶ Jonathan D. Holmes, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 71.

²⁷ As cited by Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 71. Chap. 5 is useful, it also has eight common myths about forgiveness, 73-76.

²⁸ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 70.

²⁹ As cited by Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 71.

³⁰ As cited by Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 71.

³¹ As cited by Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 75.

Four Promises of Forgiveness

Ken Sande teaches the essential promises of forgiveness that demonstrate that couples should forgive each other just like God has forgiven them.³²

(1) *“I will not dwell on this incident.”* “Do not replay the person’s offense against you mentally over and over again. This promise must be renewed daily, even hourly, in the immediate aftermath. It requires God’s grace and the remembrance of your own forgiveness in Christ to accomplish this.”

(2) *“I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.”* “Don’t go into the garbage can of the past to find ammunition for your conversation today. It is one thing to use a past incident illustratively and lovingly. It is another thing to use an incident from the past to inflict shame or additional hurt.”

(3) *“I will not talk to others about this incident.”* “Do not slander or gossip about your spouse’s sin to other people. In marriage counseling, I find this promise to be especially pertinent with in-laws, siblings, and close friends of the husband or wife. Retelling your spouse’s sins to gain the sympathies of your mother or close friend is not compatible with biblical forgiveness.”

(4) *“I will not allow this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”* “Love does not keep a record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5). Biblical forgiveness does not allow forgiven sins to keep a couple from growing together in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

³² As cited in Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*, 80.

Devotionals for Peaceful Marriage /GP

Seeking Forgiveness

“The seven A’s of Confession” Ken Sande³³

1. “Address Everyone Involved.” If children were involved, confession should happen in front of them.
2. “Avoid if, But, and Maybe.” Take full responsibility for one’s own sin. (1 Cor 10:13)
3. “Admit Specifically.” Do not only say I am sorry, but state what the offence was.
4. “Apologize.” Acknowledge the hurt and state that you regret causing the spouse pain.
5. “Accept the Consequences.” (2 Cor 7:10-11).
6. “Alter your Behavior.”
7. “Ask for Forgiveness and Allow Time.”

³³ Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 52-61.

Devotional for Peaceful Marriage/GP

Biblical Repentance

The Puritan author Thomas Watson defines repentance as “a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”³⁴

Kindly meditate on each ingredient of repentance and reflect back by writing your own application.

Six Ingredients of Repentance:³⁵

1. Sight of sin.
2. Sorrow for sin.
“For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it-though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while” (2 Cor 7:8).
3. Confession of sin. (1 John 1:6-9).
“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
4. Shame for sin.
“But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death” (Rom 6:21).
5. Hatred for sin.
“The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate” (Prov 8:13).
6. Turning from sin. (Luke 15:11-32)
 - A. Change of thoughts (15:17).
 - B. Change of actions and confession (15:18).

³⁴ Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, chap. 3.

³⁵ Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, chap. 3.

Devotionals for Peaceful Marriage/GP

Mercy and Forbearance

Kindly meditate on these thoughts to renew your mind and allow God to change your heart.

1. The Word of God says in James 2:13 “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” You as a couple need to see each other through God’s eyes— “through eyes of mercy.”³⁶
2. “Martin Luther called marriage “the school of character.” Without mercy, differences become divisive, sometimes even “irreconcilable.”³⁷
3. “It’s not the presence of differences but the absence of mercy that makes them irreconcilable.”³⁸
4. Being merciful to imitate our heavenly Father is a command (Luke 6:36).
5. Married couples need to deal with mercy in a biblical manner. God’s mercy means “his kindness, patience, and forgiveness toward us.”³⁹
6. Self- righteousness is against mercy. Moreover, if in any matter, as the husband or the wife, you think that your sins are not as bad as the other spouse’s sin, then the heart of the Gospel in Matthew 18 might be missing.⁴⁰
7. Forbearance based on Proverbs 19:11, it is needed if you as a couple do not want to stop small sins from hindering solving the bigger problems in marriage.⁴¹
8. Forbearance does not mean suppressing sins, pretending they do not exist, or keeping them for later. As Harvey describes it, “Forbearance comes into play when we are truly able to cover a perceived offense with God's love not retaining the smallest resentment.”⁴²
9. “Forbearance is an expression of mercy that can cover both the big sins of marital strife and the small sins of marital tension.”⁴³

³⁶ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 52.

³⁷ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 53.

³⁸ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 53.

³⁹ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 51.

⁴⁰ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 67.

⁴¹ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 57, 58.

⁴² Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 57, 66.

⁴³ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 57.

APPENDIX 6

ASSESSMENT 4: THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS/BR FOR RIGHTEOUS MARRIAGES

The following questions can guide users to discover the perception of the couple for God's imputed righteousness in Christ. Questions will also measure spouses' walk in practical righteousness. The goal is to discover how much the wrong perceptions and lack of holiness are causing disunity and defeat in the spiritual warfare.

New Identity as a Righteous Person

1. How do you perceive imputed righteousness according to Ephesians 1 as your new identity?

2. How do you practice practical righteousness according to Ephesians 4-6:9?

Heart Evaluation in Marriage

1. What is it that you ultimately desire from your spouse?

2. What do you desire that he or she would do?

3. What is extremely frustrating to you?

4. What is the thing you cannot live without in your relationship and consider to be your right?

5. How do you evaluate yourself when it comes to controlling the words that come out of your mouth? Do you regret them later? Do they come out of your heart?

6. How do you deal with unresolved issues?

7. If you think about the cause of your conflict; is it differences, selfishness, or righteousness?

___ A. Differences

___ B. Selfishness

___ C. Righteousness

Helping Counselors Become Aware of Their Life Agendas

“The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Prov 20:5). “The Scriptures give us many windows into the heart and what rules it.”¹

The following questions are meant to help you examine personal heart themes, patterns of thought, motives, and desires. Answering them accurately can help us to acknowledge the true treasures of your heart and how those treasures shape your responses to God, others, and the situations of life.²

Heart-revealing questions.

1. When do you tend to experience fear, worry, or anxiety (Matt. 6:19–34)?

2. Where do you struggle with disappointment (Prov. 13:12, 19)? In what situations do you struggle with anger (James 4:1–2; Prov. 11:23)?

3. Where do you encounter problems in your relationship with your spouse (James 4:1–10)?

4. What situations do you find difficult by and causing temptations (1 Cor 10:13–14)?

5. Where are your patterns of avoidance? What things do you regularly seek to avoid?

6. Where do you experience regular problems in your spiritual life or in your relationship with God (Ps. 73)?

7. Where or when do you tend to doubt the truths of Scripture (Rom. 1:25)?

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 316-17, Kindle. Heart questions 1-14.

² Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 316-17.

8. What is your true agenda for others? What is your definition of a good relationship?

9. What are your expectations for others? What silent demands do you make of the people around you (James 4:1–2)?

10. Where do you struggle with bitterness (Eph. 4:31; Prov. 18:19)?

11. Where do you struggle with regret, being tempted to say, “If only . . .”?

12. What past experiences are hard for you to let go?

13. When do you experience problems in prayer and personal worship (James 4:3–4)?

14. Where do you struggle with envy? What do you tend to covet (Prov. 14:30)?

The Clues.

Robert Jones provides clues to discover the ruling desire which can also indicate that even a good desire had become a master. These clues are the following:³

- “Does it consume you?”
Never Sometimes Mostly Always
- “Do you dwell on it constantly?”
Never Sometimes Mostly Always
- “Are you willing to sin to get it?”
Never Sometimes Mostly Always
- “Do you sin when you don’t get it?”
Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Unpacking Emotions

Emotions are windows into the heart; answer the following scale to represent how much you are experiencing any of these emotions in this season of your life.⁴

Joy	1-----5-----10
Anger	1-----5-----10
Fear	1-----5-----10
Hope	1-----5-----10
Discouragement	1-----5-----10

³ Robert Jones, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 56.

⁴ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 314.

