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MARRIAGE MENTORING WITH COUPLES IN MARITAL CRISIS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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

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by  
Maria Teresa Trascritti

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

MARRIAGE MENTORING WITH COUPLES IN MARITAL CRISIS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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To my husband, Fran,  
and children, Frank (and wife Tina), Jamie, Nicholas,  
Markie (and husband Derek), and granddaughter, Jovie:

Thank you for your patience, love, and support.

I love you all very much!

To the memory of my father-in-law, Frank Trascritti,  
who always believed in me.

To all married couples.

To the Almighty God,  
my eternal gratitude for all You have done for me!

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## PREFACE

As I think about the work that went into this study, I am reminded of Jesus' statement in Mark 10:27, "Everything is possible with God." It was through God and His wonderful people that any of this work was accomplished. I am grateful for the encouragement and guidance I received from Dr. Michael Wilder— thank you for becoming my supervisor, for believing in me, and for helping me to keep going. I pray God's continued blessings upon your marriage. A special thanks goes to Dr. Timothy Jones for providing his leadership on my thesis committee. In addition, I appreciate the time that my expert panel spent in reviewing my interview questions— thank you, Dr. William Cutrer, Dr. Gwen Ebner, Mrs. Penny Hudson, and Ms. Brandi Walters! I am grateful for all the amazing people who were willing to be interviewed and for those who referred them to me: Donald and Mary Virginia Croley, Richard Cronk, Barb Dotson, Pam Evatt, Denise Friesen, Penny Hudson (who also served on my expert panel), and Keith Twigg— these mentors are true servants of Christ! I think back to when my husband and I were a young married couple and how an older couple in their 70's, Gordon and Angele, modeled for us the real example of a loving marriage. What an inspiration they were to us!

I am indebted to the CIRI Foundation for funding a major portion of my education— the scholarships and grants that they offer to Alaskan Natives like me were an answer to prayer! The prayers that were offered on my behalf by my church family at

First Baptist Church Mt. Healthy were felt—thank you! I have received much wisdom from the faculty of the School of Church Ministries and I hope to pass this wisdom onto my own students. The experience of being part of a cohort was priceless. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will always hold a special place in my heart.

Our children were a constant source of inspiration—I wanted to finish this work so that I could, in turn, inspire them! I spent many days and nights in front of a computer yet they never resented it. I am blessed to have such wonderful children! My husband, Fran, was by my side throughout this journey— what a loving, supportive, and devoted husband he is! God is the reason for all good things in my life— giving me an awesome family and getting me through school; and He even gave me the desire to write about marriage mentoring! I stand in awe of Him— "But whatever I am now it is all because God poured out His special favor on me" (1 Cor 15:10 NLT).

Maria Teresa Trascritti

Cincinnati, Ohio

December 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Marriages in the church are ending in divorce. In a study by The Barna Group, it stated, “born again Christians have the same likelihood of divorce as do non-Christians. Among married born again Christians, 35% have experienced a divorce. That figure was identical to the outcome among married adults who are not born again: 35%.”<sup>1</sup> In another study conducted on Evangelicals, only 26% that were surveyed had been divorced—the number is lower than the previous Barna study (35% of “born again Christians”) but the divorce rate still indicated that 1 out of 4 marriages end in divorce even among “Evangelicals.”<sup>2</sup> In the 2004 Barna study it specified, “A surprising number of Christians experienced divorces both before and after their conversion . . . nearly one-quarter of the married born agains (23%) get divorced two or more times.”<sup>3</sup>

Barna’s statistics were startling because of all the marriages that were performed in the United States, the marriages of Christians were the ones that should be the most stable from a biblical perspective— “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24 NIV); “So they are no

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<sup>1</sup>The Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians” (2004) [on-line]; accessed 1 May 2011; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>The Barna Group, “New Marriage and Divorce Statistics” (2008) [on-line]; accessed 1 May 2011; available from. <http://www.barna.org/family-kids-articles/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>The Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians.”

longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt 19:6 NIV).

The Bible is clear about God’s view on divorce. In Malachi 2:16, God said simply, “I hate divorce.” Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 19:8, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.” Believers were told to remain married: “Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his . . . . So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Mal 2:15 NIV).

Studies have been written about the causes of divorce. For example, Gottman observed the way couples interacted during a marital conflict to see if the way they handled it was indicative of future divorce; and his basic finding was that couples who were disrespectful, belligerent, and unwilling to listen to one another during a conflict were more likely to get a divorce.<sup>4</sup> A study by the University of Nebraska considered the causes and behaviors that can lead to a divorce; and they discovered that jealousy, infidelity, spending money foolishly, and drinking or using drugs were “the most

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<sup>4</sup>John Gottman, “Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60 (1998): 20. Gottman explains the study, “Between 1989 and 1992, we used a two-stage sampling procedure to draw a sample of newlywed couples from the Puget Sound area in Washington. Couples initially were recruited using newspaper advertisements. To be eligible for the study, the couples had to have married for the first time within 6 months of participating in the study, and they had to be childless. Couples were contacted by phone . . . . There were 179 newlywed couples who met the research criteria and participated in the initial survey phase of the study. In this phase, husbands and wives separately were mailed a set of questionnaires to fill out that included measures of demographic characteristics and indices about their marriage, well-being, and health. In the second phase of the study, 130 newlywed couples who represented an even distribution of marital satisfaction were invited to participate in a marital interaction laboratory session and complete additional questionnaires . . . . Once each year, the marital status and satisfaction of the 130 couples in the study were assessed. At the end of the 6-year period (called Time 2 in this article), there had been 17 divorces—six in the first cohort, six in the second, and five in the third. The mean number of years married among the divorced couples was 3 (SD = .79).”

consistent predictors of divorce.”<sup>5</sup> Barna, however, speculates that the divorce rate was due to American society becoming “comfortable with divorce” because it is seen as a “natural part of life.”<sup>6</sup> John Piper believes that the idea of marriage had been watered down and centered on selfish feelings rather than a holy covenant.<sup>7</sup> In fact, some divorces happen because one or both spouses were “not happy” or felt that the marriage was “not working anymore.”<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the divorce rate, John Gottman noted, “It is as if some hidden, evil force is loose in America that is making marriages fall apart.”<sup>9</sup> Although many writers have studied the causes of divorce, little empirical information was available regarding the ways that divorce is prevented; however, mentoring has been used to prepare couples for marriage with the intent of averting a future divorce.<sup>10</sup> Even though many popular

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<sup>5</sup>Paul R. Amato and Stacy J. Rogers, “A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 59 (1997): 619. Amato and Rogers explain, “In 1980, telephone interviewers used random-digit dialing to locate a national sample of 2,033 married persons (not couples) 55 years of age and under . . . Of those individuals contacted, 78% completed the full interview. In 1983, telephone interviewers successfully contacted 1,592 of the original respondents (78%). We obtained information on marital status from an additional 150 respondents via a short, mailed questionnaire, so we had information on subsequent divorce for 86% of the original sample. In 1988, we completed telephone interviews with 1,341 respondents and obtained marital status information from an additional 94 respondents (71% of the original sample). In 1992, we interviewed 1,189 respondents by telephone and obtained marital status information from an additional 45 people (61% of the original sample). In 1983, 1988, and 1992 respondents indicated if they had divorced or separated permanently since the previous interview. During the 12 years of our study, 231 divorces and 33 permanent separations occurred; permanent separations, therefore, represented 12.5% of the cases of marital disruption.”

<sup>6</sup>The Barna Group, “New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released.”

<sup>7</sup>John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 16-17.

<sup>8</sup>Harry Benson, *Mentoring Marriages* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 219.

<sup>9</sup>John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: And How You Can Make Yours Last* (New York: Fireside, 1995), 16.

<sup>10</sup>*Background of the FOCCUS Pre-marriage Inventory* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 28 July 2011; available from <http://www.foccusinc.com/foccus-inventory-background.aspx>; Internet.

books and magazine articles were written about mentoring married couples (older couples in long established marriages mentoring younger couples), the academic research available on the subject of mentoring of married couples was lacking. In fact, only five dissertations on mentoring married couples existed; furthermore, all the studies focused on pre-marital or newly married couples and not couples in established marriages. In a 2007 dissertation, the author stated, “Nearly no research has examined this model [marriage mentoring], although manuals have been written describing marriage mentoring.”<sup>11</sup>

In its basic form, mentoring was an age-old method of teaching in which a more experienced person teaches a less experienced person. In fact, mentoring was very similar to the process described in Titus 2:2-4 where “older” Christians were instructed to teach “younger” Christians (“Teach the older men . . . . Likewise, teach the older women . . . . Then they can train the younger,” NIV). Although the Titus passage referred to teaching and training, the basic principle of older men and older women influencing the younger generation was the same. In a general sense, mentoring was a “God-given relationship in which one growing Christian encourages and equips another believer to reach his/her potential as a disciple of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> When applied to marriages, mentoring involves older couples mentoring younger couples, most especially couples who are experiencing marital distress.

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<sup>11</sup>Eric N. Gadol, “Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), iii.

<sup>12</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Making Disciples through Mentoring: Lessons from Paul and Timothy* (Oxnard, CA: Ephesians Four Ministries, Church Growth Institute, 2002), 5.

## Statement of the Problem

Of the five dissertations that are relevant to this study, Sandstrom's study provided helpful insights regarding the mentoring process; however, its emphasis was on couples who received premarital mentoring and not on married couples in distress. Likewise, none of the newly married participants in Gadol's study involved marital distress; in fact, one of the criteria for participation in his study was low marital distress.<sup>13</sup> Byington's study also focused on newlywed couples who were mentored, and although she found benefits for the mentoring process, her participants were not experiencing marital distress to the point of impending divorce.<sup>14</sup> In her research, Crawford looked at marriage education and recommended that mentoring be added in order to build relationship skills. Though her study validated the findings of other studies— that mentoring was beneficial— her participants were newly married couples and not couples in established marriages experiencing marital distress to the point of divorce.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Wages discovered that there were merits to the premarital program, however, his study centered on premarital couples and not couples in established marriages with marital distress.<sup>16</sup> Since academic research was lacking in the area of

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<sup>13</sup>Gadol, "Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program," 30.

<sup>14</sup>Kristin D. Byington, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Marriage Mentoring Program" (Ph.D. diss., Seattle Pacific University, 2008).

<sup>15</sup>Shannan C. Crawford, "Efficacy of the Parrott's Couples Mentoring Program in a Community Setting" (Psy.D. diss., Regent University, 2009).

<sup>16</sup>Steven A. Wages, "A Formative and Summative Evaluation of a Marriage Preparation Program Using Mentor Couples" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 2002).

marriage mentoring of distressed couples in established marriages, there was a need for additional research to better understand the subject of marriage mentoring.<sup>17</sup>

### **Purpose of the Study**

Is marriage mentoring an effective technique to repair marriages? The current study sought to examine the marriage mentoring model as a method to restore marriages among believers. This thesis first assessed the dissolution of marriages through divorce in order to understand its causes, and included a study of the Scriptures regarding divorce and the topic of marriage. In addition, current literature was reviewed in an attempt to better comprehend how mentoring worked and how it may be utilized as a divorce prevention method among troubled marriages. Interviews were then conducted with couples who had experienced marital distress but were reconciled. The responses were then analyzed.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The study was limited to couples who had experienced a marital crisis but were reconciled for a year or longer with the help of marriage mentoring. The study was delimited to couples who have participated in a mentoring program received through a church or a Christian counseling center to address their marital issue. Since names of couples were derived from the databases of select churches and Christian counseling centers, the study was delimited to couples who had completed the mentoring program. For the purposes of the study, the actual mentoring process that was received by the

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<sup>17</sup>No academic research exists on the topic of marriage mentoring on established marriages in marital distress. Of the five studies that were found on marriage mentoring, all centered on marriage mentoring in a premarital or newly married context and not on established marriages experiencing marital distress.



distressed couple was examined and not the mentoring program used.<sup>18</sup> The following was the criteria for inclusion in the current study:

1. Couples have been married for at least 3 years at the time they sought the help of a marriage mentor.
2. Couples had experienced marital distress which caused them to seek the help of a marriage mentor.
3. Couples have been married for at least a year (and are still married) following marriage mentoring.
4. Couples who viewed marriage as a covenant.

### **Definitions**

The following are terms used in the study:

*Covenant marriage.* As illustrated in Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6, it is through God that two people become one flesh.<sup>19</sup> Marriage is “good and holy;” God is seen as the “third party member to all marriages, acting as guarantor of the institution.”<sup>20</sup>

A covenant marriage is opposite of a contractual marriage (a marriage that can be terminated as one terminates a contract).

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<sup>18</sup>The focus of the current study is not to compare and contrast the mentoring programs that are used, but to instead gain insights of the mentoring experience from those who were on the receiving end of mentoring. In particular, to understand what couples think about the mentoring relationship and in what ways they believe it saved their marriage.

<sup>19</sup>John K. Tarwater, *Marriage as Covenant: Considering God's Design at Creation and the Contemporary Moral consequences* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 3-9.

<sup>20</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2009; Kindle ed.), locations 22114 of 27055. Calvin states, “Priests, monks, and nuns, forgetful of their infirmity, are confident of their fitness for celibacy. But by what oracle have they been instructed, that the chastity which they vow to the end of life, they will be able through life to maintain? . . . marriage, which God did not think it unbecoming his majesty to institute, which he pronounced honourable in all, which Christ our Lord sanctified by his presence, and which he deigned to honour with his first miracle, they presume to stigmatise as pollution.”

*FOCCUS/REFOCCUS*. FOCCUS/REFOCCUS stands for “Facilitate Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study.” It was used by some churches or Christian organizations as a marriage mentoring tool. The inventories and assessments were developed by three therapists, B. Markey, M. Micheletto, and A. Becker, and were used by mentors. Facilitator training was offered online or in-person. In addition to the marriage inventory, a discussion guide was provided for individual or group use.<sup>21</sup>

*Marital distress*. Marital distress is “relationship difficulties and their comorbidity with emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems” with the spouse or marriage in general.<sup>22</sup>

*Marriage mentoring*. Marriage mentoring is “linking seasoned couples with less experienced couples” for the purpose of reducing marital distress and prevention of divorce.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this study, marriage mentoring was the relationship process of an older couple sharing life experiences with a younger couple so that the older couple offers encouragement and a personal example for the younger couple to strengthen their marriage. Mentoring can be “any action that inspires another” and can “happen at any time or place.”<sup>24</sup> Mentors were to “encourage,” “guide,” and “cajole” but mostly, they

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<sup>21</sup>FOCCUS Inc., *REFOCCUS Marriage Enrichment Inventory* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 16 May 2011; available from <http://www.foccusinc.com/refoccus-inventory.aspx>; Internet.

<sup>22</sup>Douglas K. Snyder, Mark A. Whisman, and Steven R. H. Beach, *Screening for Marital Distress* (2009) [on-line]; accessed 14 June 2011; available from <http://www.relationshipeducation.info/downloads/pdf/09%20Snyder.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>23</sup>Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring: Connecting Couples to Build Better Marriages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005; Kindle ed.), location 2830 of 3198.

<sup>24</sup>John Wooden and Don Yaeger, *A Game Plan for Life: The Power of Mentoring* (New York: Bloombury, 2009), 3.

were to reinforce new behavior using “honesty” and “trust” within the mentoring relationship.<sup>25</sup>

*PREPARE/ENRICH*. PREPARE/ENRICH was developed by David and Karen Olson. This marriage mentoring program was used by some churches and Christian organizations. The program provided inventories, in-person “marriage facilitator” training, a manual and a resource kit that can be tailored to fit the needs of the church or organization using its product.<sup>26</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

This was a qualitative study and was descriptive in nature. It was a qualitative study because the objective was to examine the marriage mentoring model using personal interviews. This study utilized nonprobabilistic or purposive sampling since purposeful sampling was “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.”<sup>27</sup> The sample selection for this qualitative study was “nonrandom, purposeful, and small” and where the researcher was “the primary instrument” during interviews.<sup>28</sup> A qualitative study consists of a “purposeful sampling” of “5-15

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<sup>25</sup>Laurent A. Dolaz, *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 216, 218.

<sup>26</sup>Life Innovations, Inc., *Helping Build Strong Marriages and Healthy Relationships* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 16 May 2011; available from <https://www.prepare-enrich.com/>; Internet.

<sup>27</sup>Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 61.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-9.

individuals” and centers on understanding “an experience from the participants’ point of view” through interviews.<sup>29</sup>

This qualitative study analyzed the responses of thirteen married couples through phone interviews about their perception of the mentoring process and its outcome on their marriage. The sample size was within the required number for a purposeful sampling—thirteen couples or 26 individuals. With the knowledge and consent of each couple, interviews were recorded for the purposes of transcription. Interview responses and descriptions were coded and clustered into major themes.<sup>30</sup>

Coding was described as, “identifying a theme that can be illustrated with numerous incidents and quotes.”<sup>31</sup> The process involved, “analyzing data for material that can yield codes that address topics that readers would expect to find, codes that are surprising, and codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research.”<sup>32</sup> Analysis of the data was obtained using an online coding analysis toolkit, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), and the CAQDAS (computer assisted qualitative data analysis software).<sup>33</sup> QDA examined the “meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data”;<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall, 2005), 144.

<sup>30</sup>Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 160. In content analysis, content of interviews is analyzed for “themes and recurring patterns” and the data is coded in order to “capture relevant characteristics of the document’s content.”

<sup>31</sup>Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 164.

<sup>32</sup>John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 193.

<sup>33</sup>Ann Lewins, Celia Taylor, and Graham R. Gibbs, *Qualitative Analysis Data* (2010) [on-line]; accessed 11 May 2011; available from [http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro\\_QDA/what\\_is\\_qda.php](http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php); Internet.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

while the CAQDAS “searches, organizes, and annotates textual data for further qualitative and/or quantitative analyses.”<sup>35</sup>

Qualitative interviewing was the primary mode of data collecting as it helped to determine if marriage mentoring prevented couples in distressed marriages from seeking divorce. An expert panel was used to validate the interview questions. The expert panel included professors and church practitioners familiar with research designs, or those that have personal or professional experiences as a mentor or counselor. Feedback from the panel determined if questions needed to be restructured then the updated questions were used to interview the participant couples.

### **Summary**

Very little empirical research existed regarding the topic of marriage mentoring. Marriages continue to end for both Christians and non-Christians. A clear understanding of marriage mentoring from qualitative data helped both researchers and the church in finding effective ways to restore marriages.

The precedent literature was examined in the next chapter. This review of literature provided a framework for the questions that were used in the interviews. Contemporary research on the topic of marriage mentoring was also reviewed to provide further understanding of the subject, and a clear connection was made between the related topics and Scripture.