Frustration	1-----5-----10
Sadness	1-----5-----10
Gratitude	1-----5-----10
Bitterness	1-----5-----10
Despair	1-----5-----10
Contentment	1-----5-----10

The Christian Walk

- What do you know about the righteousness of Christ in your life? (Rom 3:24)

- How do you live and practice the Christian life in your marriage? (Ephesians 4:20)

- Do you practice the put off–put on righteousness strategy in your Christian walk and marriage? Explain (Eph 4:22-24).

- ___ A. Yes
- ___ B. No

Walk in Unity Evaluation

1. Do you focus on keeping the unity or proving you are right, and your spouse is wrong?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

2. Do you recognize the importance of unity to God? (Eph 4:2-6, 15)

- ___ A. Yes
- ___ B. No

3. Why do you think there are conflicts in marriages? (Gen 3)

4. What are the effects of conflicts on relationships? (Gen 3:12, 16)

5. What do you know about the effects of words? (Prov 11:9; 15:1)

6. What is Jesus's stand toward angry words against another? (Matt 5:21-22)

7. What does the Bible say about the effects of quarreling? (Gal 5:15)

8. Are there solutions for conflicts in the Bible? (Gal 5:12-16)

Put on-Put off Evaluation

By answering the following questions, we will discover together how much you are walking in the new identity within practical righteousness in many areas in your life, therefore what is affecting your marriage relationship.

Imitating God: Love

- How do you imitate God in your marriage? (Eph 5:1)

- How do you walk in love as God's child?

- How do you walk in holiness?
-

- Do you have a plan to protect yourself and your marriage from sexual temptation?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Imitating God: Purity (Eph 5:3)

- Is there any kind of sexual immorality in your life? (pornography or extra marital affairs)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Is there any impurity in your marriage? (lust, crude joking, or any other impure practice)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Is there adultery in your marriage?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Walk in the Light: Friendships

- Tell me about your close friendships?
-
-

- Do your friends know Jesus?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you have fellowship with the body of Christ?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Are you part of a small group?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Biblical Communication Evaluation

- “Do you know how your partner communicates”?

None Barely Partially Sufficiently Completely

- Do you listen well when your spouse communicates with you?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

- Do you pray and share Scriptures together?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

- Do you share deep thoughts together?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

- Do you know what can kill communication?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you seek wisdom from God to improve your communication?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you practice gentleness and kindness in your speech?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Anger Evaluation

- Describe how frequent is anger in your life in general and in your marriage specifically? (Eph 4:26)

- What do you do when you are angry at your spouse?

- Do you know that unresolved anger gives an opportunity to the devil? (Ephesians 4:27)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you have rage episodes? (Ephesians 4:31)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Speech Evaluation

- How many corrupting words come out of your mouth? (Ephesians 4:29)
-

- Do you practice giving thanks? (Ephesians 5:4)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Are you thankful for your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

- Do you work on building up your spouse and others?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

- Does any foolish, filthy talk, or cruel joking come out of your mouth toward your spouse?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Bitterness Evaluation⁵

- Are you fed up with your spouse?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

⁵ This can be expanded to include slander, clamor, and malice according to commentaries.

- Do you feel you cannot take one more incident?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you find yourself bringing up the past when you deal with new issues?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Walk in Wisdom: Resources

Using your resources in an unbiblical manner can affect your marriage for better or worse. Help the counselor discover patterns in your life in the following areas:

Work

- Are you faithful in your recourses (job, tasks, time) or do you steal in any way? (Ephesians 4:28)

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Is your spouse happy with your vocation?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Are you more dedicated to work than family?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- How many hours do you work a day?

- Do you work on weekends?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Time

- How do you use your time?
-

- Do you know the will of God for your life?
-

- Is your spouse content with the use of your time?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Money

- Are you in a financial crisis?"

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Is money a source of disagreement between you and your spouse?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you see yourself as a saver (careful, hesitant, budget follower), or a spender (impulsive and out of budget)?

___ A. Saver

___ B. Spender

- Do you find it difficult to make ends meet?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you follow a budget?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you have large amount of debt?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you have a plan to pay it off?

___ A. Yes

- ___ B. No Do you live on credit as lifestyle? Do you often carry balances on your credit cards?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Physical Health

- Do you take care of your physical health?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you eat well?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Do you exercise regularly?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Walk in the Spirit

- Do you have a thankful heart?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Are you being filled in the Spirit (Eph 5:18) (Gal 5:19-20)? Explain.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibteissam Kawar.

Devotionals Breastplate of Righteousness for Righteous Marriages/BR

Imputed Righteousness

Romans 3:24

Practical righteousness

Ephesians 4–6:9

The Heart

Believers must practice righteousness in the heart (Eph 4:22, 26, 31, 32) and mind (4:17, 23).

James 4:1-10, Mark 7:21, Proverbs 4:23.

Walk in Unity

- Ephesians instructs readers to walk in a manner worthy of the calling, maintaining the unity with the family of God (Eph 4:2-6, 15). Believers must walk in unity (Eph 4:3-6).

- Danger of conflict and being quarrelsome in Proverbs 11:9, 20:3.

Walk in the New Man Put off- Put on

- Members of the body of Christ are instructed to put off the old self, renew the mind (Eph 4:22-24), “and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). Putting off the old in the following areas
- Conduct (Eph 4:17, 26, 28, 30-32)
- Speech and communication (Eph 4: 25-26, 29; 5:4, 19, 20)
- Impurity of the senses (Eph 5:3, 5)
- Resources (Eph 4:28; 5:16)
- Bodies (Eph 4:28) (1Tim 4:8)
- Anger and bitterness (Eph 4: 26-27; 31-32)
- Relationships (Eph 4:2, 3; 5:21–6:9).

Imitate God and walk in love and holiness.

Ephesians 5:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13.

Walk as children of light (Eph 5:8, 9).

Check your friendships and fellowship.
Examine what pleases the Lord.

Walk in wisdom, resources, knowledge of God's will (Eph 5:15).

Walk in the Spirit (Eph 5:19)

Walk in God's design for family relationships (Eph 5:21-31, Gen 2:24).

APPENDIX 7

ASSESSMENT 5: THE SHIELD OF FAITH/SF
FOR FAITH-FULL MARRIAGES

1. What is faith?

2. Why do you need faith in your marriage?

3. Can faith add to the health of a marriage relationship? How?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Do you question God's faithfulness in the middle of your struggles?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

5. What is the meaning of the shield of faith, and the definition and the content of faith necessary for victory in the spiritual walk?

6. Write down fears and concerns about the relationship to discover where fear is in action instead of faith.

7. How can faith protect marriage relationships from fears?

Devotionals for the Shield of Faith/SF for Faith-full Marriages

Kindly read the following as a devotional to strengthen your faith.

1. Faith helps the person trust the truth, believe the righteousness given in Christ, believe the gospel, and obey God. In Ephesians 6:16, *faith* (“above all” [NKJV] or “in all situations” [ESV]), teaches that the shield of faith is necessary for all other pieces—as different situations attack different pieces of the armor. Thus, the order of the shield of faith in the middle is important. Faith is written after truth, righteousness, and peace because it must be cultivated to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Therefore, the armor of God needs faith to receive God’s strength to pray and understand the spiritual warfare.
2. The content of this faith is foretold in Ephesians 1:13, 15, and 19. Ephesians 1:19, 2:8 speaks about faith as a means for salvation. Ephesians 3:2 speaks about faith as access to God and His purposes through Christ. Through faith, Christ dwells in hearts in Ephesians 3:17-18, and faith unites in 4:5,13.
3. Faith is needed to face the storms of life (Luke 8:25). Specifically, faith that helps face the marriage crisis is faith in the promises and character of God and faith in God’s love (Eph 3:17), as God’s love casts fears away (1 John 4:18).
4. The devil can attack anything to bring doubt and deceit, against which faith is the shield. The shield “not only catches the incendiary devices but extinguishes them.”¹
5. The big size of the shield protects a large area in the soldier. The imagery of standing beside each other to form a wall of shields implies the importance of the couple standing with each other in faith to face difficulties and attacks from the enemy.²
6. It is good to have a reading plan to cultivate the faith, decide the plan with the help of your counselor.
7. Read stories of faith. Example: Mark 4:35-41³
8. Read Hebrews 11
9. Read 1 Peter 5:8-9

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 408.