Chapter 3 included a brief description of the questionnaire and the methods that were used to gather data. Chapter 4 presented an analysis of the findings from the

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<sup>35</sup>Kerry Rice and Barbara Schroeder, *A Research Guide for BSU Doctoral Students* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 14 July 2011; available from [http://edtech2.boisestate.edu/qda/CAQDAS\\_Info.htm](http://edtech2.boisestate.edu/qda/CAQDAS_Info.htm); Internet.

study. Finally, chapter 5 consisted of key insights, conclusions, and application of the data to the field of marriage mentoring so that both scholars and practitioners can utilize the insights for further ministry research and application.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE AND MENTORING

The first marriage was seen in the book of Genesis: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ . . . the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ . . . they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:18, 22-24 NIV). In Matthew 19:4-5 Jesus pointed out that two people who were married became “one flesh”— described as “an intimate closeness that cannot be separated.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, the “one flesh” in marriage was a “reenactment of and testimony to the very structure of humanity as God created it.”<sup>2</sup> Just as God made the first man and the first woman, God also produced the first marriage—He was the One who brought Adam and Eve together to become “one flesh.”

#### **Biblical Foundation for Marriage**

Danny Akin explains marriage in the context of “three great movements”—(1) “Creation,” based on Genesis 1 and 2—where everyone is an “image bearer” of God and both husband and wife have a “distinctive and complementary role” in the marriage; (2) “Fall,” centered on Genesis 3— all of humanity has “fallen” after Adam and Eve ate from

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce B. Barton et al., *Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 369.

<sup>2</sup>D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 2 of *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 87.

the Tree of Knowledge, leading to a “battle of the sexes”; and (3) “Redemption,” when all marriages are “redeemed and restored,” whereby husbands are “loving and knowing” and wives are “submitting and respecting.”<sup>3</sup> In order to have a proper Biblical foundation of marriage, all three “movements” will be examined.

## **Creation**

The Biblical foundation of marriage starts with Creation and is based on the Scriptural passages found in Genesis 2:18, 21-25. One author stated, “The creation of the first couple leads naturally to their relationship expressed through marriage . . . . Marriage is depicted as a covenant relationship . . . . Marriage involved the two united in commitment; two parties are bound by stipulations, forming a new entity or relationship. The two people . . . . become dependent and responsible toward one another.”<sup>4</sup> God created marriage so that Adam would not be alone and that he would have a helper. Eve was created from his own body, and both are “one flesh” (Gen 2:18, 21-25 NKJV). Another author commented, “Since, by virtue of creation, the bond between husband and wife is stronger than any other human relationship . . . . God mercifully bases his marriage ordinance up on man’s own natural inclination [to cleave to his wife], the strong bent or desire with which the Almighty himself endowed him.”<sup>5</sup> This same author

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<sup>3</sup>Danny Akin, *Biblical Marriage in A Broken World: A Biblical and Practical Theology of a Redeemed Relationship* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 17 November 2011; available from <http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/ETS-2011.-Biblical-Marriage-In-A-Broken-World.-A-Biblical-and-Practical-Theology-of-a-Redeemed-Relationship.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 222-23.

<sup>5</sup>William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 256.



explained that the love between a husband and wife was so deep that in its purest form, it is “patterned after that of Christ for his church.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Fall**

In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the “tree of knowledge.” In addition, when God confronted them about the incident, they blamed each other (Gen 3:12-13). As a result of their disobedience, God banished them from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:23-24). The consequences of their sin caused a division in their marriage— “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Gen 3:16 NIV).

An article in the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* described how a marriage suffered from the effects of the “Fall”—marriages should be a “picture of Christ and the church” as explained by Paul in Ephesians 5, but “if husbands are too proud and lazy to be kind and loving sacrificial servant leaders, then the picture doesn’t work . . . . Likewise, a self-centered, self-pursuing, disobedient, dishonoring wife sends the message that the church should be self-centered, self-pursuing, disobedient, and dishonoring to Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Marriage should epitomize self-sacrifice; however, marriage in the context of the “Fall” diminishes the covenant marital relationship exhibited by Jesus Christ for His church.

## **Redemption**

The book of Ephesians provided a prescript for a redeemed marriage, “Wives,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 256.

<sup>7</sup>Eric M. Schumacher, “The Means, Mandates, and Motivation of Biblical Womanhood in Titus 2:4–5,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14 (2009): 54-55.

submit to your husbands as to the Lord . . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies . . . . After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church” (Eph 5:22, 25, 28-29 NIV). In these verses, marriage was shown as the same type of relationship as the one between Jesus Christ and the church—marriage was a “holy union, a living symbol, a precious relationship that needs tender, self-sacrificing care.”<sup>8</sup> John Piper stated, “Marriage exists ultimately to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church.”<sup>9</sup> The husband and wife should demonstrate to each other the same actions that were exhibited by Jesus Christ and the church—as they honor one another they were embodying God’s work in their marriage for the entire world to see.

**Summary of the Three Movements:  
Creation, Fall, Redemption**

A man and a woman become one flesh when they marry—this was part of God’s created plan (Gen 2). God’s plan for marriage was disrupted when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him and He banished them from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3)—since then, marriages have suffered from the effects of sin. Through Christ, marriages can be redeemed so that they reflect the covenant relationship that is illustrated between Jesus Christ and His church.

**Views on Marriage**

According to a report generated by the United States Center for Disease

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<sup>8</sup>Bruce B. Barton et al., *Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians*, 114.

<sup>9</sup>John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 42.

Control and Prevention (CDC), over 2 million people in the U.S. get married every year.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, 40% of first time marriages end in divorce.<sup>11</sup> These were staggering statistics, and perhaps the astonishing divorce rate was the reflection of a distorted view of marriage. How should one view marriage?

Authors Les and Leslie Parrott explained that no marriage was perfect because people were imperfect—“every bride and groom has faults as well as virtues. We are at times gloomy, cranky, selfish, or unreasonable. We are a mixture of generous, altruistic feelings combined with self-seeking aims, petty vanities, and ambitions . . . . Marriage is an alloy of gold and tin. If we expect more than this, we are doomed to disappointment.”<sup>12</sup> Sometimes people have unrealistic expectations about marriage and they might look to divorce as a way out when they get disenchanted with the reality of the marital relationship.

In his book *Marriage as Covenant*, John Tarwater presented four models of marriage that he named, Covenantal Model, Sacramental Model, Non-Covenantal Evangelical Model, and Contract Model.<sup>13</sup> The Covenantal Model<sup>14</sup> was based on John Calvin’s view of marriage: “Calvin retained the Protestant conviction that celibacy was not a higher calling than marriage. As a covenantal relationship designed and instituted

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<sup>10</sup>Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends: 2000-2009” (2009) [on-line]; accessed 25 June 2011; available from [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage\\_divorce\\_tables.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm); Internet.

<sup>11</sup>W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Evolution of Divorce,” *National Affairs* 1 (2009): 88.

<sup>12</sup>Les Parrott, and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage before It Starts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 74.

<sup>13</sup>John K. Tarwater, *Marriage as Covenant: Considering God’s Design at Creation and the Contemporary Moral Consequences* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 3-9.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 4-5.

by God, marriage was good and holy;” God was seen as the “third party member to all marriages, acting as guarantor of the institution.”<sup>15</sup> The Sacramental Model<sup>16</sup> derived from Augustine’s view of marriage: “Marriage becomes a way of reaching higher levels of spiritual achievement, or of grasping some larger measure of spiritual power through material experience; marriage is a means of spiritual transformation.”<sup>17</sup>

The Non-Covenantal Evangelical Model focused on the view that “Marriage is a divine institution, characterized by permanence and fidelity . . . partners in marriage may dissolve their ‘covenant relationship’ under certain conditions.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, the Contract Model centered on the understanding that marriage was a contract which made marriage a “matter of the state”—“neither the church nor its Scriptures define the nature of marriage; instead, the institution of marriage finds its basis in the changing standards of human law.”<sup>19</sup> Of the four models of marriage, the one that aligned more closely to biblical principles was the Covenantal model because God was seen as the Creator of

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<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2009; Kindle ed.), location 21987 of 27055. John Calvin states “Let everyone consider with himself from what forge these things have come. Christ deigns so to honour marriage as to make it an image of his sacred union with the Church. What greater eulogy could be pronounced on the dignity of marriage? How, then, dare they have the effrontery to give the name of unclean and polluted to that which furnishes a bright representation of the spiritual grace of Christ?”

<sup>16</sup>Tarwater, *Marriage as Covenant*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup>Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 2011; Kindle ed.), location 430 of 795. Augustine proclaims, “A marriage once for all entered upon in the City of our God, where, even from the first union of the two, the man and the woman, marriage bears a certain sacramental character can no way be dissolved but by the death of one of them. For the bond of marriage remains, although a family, for the sake of which it was entered upon, do not follow through manifest barrenness; so that, when now married persons know that they shall not have children, yet it is not lawful for them to separate even for the very sake of children, and to join themselves unto others.”

<sup>18</sup>Tarwater, *Marriage as Covenant*, 8.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

marriage. The Contract model appeared to be the opposite of the Covenantal model since it supported the reinterpretation of marriage and readily permitted divorce.