² A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 784.

³ More stories with questions about faith can be prepared as devotional.

APPENDIX 8

ASSESSMENT 6: THE HELMET OF SALVATION/HS
FOR HOPEFUL MARRIAGES

Many times, crisis occurs when human relationships fail to provide identity needs. Our Heavenly Father provides for the souls of His children through the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When you answer the following questions, you will be helping the counselor to help you receive and strengthen your identity in Christ. Adoption is the first blessing of salvation; therefore, the helmet of salvation reminds believers of the privileges of being the children of God—which includes the identity and inheritance of the believer. The believer receives God’s love in Christ, acquires new status, obtains significance, value, purpose, and a sense of and belonging; finally, salvation secures assurance for the future through the sealing and power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope

Are you hopeless of your spouse, explain why?

Does your marriage make you feel hopeless? explain why?

Do you feel hopeless about yourself and your future, explain why?

The Identity

Personal Significance and Value

1. What makes you feel important and gives you your value in life?

2. What do you wish you had in your life to raise your value?

3. What do you wish to remove from your life in order to raise your value?

Status

Where do you derive your sense of your status in life?

Effectiveness and Purpose

1. Do you feel effective in life?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

2. Do you appreciate your existence in life?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

3. Do you have a clear purpose? Describe it briefly.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

4. Is your purpose related to the kingdom of God?

___ A. yes

___ B. No

Love / Loyalty / Acceptance

1. Do you feel loved by others?

A. Yes

B. No

2. Is your need for love deeply met?

A. Yes

B. No

3. Do you consider your presence important in the places you are in? At home, work, friends?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Do you feel that you are important to others?

A. Yes

B. No

5. Do you feel that you are accepted as a person?

A. Yes

B. No

6. Do you feel that you are capable of influencing others?

A. Yes

B. No

7. Do you have a sense of belonging? Where?

A. Yes

B. No

8. Do you feel lonely?

A. Yes

B. No

9. Do you lack the understanding and appreciation of others?

A. Yes

B. No

Security

1. In general, what makes you feel safe in life?

2. What secures your future?

Significance and Excellence in Creation

1. Do you recognize your talents?

A. Yes

B. No

2. Do you recognize your strengths?

A. Yes

B. No

3. Do you invest to develop your talents?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Do you recognize your weaknesses?

A. Yes

B. No

5. Do you accept your weaknesses?

A. Yes

B. No

6. Do you suffer from sadness or failure in life?

A. Yes

B. No

Self-Image

1. Do you like your outward appearance?
 A. Yes
 B. No
2. Do you like your weight?
 A. Yes
 B. No
3. Do you like your height?
 A. Yes
 B. No
4. Do you compare yourself to others?
 A. Yes
 B. No
5. Do you feel that others are better than you?
 A. Yes
 B. No
6. Are you frustrated with yourself and your abilities?
 A. Yes
 B. No
7. Do you feel you are capable of achievement?
 A. Yes
 B. No
8. Do you consider yourself smart?
 A. Yes
 B. No
9. Do you consider yourself successful or a failure?
 A. Successful
 B. Failure
10. Do you see yourself strong or weak?
 A. Strong
 B. Weak

11. Has someone told you that you are not good enough in a major matter in life?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

12. Do you have self-confidence?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

13. Do you need support from others to feel confident?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

14. Do you need other people's praise to be happy with yourself?

Never Sometimes Mostly Always

Pride or Humility

Strongly	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Strongly
Disagree		Somewhat	Somewhat		Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

You believe you can do things by yourself generally or specifically, you are not sure how you need God.

SD D DS AS A SA

You see yourself better than others in everything you do.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't like to listen to advice.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't like to see your mistakes; you don't want to face your shortcomings.

SD D DS AS A SA

You believe you are really doing well with God, because you read your Bible, pray, and fast; all is taken care of.

SD D DS AS A SA

Toward God

You would like to do things your way, you want to manage life your own way, fulfill your needs your own way. Because you are not sure if God's ways are practical enough in your case.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't like to learn new ways, or God's ways in doing something,

SD D DS AS A SA

You believe all you do is good, and you know how to handle life better than others, or God.

SD D DS AS A SA

You see wisdom in yourself not in God.

SD D DS AS A SA

You like to worship God your own way not His way.

SD D DS AS A SA

You question the wisdom and intelligence of God when He asks you to do things in a certain way.

SD D DS AS A SA

You want to become God because you're really good.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't like to put aside your own ways and learn God's way from Him or others.

SD D DS AS A SA

Toward others

You often don't realize you hurt others until somebody tells you.

SD D DS AS A SA

You do not feel responsible or feel the need to amend the matter.

SD D DS AS A SA

You see the mistakes and weaknesses of others but want others to see your strengths only.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't forgive others because you are convinced that you're not able to do the same offense.

SD D DS AS A SA

You're usually focused on your needs or wants and not on the needs and wants of others.

SD D DS AS A SA

You believe that others caused your bad past, and you are causing your good present. The future is bright because you are able to make it so.

SD D DS AS A SA

You love your thoughts, and you are convinced they are right.

SD D DS AS A SA

You do not like to listen to experts, nor do you appreciate listening to the opinion of younger people or people with less important status than you.

SD D DS AS A SA

You don't see or realize the good that God granted you, you say, "where is it?" You don't appreciate God's gifts.

SD D DS AS A SA

Toward Life:

You forget you have limited ability and that only God can get you to the goal.

SD D DS AS A SA

You usually take things for granted; you forget that without God you cannot even breath.

SD D DS AS A SA

You do not believe that God's way will work even if it is strange or unreal.

SD D DS AS A SA

You find it difficult to wait on God and you end up doing things your way.

SD D DS AS A SA

Perfectionism

Family Upbringing

- In my family whatever I did was not enough; they always expected more from me.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- The more I met the expectation, the better my parents expressed their love and acceptance.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Nothing I did was good enough; “it was good, but I could do better.”

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- My parents (or one of them) compared me to others and their accomplishments.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I was raised under rigid expectations in my behavior or in my achievements.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- My parents (or one of them) loved me because of what I did or accomplished.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Present Experience/ Relationships

- *Never good enough* is a feeling which I often experience in practical life, in relationships, and with God.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- If someone loves me, I need to know the reason. “What did they find in me that is lovable?”

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I do not accept love unconditionally.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I have a high need for affirmation.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I need to hear that I am good enough all the times.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- My real value is connected to what I can accomplish.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I feel that I am conditionally accepted or loved in certain terms.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I am sensitive to criticism, and I really hate it.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I hate it when somebody catches my weaknesses, mistakes, or shortcomings.
I become vulnerable and might feel down or shameful for long time.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Even though I know I am good, I have a high need for appreciation.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I always need assurance in relationships, I need assurance that people still appreciate me and see that I am good.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I always need to feel special.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I hate myself and feel I might lose people or relationships when I am less than perfect.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- Demanding relationships make me nervous.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- My confidence becomes affected when I am in demanding relationships.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

Achievements

- I am sensitive to mistakes.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- I am afraid of failure.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- Sometimes I don't even try if there is a possibility to fail.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- I hate evaluation.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- I hate myself when my performance is less than expected. This applies to on practical life and relationships.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- Nothing I do is good enough for me; there is always room for improvement.

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

- I criticize myself and others a lot.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Nothing others do is good enough.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- My self- worth is connected to my achievements.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I am a procrastinator. I postpone tasks when I feel they need effort to be excellent.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- I always want to be perfect and excellent, and this is deeply connected to my emotions.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Fear

What fears do you experience? Kindly answer patiently and prayerfully so I can be able to help you.

- Fear of losing values.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing Identity.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing love.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing appreciation.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of rejection.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing social esteem.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing status.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing family.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing trust.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear to give bad impression.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of judgment by others.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

- Fear of losing love and appreciation.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibtissam Kawar.

Devotionals for the Helmet of Salvation/HS for Hopeful Marriages

Hope

To understand the biblical hope more. Kindly read the following references so we can discuss it together. Colossians 1:27, Romans 5:1- 11, James 1:1-6, Romans 8: 18-39, Hebrews 6:18-20.

Identity

Read these passages and reflect by writing down how it affects your identity.

- 1- Created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28)
- 2- Sinner needing grace (Genesis 3)
- 3- Adopted to become child of God (Ephesians 1:5)

Read John 1:12

- Write down at least three benefits for adoption from Ephesians 1:5
-

Pride

Kindly meditate on these Bible passages and reflect by writing down one practical step you would like to take.

- 1- Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus is meek and humble.
- 2- 2 Chronicles 7:14 We have to be humble when we pray.
- 3- 1 Peter 5:5 Submission is humility.
- 4- James 4:6 Loving the world is connected with pride.
- 5- Daniel 4:28-37 Giving glory to oneself is pride.

Perfectionism

In God's Eyes

- I am a human being, therefore, I will make mistakes.
- I can never be perfect, but I am always valued by God.
- I am excellent at certain things, and less in other things, and that is ok and human.
- I am unconditionally loved by God no matter what.
- I don't do things to get God's approval; I have this approval through Christ and his cross.
- I do things because I love God and I realize that He loves me.
- I do things for God's kingdom, the welfare of others, and my welfare.
- I am eternally loved and accepted by God even when I am weak or less than perfect.
- God concentrates on my strengths and compassionately works on my weaknesses.
- I am unconditionally loved, appreciated, valued as person by God.
- Though I am not perfect, God knows that I can be effective in his kingdom.
- God never hates or reject me for my mistakes or sins. He hates the sin in my life and wants me to repent.
- What God doesn't tolerate in my life is indifference to sin, deliberate sin, or unrepentant heart.
- When God works in my life, it is because He wants to remove sin, make me like Jesus, and make me powerful and effective for his kingdom. God works to bring out the best He created in me.
- God created me special; I am a special, important child with distinctive traits that he placed in me.
- I am always accepted, never rejected by God.
- God can fill my life with grace and people will see me through his grace when I am obedient to him.
- His love can compensate for and heal any rejection in my life.
- People will not decide my value. God does.

Bible Readings

1. Blessings of salvation, read Ephesians 1-2
2. Do not try to be perfect, read Ecclesiastes 7:16-20.
3. Love vs. Fear read 1 John 4:18.
4. Perfectionism is based on anxiety and social fear, read Philippians 4:6.

All rights reserved, no part of this questionnaire is permitted to be used or reproduced for any use, without the consent of Ibteessam Kawar.

APPENDIX 9

ASSESSMENT 7: PRAYER/P FOR
PRAYERFUL MARRIAGES

Imagine that there is a command that says *eat without ceasing* how fun would that be?

Read Ephesians 6:18

Define prayer as you see it.

Describe your prayer life.

Do you pray with your partner? How often?

Decide what changes you need to make in your life to pray more.

- Find an accountability partner if your spouse refuses to pray with you and pray for your marriage.
- Have a practical plan to pray as a couple.
- Listen to videos from the course *Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for victory* by Ibtissam Kavar.
- The counselor will teach you more about the meaning of prayer, prayers in Ephesians, kinds of prayer, praying continuously. The importance of uniting in prayer as a couple from the same course.

APPENDIX 10

CONCISE TABLES FOR THE MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING PROGRAM BASED ON THE ARMOR OF GOD/ EPHESIANS 6:10-18

The tables in this appendix concisely display the marriage crisis counseling program (Eph 6:10-18), including the two stages of the counseling methodology—the preparatory stage based on Ephesians 6:10-13 and the intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18, displayed as follows:¹

Stage 1: Tables A1, A2—The preparatory stage sets the general preparation and presents the three dimensions of the armor of God. Table A1 shows the main subjects, ideas, procedures, and their codes in the preparatory stage. The table also shows the main role of the counselor and the general goal of counseling. Table A2 explains the three dimensions of the armor of God which the counselor will use at the preparatory stage and all through the pieces of the armor.

Stage 2: Tables A3-A9—The intervention stage is comprised of the seven steps. Tables A3-A9 show the intervention stage, mention the pieces of the armor, their codes, and the schemes of the enemy against each piece. The intervention shows the main role of the counselor. The goal of counseling in connection to the pieces of the armor. Most importantly, the tables display the different issues that fit under different pieces of the armor.

¹See chaps. 2 and 3 for details. Tables do not include all the details of the two stages.

Table A1. Preparatory stage, Ephesians 6:10-13

Ephesians 6:10-13	Code	Preparatory stage Ephesians 6: 10-13		The General Counseling Goal
Main Subjects	PS's	Main ideas	Procedures: Assess and Teach	Marriage
-The source of strength	PR	The perspective: -God's purposes for marriage	P. Pray/Start a prayer team for the couple. Teach couples (using the videos) the following: ³	The counselor aims to achieve a triumphant marriage which stands in victory facing the spiritual battle and the crisis. This marriage fits well in the framework of the metaphor of the armor of God. The triumphant marriage description is displayed in connection to each piece of the armor of God in the following tables.
- The redemption ministry	SS	-spiritual battles Spiritual status of the couple. ²	-PR God's purposes for marriage -SB The spiritual battle -SC The schemes of the enemy -S The source of strength	
- The spiritual warfare	S	The source of strength in the spiritual warfare	-PS The process: be ready to put on a set of equipment, and godly characteristics, (the armor of God)	
	SB			
	SC	The spiritual battle	-G The goal: to stand.	
-The enemy	PS	The schemes of the enemy		
-The full armor of God	GS		The counselor assesses the spiritual status and the basic truth of the gospel in the couple's lives as preparatory work for the intervention.	
		The process of putting on the armor of God	The counselor aims to know the gaps and help couples in the process of fastening on the belt of truth. (This step overlaps with the belt of Truth). ⁴	
-The goal		The Goal (to stand)	The counselor teaches: The gospel, and the basic blessings as God's children from Eph 1-2.	

² See appendix 3, assessment 1/Spiritual status/SS.

³ All teaching in this program refers to the "Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory" course. Syllabus is in appendix 1, also available in teaching videos. Some teaching is also included in devotionals at the end of assessments' appendices 3-9.

⁴ All assessments are available in appendices 3-9 in the ministry project. They are called "assessments," have the name of the piece of the armor, the code, and have devotionals for teaching at the end.

Table A2. Preparatory stage: the full armor of God (Eph 6:10-13)/Code: FAG

Preparatory stage Ephesians 6: 10-13: the full armor of God			Code: FAG
Exegesis ⁵	Application ⁶	Intervention	The Goal
<p>First, the armor depends on what God provides for the believer.</p> <p>Second, it reflects the believer's role in appropriating the virtues, conduct, and new identity in Christ.</p> <p>Third, the center and the source of blessings and identity are always Christ Himself.</p>	<p>Ultimately, the armor of God provides an imagery for couples to keep in mind as they are pursuing a peaceful relationship making abstract concepts more concrete.</p> <p>Couples can be strengthened in Him to survive the marriage crisis and restore unity in the one-flesh covenant relationship.</p> <p>When couples learn about God's blessings and gain a new perspective toward the purposes of God for marriage and the spiritual warfare against it, they can see beyond their relationship struggles.</p> <p>Couples learn that there is a prayerful process of putting on the armor of God, they will realize that restoration is a sanctification process that will enable their marriage to stand against the battle.</p> <p>Couples must become ready for the second stage.</p>	<p>The counselor must assess the understanding of couples.</p> <p>Teach them and help them practice the three-dimension perspective of the armor of God all through the armor of God.</p>	<p>The counselor must gradually ensure victory over the enemy and victory in the marriage crisis.</p> <p>Marriage Crisis turns into victory in Christ.</p>

⁵ See chap. 2.

⁶ See chap. 3.