### **Divorce in the United States**

Divorce does not suddenly happen to a couple. According to sociologists Paul Amato and Bryndl Hohmann-Marriott, divorce was the culmination of a long and steady negative process: “couples disagree and fight frequently, partners become increasingly disengaged from one another emotionally, and each partner’s marital happiness declines. Eventually, one or both partners decide that the marriage has eroded to the point where it cannot be salvaged. As a result, one partner, often with the consent of the other, files for marital dissolution.”<sup>20</sup> According to another journal article co-authored by Amato, distal factors, such as the couple’s age at the time of marriage, were likely to cause difficulties in the marriage but when they also included proximal problems (i.e., anger or hurt feelings) then the possibility of divorce was amplified (see Figure 1).<sup>21</sup>

To explain further, variables such as age at marriage, remarriage, and parental divorce can increase the possibility of divorce because it can become a factor in creating problems in the marriage. With the variable of “age at marriage,” Amato explained, “When marriage occurs at younger ages, spouses are more likely to report marital problems associated with infidelity and jealousy. This suggests that these marriages tend to be unstable because young spouses are readily drawn into extramarital relationships.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Paul Amato and Bryndl Hohmann-Marriott, “A Comparison of High- and Low-Distress Marriages That End in Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 621.

<sup>21</sup>Paul R. Amato and Stacy J. Rogers, “A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1997): 614.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 623.

Another author stated, “Neither husband's nor wife's anger was predictive of divorce; however, both husband's and wife's high intensity negative affect, (the sum of belligerence, defensiveness, and contempt) did predict divorce. [In addition], the wife's low-intensity negative affect— the sum of whining, anger, sadness, domineering, disgust, fear, and stonewalling— did predict divorce.”<sup>23</sup> Apparently, continual intense or negative emotions and actions may eventually cause a couple to seek divorce.

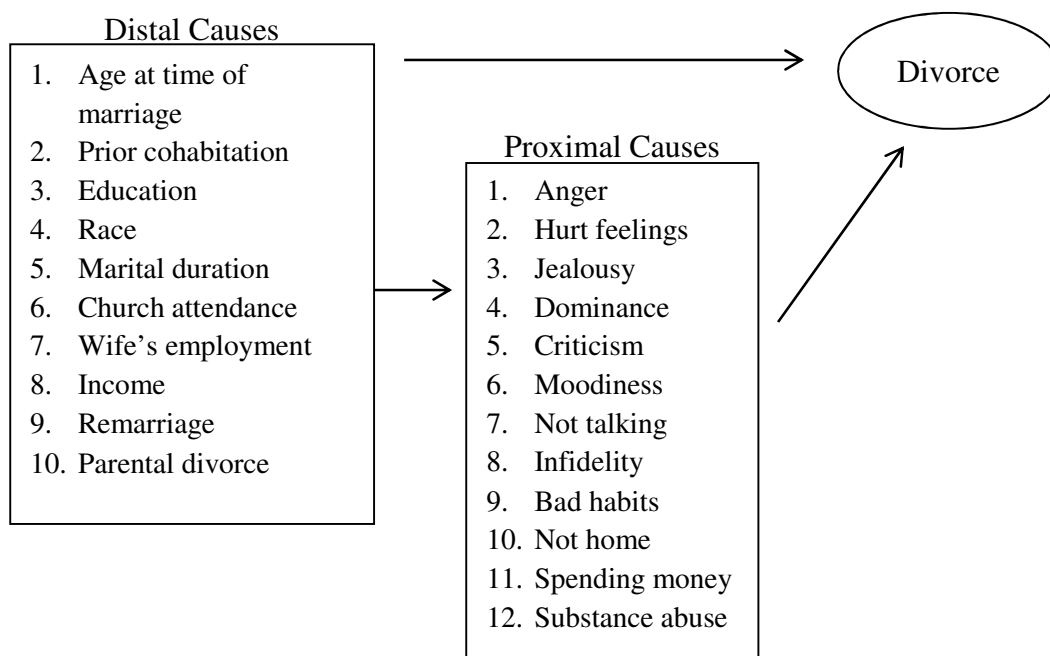


Figure 1. Amato and Rogers distal and proximal causes of divorce found in page 623

Even though divorce happened for various reasons, it was obvious that several factors, and not just one factor, contributed to marital distress and eventual divorce. One author described the lure of divorce: “We [Christians] have bought into the world’s view of marriage in a major way—believing all sorts of lies that follow the false and seductive

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<sup>23</sup>John M. Gottman et al., “Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60 (1998): 13.

belief that marriage and my partner exist primarily to make me happy. Hence, when we end up ‘losing at love,’ we then blame marriage and our spouse for it and divorce becomes an alluring lie that promises a way out and a fresh start.”<sup>24</sup> Some Christians have the wrong view of marriage (that it was based on personal happiness), and their idea that divorce was an option (if one was not happy in the marriage) was misguided.

### **Biblical Understanding of Divorce**

In Malachi 2:16, God said, “I hate divorce.” Although this passage was very direct and clear, several commentaries elaborated on its meaning. For example, one writer explained that not only was God against divorce, but the one who divorced his wife “shows himself openly to all beholders as an iniquitous [evil, wicked, sinful] man.”<sup>25</sup> Another writer asserted, “The one who divorces his wife out of hate or greedy desire joins a ‘devilish fraternity’ because he is ‘wickedly and unscrupulously robbing’ her of the things that he should be giving to her (‘blessings, good, praise, and peace’).”<sup>26</sup> God hated divorce because marriage was a “covenant” and must be taken “with utmost seriousness,” in fact, “not even the man who is part of that union may make such a separation.”<sup>27</sup> These statements suggested that married couples do not have the authority to divorce one another.

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<sup>24</sup>Tim Clinton, “The State of Christian Marriage,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003): 181.

<sup>25</sup>W. J. Deane and E. S. Prout, *Malachi*, The Pulpit Commentary (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1977), 23.

<sup>26</sup>Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Malachi*, The New American Commentary, vol. 21a (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2004), 369.

<sup>27</sup>Robert L. Alden, *Malachi*, in vol. 7 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 717.

Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 19:8, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.” Craig Blomberg specified that God “did not originally create people to divorce each other, and therefore does not intend for those whom he re-creates—the community of Jesus’ followers—to practice divorce.”<sup>28</sup> Christian couples should not resort to divorce. William Hendriksen claimed that the act of divorcing then marrying another person was equated with adultery: “Jesus declares that whoever divorces a faithful wife, and adds to his sin by marrying someone else, thereby rending reconciliation with the woman whom he had been married impossible, involves himself in—or commits—adultery.”<sup>29</sup> Divorce was bad enough, but it should not be compounded with another marriage.

D.A. Carson stated, “Since marriage is grounded in creation then it cannot be reduced to a merely covenantal relationship that breaks down when the covenantal promises are broken . . . . divorce is rebellion against God.”<sup>30</sup> Divorce was not part of God’s plan and God did not intend for couples to get divorced. Marriage was a covenant— a “compact or agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each other’s behalf . . . . it denotes a gracious undertaking entered into by God for the benefit and blessing of humanity.”<sup>31</sup> Marriage was an act of God.

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<sup>28</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 291.

<sup>29</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 716.

<sup>30</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 88.

<sup>31</sup>Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Covenant,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 299.



Believers were told to remain married: “Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his . . . . So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Mal 2:15). Essentially, this passage was saying that God “made monogamous marriage and intends unions to last”—people should stay married to their spouse.<sup>32</sup> Along the same line, Jesus declared in Mark 10:8-9, “‘the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Since a married couple was now essentially one body, there was no way they can be separated. Commenting on verse 9 of Mark 10, William Lane stated, “Jesus’ pronouncement grounds the sanctity of marriage in the authority of God himself . . . . that the man who dissolves a union sanctioned by God inevitably stands under the divine judgment.”<sup>33</sup> Another writer explained, “Those who decide to marry must view marriage as a divine institution . . . . According to Christ’s teaching, husband and wife form a team . . . . For a man to separate that which God has yoked or joined together means arrogantly to defy an act of God!”<sup>34</sup> People do not have the right to get a divorce because God, and not people, instituted marriage.

One author asserted that when the “no-fault” divorce law became popular in many states, it led to an increase in divorce—the divorce rate more than doubled from 1960 to 1980.<sup>35</sup> Americans continued to get divorced. In a 2011 U.S. Census report it stated, “first marriages which ended in divorce lasted a median of 8 years for men and

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<sup>32</sup>Alden, *Malachi*, 717.

<sup>33</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 356.

<sup>34</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 378-79.

<sup>35</sup>W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Evolution of Divorce,” *National Affairs* (Fall 2009), 81.

women overall.”<sup>36</sup> The Barna Group reported, “born again Christians have the same likelihood of divorce as do non-Christians. Among married born again Christians, 35% have experienced a divorce.”<sup>37</sup> The fact was that divorce happened even among believers. The Barna Group specified, “Nearly one-quarter of the married born agains (23%) get divorced two or more times.”<sup>38</sup> Sadly, both Christians and non-Christians have ended their marriages through divorce.

Family Builders Ministries proclaimed that the solution to the high number of divorces within the church was to “raise up an army of trained marriage mentors in churches who will develop a comprehensive marriage ministry that prepares couples for marriage, helps married couples maximize their relationship, and provides effective resources for couples in distress.”<sup>39</sup> Well-known marriage expert, Mike McManus stated, “If only a third of the nation's 300,000 churches each trained 10 mentor couples by 2020, there would be a million mentor couples who could save half of the 1.2 million couples who divorce annually.”<sup>40</sup> Both statements illustrated the need for marriage mentors.