Table A3. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the belt of truth (Eph 6:14)/Code: BT

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The belt of truth (6:14)	Code: BT
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ⁷	The Intervention	The Goal
-Lies and deceit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The foundation of the gospel -Christ-centeredness -The Bible as reference - God -Truthfulness -Honesty -Transparency— untruthfulness can produce guilt, shame, and division. 	<p>-The counselor must assess then teach the truth about God's attributes, Christ, the importance of the Bible as the Word of God, human sinfulness, redemption, and call for faith.</p> <p>-Moreover, the counselor must discover if untruthfulness is affecting the couple's unity causing a crisis, so he can help them to become truthful again.</p>	<p>-Truthful Marriage:</p> <p>A marriage built on the foundation of gospel, Christ is the cornerstone, and the Word of God is the base.</p>

⁷ See appendix 4, assessment 2.

Table A4. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14)/Code: BR

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The breastplate of righteousness (6:14)	Code: BR
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ⁸	The Intervention ⁹	The Goal
Accusation Temptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identity as a righteous person -Accusation from the enemy or accusing each other -Guilt over forgiven sins -Heart Desires - Emotions - The Christian walk: -Unity vs. Conflict resolution -Put-off Put-on strategy— - Heart issues: bitterness, anger as foothold to the enemy (Eph 4:27) -Communication, foolish speech -Selfishness -Impurity - Friendships -Resource management— God's will about time, money, work, health -Marriage relationship design.¹⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counselors must be concerned with three aspects: (1) the new identity as the righteousness of God in Christ, (2) walking in this new identity,¹¹ and (3) the connection between walking in righteousness and the spiritual warfare aspect. -The counselor can assess the understanding of imputed righteousness to help receive the identity in Christ, its applications, and the practical righteousness in all sides of the relationship. -The counselor assesses the couple's emotions, practical problems, and issues. -Regarding spiritual warfare, (1) The counselor intervenes to help the couple live their new identity as righteous people, overcome unresolved guilt, and refuse the enemy's accusations, (2) The counselor helps the couple to stop accusing each other, and (3) he also helps the couple to repent from bitterness and anger so as not to give an opportunity to the devil (Eph 4: 27). - Since the enemy is a tempter, the couple must start perpetuating the Christian walk (Eph 4– 6:9) as follows: walk in unity, in the new man, in the light, in wisdom, imitating God walking in love and holiness, and being filled with the Spirit. -The counselor must assess the mentioned issues and teach the law of God. -The counselor can refer to put on-put off strategy for wives.¹² Refer to put off-putting on for the husbands.¹³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Righteous marriage: A marriage covered with Christ's righteousness and lived through practical righteousness; thus, marriage becomes free from bitterness, not controlled by anger and fear, and without accusation which can hinder unity.

⁸ See appendix 6, assessment 4.

⁹ The intervention in this table represents the basic points and does not cover all the details available in chap. 2 and 3.

¹⁰ See assessments and devotionals inside each lesson in Bruce Wilkinson, *A Biblical Portrait of Marriage* (Atlanta: Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, 1995).

¹¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 472-75.

¹² Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005), 24. The methods are not connected to the full armor of God, but the counselor can use put off-put on examples to help couples to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

¹³ Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002), 44.

Table A5. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15)/Code: GP

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The gospel of peace (6:15)	Code: GP
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ¹⁴	The Intervention	The Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lies about the gospel -Division and unforgiveness -Chaos and fear -Distraction from purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check the understanding of the gospel. - Diagnose gaps and counterfeit gospels— that can be preventing receiving forgiveness from God and forgiving the spouse. -Assess identity as a forgiven child -Conflict and quarrels -Granting forgiveness -Seeking forgiveness -Biblical repentance -Mercy -Forbearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The counselor must confirm the right teaching of the gospel again. -The counselor helps the couple cultivate the peace of God in the heart and relationship by receiving the forgiveness of God, upon which they must grant forgiveness to one another. -The counselor can also help one spouse if the other is not seeking help. -The counselor must assess strongholds against the gospel that prevent the process of reconciliation. -The counselor must teach about identity as forgiven; he must also teach about repentance, granting and seeking forgiveness, mercy, and forbearance.¹⁵ -At an advanced stage in the intervention, the counselor helps the couple to go forward facing the crisis together and walking toward a larger goal for the gospel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A peaceful marriage full of forgiveness. Marriage becomes missional going forward with the gospel to new generations to keep the purposes of God.

¹⁴ See appendix 5, assessment 3. This step is better to precede the step of the breastplate of righteousness concerning the identity subjects.

¹⁵ All teaching mentioned in this table is available in the “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory course. Some teaching is part of the devotionals in appendices 3-9.

Table A6. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the shield of faith (Eph 6:16)/Code SF

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The shield of faith (6:16)	Code: SF
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ¹⁶	The Intervention	The Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Doubt -Deceit -Different attacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doubts causing defeat in spiritual warfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The counselor must assess the understanding of faith, discover doubts about God and faith elements. - The counselor can also help the couple cultivate faith in God's character, care, and love; faith in His promises for the future; and faith in the other pieces of the armor of God. -The counselor helps the couple through sharing the Word of God in the right context of their problem, and assigning readings about foundations of faith (God, salvation, prayer, the Bible, and the Church); marriage (design and purposes); identity; and righteousness. -The couple must build the habit of reading the Word of God. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A Marriage full of faith in God and His Word.

¹⁶ See appendix 7, assessment 5.

Table A7. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17)/Code: HS

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The helmet of salvation (6:17)	Code: HS
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ¹⁷	The Intervention	The Goal
-Discouragement -Hopelessness	-Hopelessness -Identity: as an adopted child of God—significance and value; status; effectiveness and purpose; love, loyalty, and acceptance; security; significance and excellence (creation); self-image. -Identity strongholds: -Pride -Shame -Perfectionism. -Fear	The counselor must diagnose the couple's strongholds of hopelessness, and he must locate strongholds of identity. He can help the couple to hold their thoughts captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5) and encourage them not to lose heart at sufferings and marital struggles (Eph 3:13). -The counselor can empower the couple to overcome their past, live a secured present in Christ, and believe in a better future based on the hope of salvation, thus reflecting on having a blessed marriage. The counselor must teach the couple about all included issues under the helmet of salvation. (available in the videos and the devotionals.)	-Marriage becomes hopeful because couples grow in the knowledge of their new identity as God's children.

¹⁷ See appendix 8, assessment 6.

Table A8. Intervention stage: intervention step based on the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)/Code: SW

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		The sword of the Spirit (6:17)	Code: SW
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ¹⁸	The Intervention	The Goal
-Deception	The counselor must stay aware of the couple's general use of the Word of God. The counselor decides if the couple uses the right meaning of the Word of God in application to their lives.	The counselor must train couples to hear God in their struggles through reading His Word. Thus, they will be able to have a Word to believe and declare against the enemy when he attacks with deception.	Marriage gets empowered by the Spirit of God to continue to stand in spiritual warfare.

Table A9. Intervention stage: intervention step based on prayer (Eph 6:18)/Code: P

Intervention stage based on Ephesians 6:14-18		Prayer (6:18)	Code: P
The Enemy's Schemes	Assessing the Issues ¹⁹	The Intervention	The Goal
-Distraction -Weak prayer life.	Prayerlessness as an individual or as a couple.	Procedures must include the following: 1-Prayer team to pray for the crisis, also prays Ephesians 1:17-20; 3:14-21 for the couple, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit for restoration. 2- The counselor assesses the basic understanding and practice of prayer. 3- The counselor prays for and with the couple; moreover, the counselor must teach the couple to pray. He can provide a practical prayer list can help the couple in crisis to pray, individually and jointly. ²⁰ 4-Some teaching about prayer.	A prayerful marriage: Couples always pray individually, and couples often pray together.

¹⁸ There is no formal assessment in connection to the sword of the Spirit.

¹⁹ See appendix 9, assessment 7.

²⁰ Andreas Köstenberger and Margret Köstenberger, "How to Pray during Marital Conflict," Crossway, 2014, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-to-pray-during-marital-conflict/>.

APPENDIX 11

MIXED METHODS ASSESSMENTS

**Qualitative Assessment 1, Evaluating
the First Week Teaching**

Agreement to Participate

The questions I present during teaching *Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory* are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. This doctoral research is being conducted by Ibtissam Kawar for the purpose of equipping spouses, marriages, and families to raise a generation for the purposes of God, and to prevent prospect marriage crisis in families at Ajyal Church. I will analyze and use your answers anonymously (without any names) to describe the effect of the course to better equip families for spiritual warfare through my doctoral research.

A. Pre-teaching:

Question 1: What were your purposes for establishing a family, when you got married?

B. Post-teaching:

Question 1: How close are your purposes to God's purposes concerning marriage?

1-----10

On a scale from 1-10 kindly answer the following questions to reflect the amount of change that happened in your understanding after last weekend's teachings.

Question 2: How much did you know about spiritual warfare before last week's lesson?

1-----10

Question 3: How much did you see the satanic spiritual dimension behind the human struggle? Our struggle is not with flesh and flesh (Eph 6:12).

1-----10

Question 4: What was your knowledge of the full armor of God before last week?

1-----10

Question 5: Did you know that keeping rage and bitterness gives the devil a place in your life?

1-----10

Question 6: How much did you know about the enemy and its strategies before last week?

1-----10

Question 7: How much did the definition of the following words change after last week teachings: the perspective, the enemy, the battle, the source, and the goal?

1-----10

Note: Data Analysis was as follows: 1 to 3 (had a lack of knowledge), 5 to 7 (had some knowledge), and from 8 to 10 (had extensive knowledge).

Qualitative Assessment 2, The Gospel¹

What do you know about the sinful nature of man?

How do you describe the human need for grace?

What do you know about the centrality of the human heart and its nature?

How do you describe the Christian life that God asks to live in two sentences?

¹ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 13-16.

Qualitative Assessment 3, The Gospel Gap²

Which of the following sentences best describes the meaning of Christian life for you? Sort the following sentences according to their importance to you.

Arrange the sentence numbers according to priority in the table below.

1. The commitment to all church meetings and activities.
2. Focusing on works that please God, such as fasting, praying, giving, and others.
3. Focusing on your emotional and moral experiences with God and on the Holy Spirit to affect feelings and cause inner healing, peace, and joy.
4. Focusing on serving others, people in need, volunteering, and the desire to reform society.
5. Focusing and emphasizing on the Christian view of the evil that is in the world.
6. Focusing on the position in the church, serving God, social relationships, and fellowship with brothers.

Priority	Sentence Number
First	
Second	
Third	
Fourth	
Fifth	
Sixth	

² Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 7-10. The teacher or counselor can use statements 1-6 to assess the tendencies of people to replace the gospel with (1) formalism, (2) legalism, (3) mysticism and psychologism, (4,5) activism, (6) socialism.

Assessment 4 Quantitative and Qualitative, Seeking Forgiveness

Even if your spouse is ninety percent wrong, acknowledging one's own sin will give you better sight. Mathew 7:3-5 should be applied first—removing the log of one's own eye and confessing one's sins to God, then seeking forgiveness from the other are all important steps. Many marriages are damaged because seeking forgiveness is delayed. Unresolved conflict is like weeds that kills the good plants.³

Help me assess your practices of dealing with conflicts, hurts, and confession, so we can resolve matters.

1. How do you practice confession?⁴

2. Do you use ifs and buts?

Rarely Sometimes Always

3. Do you seek forgiveness?

Rarely Sometimes Always

4. Do you repent and alter your behavior?

Rarely Sometimes Always

5. Do you acknowledge the hurt?

Rarely Sometimes Always

6. Are you specific in your apology?

Rarely Sometimes Always

³ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 124.

⁴ Participants answered this question before and after the teaching.

7. Do you address people involved?

Rarely Sometimes Always

8. Do you focus on right or wrong or do you offer mercy?

Rarely Sometimes Always

9. Do you deal properly with conflicts or you leave it unresolved?

Rarely Sometimes Always

Note1: I classified the scale from 1 to 10 in this way: answers from one to three are considered to be rarely; four to seven to be sometimes, and eight to ten to be always.

Note 2: Question 4 and 8 were not addressed or measured.

Qualitative Assessment 5, Identity

Pre-Teaching

What are the things that make you feel valuable as a person, give you a sense of importance, and make your Identity?

Post-Teaching:

What are the things that give foundation to your real identity as a believer?

Qualitative Assessment 6, Prayer

1. Do you pray together?

A. Yes

B. No

2. How often do you pray together?

Never sometimes mostly always

3. Would you like to make a decision that suits your weekly schedule so you can pray together?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Would you like us to start a family prayer meeting over Zoom in the church every Wednesday?

A. Yes

B. No

Revisions and Decisions: Oral Questions

Spiritual Warfare

Our battle

Our source of power

The full armor of God

The Belt of Truth

A. Three words that describe the truth:

B. Three practices that hinders putting on the belt of truth:

C. Three ways to live in the truth:

D. The schemes of the enemy:

The Breastplate of Righteousness

1. Three dimensions of righteousness:

2. What is the difference between imputed and practical righteousness?

A. Six aspects that describe the life of righteousness:

B. The schemes of the enemy

The Gospel of Peace

1. Three problems that hinder the application of forgiveness and reconciliation within the family:

What are the promises of forgiveness?

What Is Faith?

1. What are the characteristics of the shield of faith?

2. What does it mean to place the shield of faith side by side with your partner and also with the body of Christ?

3. Why do you need faith in your marriage and your family?

4. State three ways to strengthen your faith.

5. What is your plan for developing your faith?

6. Do you have a plan to read the Word of God?

The Helmet of Salvation

1. What are the Main blessings of Salvation from Ephesians 1–2?

2. How can you apply the Helmet of Salvation on your life and marriage?

3. What does the enemy aim at in this area of my life and family?

The Sword of the Spirit

1. What is the difference between the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit?

2. Why is it called the Sword of the Spirit? What must you be doing to receive this sword in the battle?

3. What are the schemes of the enemy against all pieces of the armor?

APPENDIX 12

EXPERT PANEL EVALUATION RUBRIC

Evaluating the Intervention Methodology in Marriage Crisis Based on the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)

Table A10 shows the evaluation rubric of the framework, methodology, and the seven initial steps of urgent intervention in marriage connected to the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18), based on the concise tables available in appendix 10. This rubric was designed for the Expert Panel.

Standard of care is a term used in the medical field for having good procedures in the ICU section, in this counseling program I would like to use it to mean that the biblical and the methodological standard of care is at good level in the counseling process.

Table A11 shows the evaluation rubric of the Assessment Tools available in appendix 3-9, prepared to diagnose specific needs and issues of the crisis as pertaining to the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18). Also, the rubric refers to the concise tables available in appendix 10, in order to see the direction and general methodology of counseling. This rubric was designed for the Expert Panel.

Table A10. Expert panel evaluation rubric of the framework, methodology, and seven initial steps of urgent intervention in marriage connected to the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)

Evaluation	3: Exceeds Standard of Care 2: Meets Standard of Care 1: Fails to meet Standard of Care					
Grade the Following Criteria for Each Aspect						
Criteria	Clarity of steps	Flow and organization of steps	Directed process	Targeted toward the goal	Classifies issues to decide direction of intervention. (under different pieces of the armor)	Expected to be timely
Aspects						
Framework of marriage counseling connected to the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)						
General Methodology						
Stage 1: Preparatory Stage						
Stage 2: Intervention steps (1-7)						
1. The Belt of Truth						
2. The Breastplate of Righteousness						
3. The Gospel of Peace						
4. The Shield of Faith.						
5. The Helmet of Salvation						
6. The Sword of The Spirit						
7. Prayer is included in all steps						

Table A11. Expert panel evaluation rubric of the Assessment Tools available in appendix 3-9, prepared to diagnose specific needs and issues of the crisis as pertaining to the Armor of God (Eph 6:10-18)

Evaluation	3: Exceeds Standard of Care 2: Meets Standard of Care 1: Fails to meet Standard of Care				
Grade the Following Criteria for Each Assessment Tool					
Criteria	Clearly connected to the armor of God.	Follows a clear methodology, parallel to the armor of God.	Identifies problems under the framework of the armor of God.	Classifies issues under different pieces of the armor to decide direction.	Comprehensive enough (includes many major issues)
Assessment Tools					
Preparatory stage					
The Belt of Truth					
The Breastplate of Righteousness					
The Gospel of Peace					
The Shield of Faith					
The Helmet of Salvation					
The Sword of The Spirit					
Prayer is included in all steps					

APPENDIX 13

COURSE SYLLABUS: MARRIAGE CRISIS PREPARATORY COUNSELING

“Marriage Crisis Preparatory Counseling” is an introductory course in marriage counseling intervention based on Ephesians 6:10-13; it introduces the student to the biblical and methodological foundation for effective counseling for marriage crisis in connection to the armor of God Ephesians 6:10-18. This course is a prerequisite for Marriage Crisis Intervention Program counseling course that teaches the counseling strategy based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).