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<sup>36</sup>Rose M. Kreider and Renee Ellis, *Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2009* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), 15. The authors presented the data with the median rate of divorce. The averages were categorized by race: White/non-Hispanic, 7.85; Black, 8.45; Asian, 8.25; All remaining races and combinations, 7.9; and Hispanics, 8.05.

<sup>37</sup>The Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians” (2004) [on-line]; accessed 1 May 2011; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again>; Internet.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>William Batson, *Family Builders Ministries* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 26 June 2011; available from [http://www.familybuilders.net/marriage\\_mentoring\\_seminar.htm](http://www.familybuilders.net/marriage_mentoring_seminar.htm); Internet.

<sup>40</sup>Mike McManus, *How to Virtually Eliminate Divorce in Your Congregation* (2010) [on-line]; accessed 25 June 2011; available from <http://www.marriagesavers.org/sitems/Training>; Internet.

## Biblical Foundation for Mentoring

The book of Titus provided a picture of mentoring—“older” Christians were instructed to teach “younger” Christians (“Teach the older men . . . Likewise, teach the older women . . . Then they can train the younger”) (Titus 2:2-4). When this process was applied to marriages, mentoring was seen as couples in established marriages who mentor couples that have been married for only a few years. The word, “older,” referred to “those who were experienced in life, marriage, and child rearing.”<sup>41</sup> As one writer stated, “‘Younger’ suggests a reference to the newly married”; older women were to demonstrate “by personal word and example what is morally good, noble, and attractive.”<sup>42</sup>

Specifically, “Christian matrons are to assist the younger women in the discipline of family love, not of course as interfering busybodies, but as humble advisers on problems of married life.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, John Calvin commented, “it is not enough if their own life be decent, if they do not also train young women, by their instructions, to a decent and chaste life.”<sup>44</sup> One of the responsibilities in being an older Christian was to train or mentor the younger generation— especially in the area of marriage. William Mounce expounded, “the characteristic that elder women must teach [in its] context refers not to an official teaching position in church but rather to informal, one-on-one

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<sup>41</sup>William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 410.

<sup>42</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus*, Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 927.

<sup>43</sup>Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 214.

<sup>44</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 1 May 2011; available from [http://christianbookshelf.org/calvin/commentary\\_on\\_timothy\\_titus\\_philemon/titus\\_2\\_1-5.htm](http://christianbookshelf.org/calvin/commentary_on_timothy_titus_philemon/titus_2_1-5.htm); Internet.

encouragement.”<sup>45</sup> The way the word “teach” was used in the Titus passage more closely related to mentoring rather than formal teaching. In fact, “teaching” in this setting (older teaching younger) referred to “encourage, advice, [and] urge.”<sup>46</sup>

The teaching (mentoring) that was described in Titus 2 is meant to create “congenial and cohesive Christian family units” within the church.<sup>47</sup> Older women should instruct younger women in areas that specifically related to their own families: “these young women must scrupulously avoid any immorality in thought, word, and action . . . . not only must they be chaste but also workers at home . . . . self-control is the most necessary requirement for any practical Christian wife and mother . . . . a young woman’s own husband and her own children should occupy a very prominent place [in her life].”<sup>48</sup> Older women (and older men) had a duty to ensure that young families in their church remained intact and flourishing.

An article in the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* prescribed that older women be “intentionally encouraging, advising, and urging the younger women by setting an example in word and in deed,” and that these older women ought to practice “investing in the lives of younger Christian women with the intentional purpose of helping them to apply the gospel to their lives.”<sup>49</sup> Mounce noted simply that mentoring

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<sup>45</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 410.

<sup>46</sup>George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 307.

<sup>47</sup>Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992), 300.

<sup>48</sup>William Hendricksen and Simon J. Kistmaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 365.

<sup>49</sup>Schumacher, “The Means, Mandates, and Motivation,” 51-52.

happens, “Just as the older Paul worked with the younger Timothy.”<sup>50</sup> Clearly, the same type of process ought to be practiced by an older couple—that they should guide and inspire a younger couple.

### **Overview of Mentoring**

One author affirmed that mentoring as a “preventive intervention” stemmed from the belief that couples (typically pre-marital couples) can learn from “observing and interacting” with other couples who were “models of successful marriages” as they shared their “insights and experiences” with the younger couple.<sup>51</sup> Someone who mentors was actually supporting another person in becoming a well-developed Christian. Mentoring was described as a process that “takes work” and necessitated the “consistent, self-sacrificing love of [one] who is willing to invest his or her life to encourage and to teach [another]”; mentoring stressed “loving a person through failures and immaturity and helping him or her mature into a life of service for the Lord.”<sup>52</sup>

Mentoring was devoting personal time to someone else so that he or she can develop into a mature believer. Chuck Lawless declared that mentoring “takes place within a God-given relationship,” where the parties involved provided encouragement and support as they challenged one another to “strive for God’s best” while personally growing in their own “Christian walk.”<sup>53</sup> Mentoring also teaches others about “loving

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<sup>50</sup>Mounce, “Pastoral Epistles,” 411.

<sup>51</sup>Steven A. Wages, “A Formative and Summative Evaluation of a Marriage Preparation Program Using Mentor Couples,” (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 2002), 9.

<sup>52</sup>Mel Walker, *Mentoring the Next Generation* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>53</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Making Disciples Through Mentoring: Lessons from Paul and Timothy* (Oxnard, CA: Ephesians Four Ministries, Church Growth Institute, 2002), 51.

what is good.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the heart of mentoring is expressed in Galatians 6:2, “bearing one another’s burdens”; being a part of a person’s life, and helping one another to become an image bearer of Jesus Christ.

The idea of sharing another’s burden was clearly illustrated in Parrott and Parrott’s depiction of marriage mentoring. Les and Leslie Parrott claimed that mentoring is to “lovingly invest in the preparation, maximization, and restoration of lifelong marriages by walking alongside couples who are less experienced than their mentors;”<sup>55</sup> but marriage mentoring helped more than the couples involved. In fact, Family Builders Ministries, a marriage ministry, provided the following reasons for starting a marriage mentoring ministry in the church:

1. Pastors are burdened by the number of couples needing assistance and the lack of time they have to help.
2. Churches are burdened by the high number of marriages that are failing inside the church but they are unable to effectively tackle the problem.<sup>56</sup>

According to Family Builders, marriage mentoring was the answer because, “pastors will not be overwhelmed by distressed marriages, churches will be more relationally healthy, children will be raised in healthy homes by their parents, and the world will see a compelling portrait of the transforming power of Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup> Marriage mentoring helped the entire church.

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<sup>54</sup>Mounce, “Pastoral Epistles,” 410.

<sup>55</sup>Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring: Connecting Couples to Build Better Marriages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009; Kindle ed.), locations 2825 of 3198.

<sup>56</sup>William Batson, *Family Builders Ministry* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 26 June 2011; available from [http://www.familybuilders.net/marriage\\_mentoring\\_seminar.htm](http://www.familybuilders.net/marriage_mentoring_seminar.htm); Internet.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

## Current Research on Marriage Mentorship

One author noted, “Empirical evaluation and research of mentoring has usually been limited to informal, anecdotal reports of couples helping other couples.”<sup>58</sup> Very little academic research was written regarding marriage mentoring; actually, only five dissertations and a limited number of journal articles were found, but all centered on marriage mentoring in a premarital or newly married context. One researcher commented, “Research on the effectiveness of marriage mentoring programs compared to non-mentoring programs could not be found;” the researcher then noted that the benefits of mentoring can be seen through business-related studies: “When the career benefits of mentoring were examined, mentee groups were found to be higher on measures of objective career outcomes, compensation, number of promotions, and job satisfaction . . . . If mentoring can increase success, satisfaction, and commitment in the workplace, then it may have the same positive results for marriages.”<sup>59</sup>

All previous research on mentoring has agreed that marriage mentoring was beneficial for premarital or newly married couples. Mentoring in the context of marriage was to have similar outcomes as those found in mentoring in the business context—specifically, improved satisfaction and commitment to the marriage. Additionally, marriage mentoring has shown to increase communication among pre-married and newly married couples. Marriage mentoring goes beyond discipleship in that it addresses the issues previously mentioned in both a formal and informal basis.

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<sup>58</sup>Wages, “A Formative and Summative Evaluation,” 9.

<sup>59</sup>Kristin D. Byington, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Marriage Mentoring Program” (Ph.D. diss., Seattle Pacific University, 2008), 32-33.