*COURSE SYLLABUS: MARRIAGE CRISIS PREPARATORY
COUNSELING*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Marriage Crisis Preparatory Counseling course is based on Ephesians 6:10-13. This course is designed to help counselors gain a biblical perspective on marriage crisis based on Ephesians 6:10-14, to equip them to face the challenges of ministering to troubled marriages. Counselors become ready to prepare couples for an intervention process based on the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).

The content of this course presents six concepts for counseling at the preparatory stage: (1) a biblical perspective on the purposes of marriage, (2) marriage crisis and spiritual warfare, (3) spiritual status of the couple, (4) process of counseling, (5) source of strength for perseverance in crisis, (6) the goal of counseling.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, counselors should

1. Have an enriched marriage and a stronger relationship with Christ.
2. Form a biblical perspective on marriage crisis based on Ephesians 6:10-18.
3. Understand the biblical perspective for conflicts based on Ephesians 6:10-13.
4. Understand the biblical perspective for spiritual warfare and the devil's schemes in general and in connection to marriages.
5. Have confidence in the source of power for the spiritual battle.
6. Be able to stay focused on the goal of counseling in marriage crisis.
7. Understand the biblical perspective for the purposes for marriage in God's larger plan.
8. Be able to teach couples all the above.
9. Be able to give hope to couples in crisis.
10. Be able to prepare couples in marriage crisis for the counseling intervention process of wearing the armor of God.

11. Have tools, presentations, and homework ready for couples in order to be timely in the counseling process.
12. Be able to assure the salvation of couples through Christ.

Course Requirements

The assignments below are designed to equip the student to become a better counselor, by forming personal convictions and designing personal tools for ministry. The interaction with the material and with other students must motivate a life-long learning desire.

Seminar paper (objectives 1-6). From the letter to Ephesians, please clarify the following: (1) the sections and flow of the letter, (2) the role of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18 in connection to the whole letter and in connection to the closer context in Ephesians 5:21–6:4. Also, explain the connection between the armor of God and marriage. Refer to commentaries and books about the armor of God listed in the readings and to all listed textbooks. The student will present the main ideas of the paper to the class. 50 pts.

Presentations (objectives 1, 6-11). Prepare PowerPoint presentations and teaching videos as follows: (1) Prepare a PowerPoint presentation about the purposes of God for marriage and the opposing powers against those purposes and against believers. Consult *God, Marriage, and Family* chapter eight, *Counsel for Couples* chapter two, and *The Storm-Tossed Family* chapter three. Refer to commentaries and the reading list. 15pts, (objectives 1, 6-9). (2) Prepare a video presentation about the urgent need to wear the armor of God with a clear rationale to convince the couples. Include an overall outlook on the armor of God and general expectation of the process of putting on the armor. You can include a homework assignment for couples. 15pts, (objectives 9-11).

Assessments Tools (objectives 11, 12). Develop one to two tools for assessing and confirming the salvation of couples. Students will share, discuss, and evaluate each other’s tools for development in groups of three. 5pts.

Bible memorization (objective 11). Memorize Ephesians 6:10-18, 3:14-21, and 1:16-19. 5 bonus pts.

Complete reading report (objectives 1-7). 5 pts.

Class participation and respect for values and policies. 10pts.

Grading. Grades under C require resubmission or discussion with students to know reasons. The minimum passing grade is C-. Following is the grading table:

	A 95-100	A- 90-94	
B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82	
C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72	
D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62	F 0-59

Course Readings

Duguid, Iain M. *The Whole Armor of God: How Christ’s Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

Foulkes, Francis. *Ephesians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.

Harvey, Dave. *When Sinners Say “I Do” : Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2010. Kindle.

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

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and David W Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.

MacArthur, John. *Ephesians. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody, 1986.

Moore, Russell D. *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*. Nashville: B & H, 2018.

Tripp, Paul David. *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*. Redesign ed. Crossway, 2010.

Vaughan, Curtis. *Ephesians. Founders Study Guide Commentary*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2002.

Course schedule

A three-day module from 9:00-5:00 pm

	First day	Second Day	Third Day	Notes
9:00- 9:15	Devotion	Devotion	Devotion	
9:15-10:30	Biblical Perspective for Marriage Crisis (Includes marriage purposes)	The Letter of Ephesians in Connection to Marriage Crisis / group work	Ephesians 6:10-14 Video Presentations	
10:30-10:45	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	
10:45-11:30	The Problem of Warfare in Marriage Crisis	Implications of Ephesians 6:10;14 on Marriage Crisis.	Goal of Counseling: Staying on the biblical track.	
11:30-11:45	Coffee-Break	Coffee-Break	Coffee-break	
11:45 -12:35	Spiritual Status of the Couple: Peer assessment for tools.	Process of Counseling: getting the couple hopeful and ready.	Presentations.	
12:35-1: 45	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break	
1:45-2:50	The devil's Schemes	The Source of Strength: how to persevere in crisis.	Group work Presentations	
2:50-3:05	Coffee-break	Coffee-break	Coffee-break	
3:05-4:30	Group work & Presentations	Group work & Presentations	Group work & Presentations	Class Photo

Classroom Values and Procedure

Christlikeness. Since this is a Christian course for believers, displaying a Christ-like character in dealing with each other is the norm. The following are the Christ-like expectations for students:

- Acceptance for different cultures of students, as all students are God's children.
- Respect of each other's work, as all colleagues are created in the image of God.
- Encouragement for each other, aiming to help each other thrive in our studies to glorify God and become ministers who serve God excellently.
- Avoidance of unhealthy competition that aims to exalt oneself and demean others, which will not be tolerated.
- Submission of work with academic integrity. Plagiarism is a crime of using the thoughts and words of others as one's own, will result in refusal for the assignment and asking for the judgment of the dean.

Policy. The professor treats all students as equal, but treats the work of each student differently as follows:

- All persons are loved and created in the image of God.
- All believers are parts of the body of Christ, important in his kingdom.
- Excellent and gifted work is treated with appreciation.

Students with disability and special needs. Please help us accommodate your special needs so you will be able to fully participate in the class. Please contact the professor for aid in hearing, reading, writing, or anything else.

Deadlines. All assignments should be submitted on time, and late assignments will result in lower grades unless approved by the professor for an accepted excuse.

Attendance. Students are expected to attend all classes. 10% of classes can be missed in urgent cases without penalty when the professor approves.

Beliefs & Theological Integrity

Professor strongly holds the following beliefs without apology:

- The inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible is the foundation for this course.
- The sufficiency of the Bible for counseling others is the base of all the teaching in this course.
- The reverence of God and his glory is the main aspect of all details of the course.
- The role of the Holy Spirit is primary in the teaching, learning, and practicing of principles.

- Equipping the saints for the work of ministry in Ephesians 4:12 is the aim for teaching the course.

Teaching Approach

Methods of teaching focus on the active-learning approach, where the student has an active role in the learning process; the general aim is to establish a lifelong learning ability in ministry.¹

Rationale

The course description and objectives intend primarily to equip the biblical counselors to become more efficient to help couples in marriage crisis, relying more on the Word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of Jesus Christ. The course will also help counselors to guide the counseling process using a larger perspective that includes the gospel and spiritual warfare before dealing with specifics of the relationship under this big umbrella. This wider approach replaces the narrow perspective of focusing on skills like communication or conflict resolution which can be included within the process of counseling.