## **Steven Wages Research on Marriage Mentoring**

In his dissertation, Steven Wages reviewed a marriage preparation program he created, *Fit To Be Tied*, as a preventative to separation and divorce during the early years of a married couple's life.<sup>60</sup> The program utilized mentoring couples but also incorporated the PREPARE/ENRICH pre-marital inventory assessment and 8 weeks of group class sessions ("didactic instructions"); of the three methods used, mentoring was found to be the most helpful element because it offered a personal perspective of a working marriage.<sup>61</sup> Wages noted, "Four out of five participants signified that their mentor couple effectively modeled how to resolve conflicts, and nearly two-thirds observed that interacting with their mentor couple actually helped them resolve relationship issues they faced."<sup>62</sup>

Wages believed that marital distress was the result of the combination of "personality characteristics or intrinsic qualities of the partners" (such as "lack of concern" for the spouse or "insensitivity to partner's feelings, wants, or needs") and "knowledge issues" (i.e., lacking communication skills).<sup>63</sup> In fact, Wages discovered that couples who went through the program report that they were "fighting" less, "understanding each other better," more willing to "talk about difficult issues," "more forgiving" of one another, were "actively listening to one another," "more confident" in

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<sup>60</sup>Wages, "A Formative and Summative Evaluation," 288-89.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 177-80.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 298.



their future together, and were “happier.”<sup>64</sup> Wages suggested that couples work on changing their “attitudes” and “caring behaviors” to ensure “future marital satisfaction and stability.”<sup>65</sup> His conclusion seemed to support Amato’s finding that more than one negative variable increases the likelihood of divorce.<sup>66</sup>

### **Gwen Sandstrom Research on Marriage Mentoring**

Another dissertation on marriage mentoring, written by Gwen Sandstrom, studied the effect of mentoring “when utilized in a premarital program.”<sup>67</sup> Her research focused on the attitude and behavior of couples who have gone through the premarital marriage mentoring program, PREPARE/ENRICH, which was used to prepare couples for marriage in the hopes of reducing the likelihood of divorce in the future.<sup>68</sup> Sandstrom believed that marriage mentoring in a premarital context was a better alternative to counseling for several reasons: (1) marriage mentors were more likely to acknowledge their flaws than a counselor, (2) mentors were perceived as “more real” and “credible,” and (3) mentoring provided the combined wisdom of both the male and female perspective.<sup>69</sup>

The results of her qualitative study indicated that the more time mentors met with their assigned couples, the more the couples benefitted from the mentoring process

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>66</sup>Amato, and Rogers, “A Longitudinal Study,” 614.

<sup>67</sup>Gwen D. Sandstrom, “The Effect of Marriage Mentoring When Utilized in a Premarital Program” (Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2004), 5.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 23.

(mentors in her study are obligated to meet face-to-face with their assigned couples between 3 to 5 times during the 12 week program).<sup>70</sup> Other indications (and recommendations) were as follows:

1. A premarital couple was more likely to learn from another couple if they have a positive interpersonal relationship with them and if they feel supported by them.
2. According to the mentees, having mentors that were models of a long-standing, loving marriage helped the mentoring experience.
3. Having a good relationship established with a loving couple made them [the mentees] feel comfortable about approaching them in the future if they did have problems.
4. The mentoring experience should start earlier in the premarital process and mentors and their mentees should have more meeting times.
5. Mentor and mentees should have a couple meetings after the couple was married.
6. The first meeting should concentrate only on the relationship between the older and younger married couples and not on the profile, so a bonding could start from the beginning.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, Sandstrom found that “open, caring connection that focuses on encouragement and support-elements” was vital to mentoring.<sup>72</sup> Mentoring was beneficial because it provided a “model of a couple with a long-standing, loving marriage, as well as the increased feelings of confidence that comes from feeling supported.”<sup>73</sup> Mentoring provided an environment where young married couples can learn how an ordinary marriage functioned from a seasoned couple.

### **Eric Gadol Research on Marriage Mentoring**

In another study, Eric Gadol trained mentors by providing them with a training

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 53, 55.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 73.

manual and a young married couple to mentor.<sup>74</sup> Mentoring was concentrated on building communication, and the study, “examined a new method of delivery that seemed to have the potential for achieving such positive increases in relationship satisfaction for young couples.”<sup>75</sup> Based on the young couples’ scores on the modified Couples Alliance Inventory (CAI-M), Gadol found that “higher risk couples” benefitted the most from the mentoring relationship.<sup>76</sup> Another finding was that the young married couples’ perception of marriage as being sacred was increased through the mentoring experience, especially when the mentoring was received through a “religious organization.”<sup>77</sup> It was evident that mentoring was helpful to those with a higher risk factor for divorce, and mentoring that was provided by churches help to form a biblical understanding of marriage for all couples.

### **Kristin Byington Research on Marriage Mentoring**

A dissertation by Kristin Byington studied marriage mentoring in a newly married context as a way to increase marital satisfaction in both mentor and mentee couples (couples who provide mentoring, and the couples who receive the mentoring).<sup>78</sup> Her study was limited to participants from five Free Methodist churches that were trained

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<sup>74</sup>Eric N. Gadol, “Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 41-46.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 59, 70.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 81, 85.

<sup>78</sup>Byington, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Marriage Mentoring Program,” 7-8.

and matched to a newly married couple that met at various times over 6 months.<sup>79</sup>

Although there was a large number of people who dropped out of her study (of the 118 individuals who started the study, only 59 completed it), Byington still found the results very useful. For example, Byington discovered that after 5 to 6 weeks of the mentoring process, there was an increase in “affective communication” (dialogue that was loving and more affectionate) among couples who provided mentoring and those receiving mentoring.<sup>80</sup> In addition, she found that all couples “increased their satisfaction about the amount of time they spent together” while going through the study.<sup>81</sup>

A surprise finding was made based on her data—“Mentor couples may not significantly increase their marital satisfaction through participating in a marriage mentoring program.”<sup>82</sup> Her conclusion was opposite of the claims made by Parrott and Parrott—that mentoring increased marital satisfaction in both mentor and mentee couples.<sup>83</sup> In spite of the outcome, she reasoned, “The mentoring program may still be a highly effective intervention for mentee couples even if the program does not increase mentor couples’ marital satisfaction.”<sup>84</sup> She made this claim because the couples increased in the amount of time spent and communication with one another as a direct

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 84, 90.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 92.

result of mentoring. As cited in one journal article, the most frequent marital problem involved communication difficulties and “not spending enough time.”<sup>85</sup>

### **Shannan Crawford Research on Marriage Mentoring**

Shannan Crawford’s dissertation studied the effects of marriage mentoring as it related to “relationship satisfaction and adjustment” and “perceived intimacy” in “premarried” and “early-married” couples.<sup>86</sup> She scrutinized several marriage education programs to see if they addressed “schemas, attributions, and rules of reciprocity,” and found that they were effective “in producing immediate short-term gains” but that the improvements considerably diminish over time.<sup>87</sup> Crawford believed that marriage mentoring was the element that was needed in marriage education programs in order for young married couples to practice the skills they learned.<sup>88</sup>

In her mentoring study, six younger married couples who received pre-marital counseling within the past 3 years were paired with older married couples who were married for at least 10 years without separation. Young couples who had “clinically significant issues in their marriage and or in their personal life” were not allowed to participate in the study.<sup>89</sup> The participants were required to meet eight times over a 4 month period. Although none of the participants were experiencing marital distress, all seemed to benefit from the experience. Crawford noted the following findings:

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<sup>85</sup>Amato and Rogers, *A Longitudinal Study*, 613.

<sup>86</sup>Shannan C. Crawford, “Efficacy of the Parrott’s Couples Mentoring Program in a Community Setting” (Psy.D. diss., Regent University, 2009), 2, 37.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 16, 22.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-41.

1. Mentee couples (those receiving the mentoring) benefitted from “observing their mentor couple model healthy relationship interaction” and benefited least from directives or advice.
2. Mentee couples felt that mentor feedback and modeling “reduced their sense of helplessness and engendered a sense of empowerment and hope.”
3. Marriage mentoring “offers a positive buffer during times of stress/crisis.”<sup>90</sup>

Crawford’s work demonstrated that young married couples can benefit from mentoring by watching the interaction of older couples; in addition, older married couples can help younger couples by offering a listening ear and by providing a safe place to ask questions.

### **The Need for the Current Study**

As shown in Appendix 1, even though Wages discovered that there were merits to the premarital program and marriage mentoring, his study centered on premarital couples who are not experiencing marital distress. Although Sandstrom’s study provided helpful findings regarding the mentoring process, its emphasis was on couples who received premarital mentoring and not on married couples in distress. None of the participants in Gadol’s study was experiencing marital distress; in fact, one of the criteria for participation in his study was low marital distress.<sup>91</sup> Byington’s study focused on newlywed couples who were mentored, and although she found benefits for the mentoring process, her participants were not experiencing marital distress to the point of impending divorce. Finally, Crawford looked at marriage education and recommended that mentoring be added as a means to build relational skills among couples. Though her study validated the results of other studies— that mentoring was beneficial— her

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>91</sup>Gadol, “Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program,” 30.

participants were newly married couples who were not experiencing major marital problems. All the studies recommended that further research was needed for marriage mentoring with couples in established marriages.

The current study was unique in that it examined couples in established marriages that were in marital distress when they participated in mentoring, which in turn, prevented an impending divorce. Mentoring was shown to improve communication and time spent among pre-married and newly married couples, but its benefit was not noted among couples in established marriages who were experiencing marital distress and considering divorce.

### **Potential Usefulness for the Church**

Marriage mentoring can be an avenue to indirectly teach couples the relational skills needed to stay married. These skills were evident in the “two truths” to good marriages that a research team discovered:

1. Happily married couples behaved like good friends—spouses in happy, stable marriages made five positive remarks for every one negative remark when they were discussing conflict . . . their relationships were characterized by respect, affection, and empathy. They paid close attention to what’s happening in each other’s life and they felt emotionally connected.
2. Happily married couples handled their conflicts in gentle, positive ways—they recognized that conflict was inevitable in any marriage, and that some problems never get solved, never go away. But these couples don’t get gridlocked in their separate positions; instead, they kept talking with each other about conflicts. They listened respectfully to their spouses’ perspectives and they found compromises that worked for both sides.<sup>92</sup>

Marriage mentors showed how they interacted with their own spouses, and they also discussed how they handled conflicts in their own relationship—this open example

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<sup>92</sup>John M. Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, and Joan DeClarire. *Ten Lessons to Transform Your Marriage* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 3-4.

provided a great opportunity for distressed couples to learn the correct way to communicate with one another especially through difficulties.

One article specified that couples received their understanding of marriage through observation, but some of what they learned may not be helpful: “Spouses learn about marriage based on observation of their own parents’ marriage. Both positive and negative aspects of the parental marriage are transmitted across generations.”<sup>93</sup> Marriage mentoring is used to provide a godly picture of marriage—something couples may not have seen in their own parents’ marriage. The Bible tells believers to live in peace—this is especially true for married couples: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy . . . . See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Heb 12:14-15).

### **Summary**

It is obvious that the topic of marriage and divorce was very important as evidenced by the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) records of marriages and divorces kept in the country. Even though marriage was significant in the United States, it is even more vital to Christians because it illustrates the relationship of Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. Since marriages are an image of Christ and His church, it is imperative that marriages remain intact.

Researchers have studied marriage mentoring for premarital and newly married couples, and in this setting it was shown to increase loving communication among

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<sup>93</sup>Melissa Curran et al., “Understanding Marital Conflict 7 Years Later from Prenatal Representations of Marriage,” *Family Process* 50 (2011): 222.



couples.<sup>94</sup> In addition, mentoring provided a forum to air frustrations and to receive helpful advice, thus decreasing marital strain.<sup>95</sup> Based on the positive reports found in mentoring research of pre-married or newly married couples, marriage mentoring ought to produce positive results in distressed couples in established marriages. As no academic research on marriage mentoring of couples in established marriages existed, a study on this topic was beneficial to pastors, churches, and researchers.

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<sup>94</sup>Byington, "Evaluating the Effectiveness," 92.

<sup>95</sup>Crawford, "Efficacy of the Parrott's Couples Mentoring Program," 97-98.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The current study sought to examine marriage mentoring as a mode of preventing couples in marital crisis from seeking divorce.

#### **Research Question Synopsis**

Is marriage mentoring an effective technique to repair marriages? Churches and Christian counseling centers have utilized marriage mentoring primarily for pre-marital or newly married couples to enhance the marital relationship— not necessarily to restore marriages or prevent divorce in an established marriage. The lack of academic research on the topic of mentoring in troubled, long-standing marriages warranted a study.

#### **Design Overview**

This qualitative study examined the causes of the dissolution of marriages by examining current research. Upon completion of the literature review, interviews and content analysis were conducted in order to group analogous themes and patterns for coding purposes.

Couples for the study were sought through mentoring websites such as Parrott and Parrott's site, *Real Relationships*, and *PREPARE* website, as well as recommendations of seminary professors, church practitioners, mentors, and counselors who are familiar with mentoring ministries. Thirteen couples who had successfully

restored their marriages through marriage mentoring from various churches and Christian counseling centers were chosen for the study and interviewed by phone in order to collect qualitative data. Questions that encouraged an open response were asked of each couple. Content analysis allowed for the identification of broad themes and common threads. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the data collection process to protect privacy.

Interviews were recorded for the purposes of transcription. The data was analyzed through Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) using an online coding analysis toolkit and a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software.<sup>1</sup> Similar themes from the interviews were coded in order to obtain a rapid retrieval of the common data among the couples for presentation in chapter 4. Once coded, analysis was made and then evaluated in chapter 5.

### **Sample and Delimitations**

A non-probabilistic sampling approach was taken for the population of churches and Christian counseling centers with marriage mentoring ministries in the continental U.S. This sampling resulted in a purposive sample of thirteen couples who had undergone marriage mentoring to restore their marriages. Purposeful sampling was the preferred data collection method for the current study since “samples are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating.”<sup>2</sup>

The study was limited to couples who had experienced a marital crisis but were reconciled for a year or longer with the help of marriage mentoring. The study was

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Lewins, Celia Taylor and Graham R. Gibbs, *Qualitative Analysis Data* (2010) [on-line]; accessed 11 May 2011; available from [http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro\\_QDA/what\\_is\\_qda.php](http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php); Internet.

<sup>2</sup>James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education: A Conceptual Understanding*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Columbus, OH: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 397.

delimited to couples who received mentoring through a church or a Christian counseling center. The study was delimited to couples who had received mentoring from a church or Christian counseling center.

Other delimitations for the current study included the following:

1. The study was delimited to couples who had been married for at least 3 years at the time they sought the help of marriage mentors.
2. The study was delimited to couples who had experienced marital distress which caused them to seek the help of marriage mentors.
3. The study was delimited to couples who had been married for at least a year (and are still married) following marriage mentoring.
4. The study was delimited to couples who had expressed a covenant view of marriage.

### **Limitations of Generalization**

Due to the unique focus of this study, the results may not be generalized beyond study participants to other couples who had received marriage mentoring. Although churches and Christian counseling centers with mentoring programs were utilized for the study, the findings may not be generalized to other churches or Christian counseling centers that offered marriage mentoring. However, it is believed that the findings from the current study may be transferable in understanding how marriage mentoring can be an effective technique for couples in marital crisis.

### **Questionnaire**

A semi-structured interview protocol was used through a phone interview. The questionnaire contained 15 questions (see Appendix 2). Questions regarding the length of time the couple had been married, the number of years the couple had been reconciled, and also at what point in their marriage they sought help. Other information that was

yielded from the questionnaire included the conflicts and difficulties that were experienced by the couple and their perception of their marriage prior to mentoring; how marriage mentoring had helped them to deal with conflicts and how their marriages were strengthened by the mentoring experience. In addition, the questionnaire indicated the length of time couples have been mentored, their perception of mentoring, and any suggestions they may have had of the mentoring process.

The questions were meant to obtain qualitative information about the couples' mentoring experience. Also, the questions that were chosen helped to understand the struggles and process of marriage mentoring. The interview allowed couples to describe how their mentors have helped them in their marriage, which gave insight into the involvement of mentoring in the process for the reconciliation of the couples.

### **Research Procedures**

This study relied on interviewing couples in established marriages who had experienced marital distress but received marriage mentoring in order to prevent divorce. Since the study relied on the interview process, qualitative research was conducted—"in qualitative research, the researcher deliberately interacts in a personal way with each individual in the study . . . . as they [the researchers] conduct interviews and observations, they begin identifying relevant themes and patterns in the total context."<sup>3</sup>

### **Expert Panel**

The expert panel comprised of several practitioners and professionals in the field of marriage: William Cutrer, a medical physician and co-author of the book, *Sexual*

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<sup>3</sup>Walter R. Borg, Joyce P. Gall, and Meredith D. Gall, *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group, 1993), 196, 198.

*Intimacy in Marriage* who also teaches *Marriage Enrichment* at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as a seminary professor; Gwen Sandstrom Ebner, professor of Christian Ministries at Winebrenner Theological Seminary and author of the Ph.D. dissertation, *The Effect of Marriage Mentoring When Utilized in a Premarital Program*; Penny Hudson, Co-founder of the Marriage and Education Resource Center in Crestwood, Kentucky; and Brandi K. Walters, a marriage and family therapist who has a private practice located at Sunrise Church in Hillsboro, Oregon.

**Face validity.** Face validity considered the “appropriate measure for obtaining the desired information, particularly from the perspective of a potential respondent.”<sup>4</sup> The validity of the survey questionnaire was established through an expert panel review. Face validity “can provide useful information about the entire [survey tool] and the degree to which it is meeting its intended purpose.”<sup>5</sup> The expert panel evaluated the interview questions for terminology, word choice, and understandability of the overall questions. Mainly, the input and recommendations of the expert panel was used to revise the interview questions for validity. Specifically, the expert panel’s suggestions helped to determine the face validity of the interview questions (that the questions appeared to address the particular characteristics that are being examined).<sup>6</sup> However, since face validity relied on “subjective judgment” and provided little “convincing evidence” that

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<sup>4</sup>David Colton and Robert W. Covert, *Designing and Constructing Instruments for Social Research and Evaluation* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 66.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall), 92.

the interview questions reflected what the study hoped to find, it was important to also establish construct validity.<sup>7</sup>

**Construct validity.** Construct validity ensured that the questions used in the study applied to the behaviors “that cannot be directly observed or measured but must instead be inferred; when researchers ask questions, they should obtain some kind of evidence that their approach does measure the construct in question.”<sup>8</sup> With the expert panel’s review, construct validity was established in order to ensure that the interview questions actually measured “patterns in people’s behavior.”<sup>9</sup> Interview questions were revised based on the expert panel’s recommendations.

### **Ethics Approval**

To ensure that the current study was within standards, all appropriate forms were submitted to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Ethics Committee for their review prior to the commencement of research. The Ethics Committee approved the study and deemed it as “Low Risk” to the study participants (“low risk” is indicated as the measure of discomfort and/or harm to which a human subject is exposed and/or may experience as a result of participation in research).<sup>10</sup>

### **Interview Protocol**

As the study was based on non-probabilistic sampling, couples were sought through churches and Christian counseling centers in the continental United States that

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Approval for the study’s research was granted by the Ethics Committee on August 8, 2011.

have a marriage mentoring ministry; and the recommendation of select seminary professors, church practitioners, or online websites such as Parrott and Parrott's, *Marriage Mentor Site*, was utilized to find facilities that have mentoring programs.<sup>11</sup> The protocol provided a description of the current study, the date and time of the interview, the method by which the interview is conducted, the questions that were asked, a statement ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and expressed gratitude for participants' time.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The descriptive data was analyzed via Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), and entailed the use of coding analysis and data analysis software such as a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software and a coding analysis toolkit.<sup>12</sup> The coding analysis toolkit and CAQDAS enabled comparable comments among couples to be classified and coded to organize descriptive data. The major purpose of a qualitative research design was to provide a structure for participants to verbalize experiences in their own words:<sup>13</sup> "The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it."<sup>14</sup> Since data in qualitative research is obtained through interviews, the person who answers the interview questions is the determining factor for the information, rather than

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<sup>11</sup>Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Site for Marriage Mentors* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 11 May 2011; available from <http://marriagementorsite.com/marriage-mentor-network.php>; Internet.