The author in *The Professor's Puzzle* focuses on tying the assignments with the objectives.² Therefore, the seminar paper along with class discussion should aim at achieving objectives 1-6. The seminar paper should strengthen the conviction for an Ephesians 6 perspective for counseling so the counselor will be able to convince couples. The counselor will have strong biblical references to support the argument because the counselor will be an advocate until the couple can see the spiritual warfare. The seminar paper is considered within the active learning approach, which can strengthen the

¹ Judith O'Brien et al., *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 34, Kindle.

² Michael Lawson, *The Professor's Puzzle: Teaching in Christian Academics* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 103, Kindle.

counselor for the ministry and at the same time strengthen the counselor's marriage (objective 1).

Presentation assignments will help achieve efficiency in the counseling process; because marriage crisis is full of escalating emotions, the need to be timely is a requirement for an efficient counselor. Therefore, the presentation, the video, assessment tools, and the memorized passages from Ephesians can empower the counseling ministry to be timely and fulfill objectives (6, 9-12). As counselors, it is very easy to be convinced that the details of a couple's story are the main problem, that they are unique, and have no solution at all while 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that "No temptation has overtaken you is not common to man" (ESV).

The video presentation aims at helping the counselor to strongly verbalize Ephesians 6:10-18 in connection to marriage. Preparing the video through the course maintains the privilege of having the teaching content fresh and solid in the mind of the counselor. Moreover, the video recording will provide the counselor with a strong tool for ministry and therefore helps the counselor minister to couples in a timely manner (objectives 8, 9,11).

Readings are chosen carefully to include good pastoral commentaries and two recommended books about the armor of God. Köstenberger is a foundational book about marriage. Counseling books have a clear perspective on the gospel, spiritual warfare, and a wide range of issues that the counselor will need in marriage counseling; all of them will support the learning outcome of objectives 1-6.

To summarize, the syllabus is based on the teaching philosophy of active learning.³ It has clear objectives and a connection between assignments and learning outcomes, in addition to clarity of values and expectations to help the students stay on the right track in the course and avoid problems. Promoting Christlikeness and the glory of

³ Judith O'Brien et al., *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 4. Kindle.

God within the values keeps the focus of learning in the proper place. Finally, the schedule covers the material and gives space for group work, presentation, and interactions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament, vol. 10. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. Kindle.
- Ashby, Jeffrey S., Kenneth G. Rice, and James L. Martin. "Perfectionism, Shame, and Depressive Symptoms." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 84, no. 2 (2006): 148-56.
- Barker, Kenneth L., and John R. Kohlenberger III, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary—Abridged Edition: New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Bengtson, Vern L., Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris. *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949. Kindle.
- Brasseaux, Shawn. "Do You Want to Go to Heaven." September 6, 2014. <https://forwhatsaiththescriptures.org/do-you-want-to-go-to-heaven/>.
- Brauns, Chris. *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008. Kindle.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition*. Bath, UK: Creative Communication, 2012. Kindle.
- _____. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984.
- Brustein, Michael. *Perfectionism: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2013.
- Burge, Gary M., and Andrew E. Hill, eds. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. The Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2018. Kindle.
- Creswell, John, and Vicki L. Plano Clark. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2017. Kindle.

- Duguid, Iain M. *The Whole Armor of God: How Christ's Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. Kindle.
- Durka, Gloria, and Joanmarie Smith, eds. *Family Ministry*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980.
- Foulkes, Francis. *Ephesians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Green, Joel B. *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. New Testament Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Gurnall, William. *The Christian in Complete Armour*. Accessed March 12, 2021. <https://a.co/2fkumuH>.
- Guthrie, George H. *2 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2015. E-book.
- Harvey, Dave. *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2010. Kindle.
- Heine, Ronald. *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Holmes, Jonathan D. *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.
- Jamieson, R., A. R. Faussett, and D. Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on The Whole Bible*. N.p.: William Collins, 1871. Logos Bible Software.
- Jones, Timothy P., and John David Trentham. *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church*. Nashville: Randall House, 2015.
- Jones, Robert D. *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005.
- Jones, Robert D. *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. Kindle.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. New York: Penguin Books, 2011.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Köstenberger, Andreas, and Margaret Köstenberger. "How to Pray During Marital Conflict." Crossway, December 7, 2019. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-to-pray-during-marital-conflict/>.

- Kruse, Colin G. *2 Corinthian*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015. E-book.
- Lane, Timothy S., and Paul David Tripp. *How People Change*. 2nd ed. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20*. Grand Rapids: Baker 1977.
- MacArthur, John. *Ephesians. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody, 1986. Kindle.
- MacArthur, John, and The Master's College Faculty. *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.
- MacDonald, James, Bob Kellemen, Stephen Viars. *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- Michalson, Carl. "Faith for the Crisis of Marriage." *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1957): 193-206.
- Moore, Russell D. *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*. Nashville: B & H, 2018.
- Newheiser, Jim. *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017. Kindle.
- O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Pattison, Stephen. *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*. Expanded ed. Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005.
- _____. "Identity Language in Counseling: What Does It Mean to Be "In Christ?"" August 30, 2018. <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/identity-language-in-counseling/>.
- Powlison, David. "A Man's Identity." *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 34, no. 1 (2020): 77-82.
- _____. *Safe and Sound: Standing Firm in Spiritual Battles*. Helping the Helpers Series. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2019.
- Richards, Lawrence O., and Gary J. Bredfeldt. *Creative Bible Teaching*. Rev. and Expanded ed. Chicago: Moody, 1998.

- Rosner, Brian S. *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity*. Edited by Jonathan Lunde. Biblical Theology for Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. Kindle.
- Sande, Ken, and Tom Raabe. *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2002.
- Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*. Rev. ed. Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002.
- Shirer, Priscilla. *The Armor of God*. Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2015.
- Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.
- Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002.
- Tripp, Paul David. *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*. Redesign ed. Crossway, 2010.
- Turansky, Scott, and Joanne Miller. *Parenting Is Heart Work, Workbook*. Lawrenceville, NJ: National Center for Biblical Parenting, 2012.
- Vaughan, Curtis. *Ephesians*. Founders Study Guide Commentary. Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2002.
- Watson, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Repentance*. 1668. Kindle.
- Wilkinson, Bruce. *A Biblical Portrait of Marriage*. Atlanta: Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, 1995.
- Witherington, Ben. *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A MARRIAGE CRISIS COUNSELING PROGRAM AT AJYAL CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE, AMMAN, JORDAN

Ibtissam Nabil Kawar, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

This ministry project was designed to strengthen families by equipping the soul care ministry with biblical procedures for intervening in marriage crises.

Chapter 1 outlines the purpose, goals, and plan for the project. It explains the ministry context and the gap that surfaced in counseling.

Chapter 2 provides the foundation and structure for this marriage crisis counseling program based on the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Chapter 3 presents a counseling methodology pertaining to the armor of God, comprising seven steps for intervening in marriage crises and argues that couples must place their identity in Christ.

Chapter 4 documents the implementation of “Marriage Battles: The Armor of God for Victory” course with church families. The chapter presents data analysis for evaluating the effectiveness of this teaching.

Chapter 5 evaluates the ministry project from a personal, theological, and practical perspective. It includes the expert panel evaluation and concludes with personal reflection.

VITA

Ibtissam Nabil Kawar

EDUCATION

BA, Arab Beirut University, 1988

MSB, National Theological College and Graduate School, 2015

PUBLICATIONS

“God Created Me.” Psalm 139. Children’s Coloring Book & DVD. Cairo, Egypt: Episcopal Publishing, 2007.

“God is my Shepherd.” Psalm 23. Children’s Coloring Book & DVD. Cairo, Egypt, 2009.

MINISTERIAL

Biblical Counselor, Church of the Nazarene, Khalda, Jordan, 2007-2021

Children’s Ministry Director, Church of the Nazarene, Khalda, Jordan, 2014-2021

Marriage/Pre-Marriage Instructor, Church of the Nazarene, Khalda, Jordan, 2007-2021

Parenting Presenter Church of the Nazarene, Khalda, Jordan, 2015-2021