<sup>12</sup>Ann Lewins, Celia Taylor, and Graham R. Gibbs, *Qualitative Analysis Data* (2010) [on-line]; accessed 11 May 2011; available from [http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro\\_QDA/what\\_is\\_qda.php](http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php); Internet.

<sup>13</sup>Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluative Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 39.

<sup>14</sup>Elliott W. Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 30, 183.



a survey instrument that is commonly used in quantitative research. In addition, the researcher who gathers the data decides how the information is interpreted.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data retrieved through interviews with couples who had received marriage mentoring. Although some thematic categories were expected due to the interview questions and literature review, other categories were discovered as a result of the collected data.

#### **Compilation Protocol**

Data collection and analysis in the study resulted in two steps: (1) the interview of participating couples; and (2) the transcribing of the recorded interviews using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) and the use of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software to code the information.

#### **Presentation of Findings**

Interviews were conducted between August 22, 2011 and September 19, 2011 (see Appendix 5). At least ten married couples were needed for the study. A total of thirty couples agreed to participate; however, seventeen couples were excluded for various reasons:

1. Two couples did not keep the interview appointment.
2. One couple did not meet the inclusion criteria, "Couples had experienced marital distress which caused them to seek the help of a marriage mentor." Although the couple had indicated that they had someone from their church that mentored them, they sought the help of a counselor when they encountered serious issues in their marriage.

3. One couple did not meet the inclusion criteria, “Couples have been married for at least 3 years at the time they sought the help of a marriage mentor.” This couple had only seen a mentor before they were married as part of the church’s premarital program.
4. Six couples did not meet the inclusion criteria, “Couples have been married for at least a year (and are still married) following marriage mentoring.” These five couples were still involved in mentoring and working on their original issues.
5. The spouses of seven couples were unable to be interviewed—one wife’s husband had died a year ago, one wife’s husband was in the military, one wife’s husband just had surgery, another wife’s husband was a truck driver and was out of town, and the other remaining couples’ spouses had scheduling conflicts. Since the study was dependent on data obtained from married couples, individual married persons were not included.

The final thirteen couples in the study met the inclusion criteria. The interviews lasted between 15 to 25 minutes. The data from the interviews were transcribed and coded then grouped into categories of similar recurring themes. Each response to an interview question was examined and is presented below. The interview provided participants an opportunity to describe how mentoring had helped them in reconciling their marriages. Responses are shown in table format with comments in dialogue format. The answers to the questions brought further insight into the struggles and the process of marriage mentoring.

### **Interview Question 1**

The first question was “When did you get married?” If the question seemed confusing to participants, the clarifying question was asked: “What is your wedding date?” Table 1 showed the number of cases for each category. Couples who were married 26 to 35 years represented the majority of the sample (31%), followed by couples married 3 to 5 years (23%) and couples married 12 to 14 years (23%).

Table 1. Years married

<i>Number of Years Married</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
3 to 5	3	23%
6 to 8	0	0%
9 to 11	0	0%
12 to 14	3	23%
15 to 17	2	15%
18 to 25	1	8%
26 to 35	4	31%

The only couples not represented in the study were those married 6 to 8 years and those married 9 to 11 years. In the findings listed above, there seemed to be no particular number of years that a couple was married when they sought the help of a marriage mentor. In fact, Couple J was the longest married couple to be interviewed was married for 35 years while Couple G was the couple that had been married with the least number of years— 3 ½ years.

### **Interview Question 2**

The second question was “How many years were you married when you sought the help of marriage mentors?” If the question was difficult for participants to understand then it was rephrased during the interview to “How many years were you married before you saw a marriage mentor?” As illustrated in Table 2, the number of cases varied for when marriage mentoring started. According to the findings, couples sought marriage mentoring after being married 3 to 5 years (23%), followed by those who were married 6 to 8 years (15%), 9 to 11 years (15%), 12 to 14 years (15%), and 18 to 25 years (15%). No one in the study saw a marriage mentor during years 15 to 17 of their marriage. Surprisingly, some couples waited twenty or more years to see a mentor

(23% total). Couple R (married for 22 years) saw a mentor after 20 years of marriage; they explained, “Everybody hears about someone going to a marriage counselor but a marriage mentoring couple was totally new.”

Table 2. Years married before the start of mentoring

<i>Number of Years Married</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
3 to 5	3	23%
6 to 8	2	15%
9 to 11	2	15%
12 to 14	3	23%
15 to 17	0	0%
18 to 25	2	15%
26 to 35	1	8%

The higher number of cases for couples married 3 to 5 years coincided with Gottman and Levenson’s findings: “The first 7 years of marriage are often characterized as a volatile and highly emotional period of marriage.”<sup>1</sup> Couples married 6 to 8 and 12 to 14 years perhaps sought mentoring because they were experiencing tension in their marriage in a second critical period. Gottman and Levenson explained, “The second critical period for divorce is midlife, often when most people have young teenaged children.”<sup>2</sup> Although the 18 to 25 year marriage demographic was not examined by Gottman and Levenson, Couple N professed, “After our children left home, we were empty-nesters, [we] kind of found it difficult to remember what it was like before we

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<sup>1</sup>John Mordechai Gottman and Robert Wayne Levenson, “A Two-Factor Model for Predicting When a Couple Will Divorce: Exploratory Analyses Using a 14-year Longitudinal Data,” *Family Process* 41 (2002): 83. Gottman and Levenson did not examine couples who were married longer than 14 years.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

were wrapped up with our kids and our jobs. We seemed to have a difficult time just communicating without it becoming a big argument.” For this one couple, a change in the family structure led to their marital problem.

### **Interview Question 3**

The third question was “How long has it been since you had your last mentoring session? (i.e., 6 months, 1 year, etc.)” If couples indicated that they were still involved in mentoring then an additional question was asked, “What is your reason for continuing the mentoring relationship? Are you in mentoring to work on the original issue(s) that brought you to mentoring in the first place?” The results of this interview question are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Length of time since last mentoring

<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1 month or less	2	15%
2 to 6 months	3	23%
6 to 11 months	1	8%
1 year	5	38%
2 to 3 years	1	8%
4 to 5 years	0	0%
6 + years	1	8%

Most couples (38%) last saw their mentors one year ago. The couples who had seen their mentors “1 month or less” (15%) were not working on the original issues, rather they were maintaining friendships with the mentors or the mentors were doing a periodic “check-up.” Couple S, who were married for 28 years, explained, “The relationship had changed from a weekly, bi-monthly kind of mentoring role.”

Another couple, Couple R, who had been married for 22 years, indicated that mentoring was completed but added, “We’ve developed a really close relationship with that couple [mentors]. They continue to be role models so now we do joint things together.” Some couples developed a friendship with their mentors and continue to visit with them even after mentoring had ended.

**Interview Question 4**

The fourth question was “How do you view God’s role in marriage?” Some participants found this question difficult to understand so the following clarifying question was asked: “How does God fit into a person’s marriage?” One of the inclusion criteria was, “Couples who viewed marriage as a covenant.” All participants believed that God played a role in marriages; in fact, the way they viewed God in a marriage differed slightly but the numbers were even across categories (see Table 4).

Table 4. God’s role in marriage

<i>Name</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
God is the center of marriage	5	38%
God is an important part of marriage	4	31%
God is the leader/first in the marriage, and we have to follow Him	4	31%

For example, thirty-eight percent of couples indicated that God is the center of a couple’s marriage, 31% of couples indicated that God was “an important part of marriage,” and another 31% specified that God should be the first or the leader in a couple’s marriage. Couple W commented, “God is number one and we should look at our

marriage from God’s perspective and love each other that way. You heard of the expression, ‘God, family, country’ so God is first and you have to keep it that way. Sometimes couples put more emphasis on each other or other things than they do with their relationship with God.”

Couple J remarked, “God is the most important part of our marriage. Without God, there’s no reason to enter into that union.” A third couple, Couple Z, shared, “He [God] is individually conforming us into His image and because He’s doing that to both of us, it’s making us grow closer to Him and to each other. Without that processing going on we wouldn’t be changing. Without it being a God-centered thing with God changing my heart, changing who I am on the inside, His role is to conform us and kicking out the sin that causes so much division between us . . . . He’s the ultimate Mentor.”

**Interview Question 5**

The fifth question was “How many months or years were you mentored as a couple?” If participants were confused, then the question was rephrased to: “How long were you mentored?” The number of cases for this question is shown in Table 5. The length of mentoring among couples were from 2 months to one year or longer (if mentoring checkups were counted).

Table 5. Length of time in a mentoring relationship

<i>Length of Time in Mentoring</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1 to 3 months	2	15%
4 to 6 months	3	31%
7 to 11 months	0	0%
1 year	6	46%
2 years	2	15%



According to the results, the majority of participants' were mentored for 1 year (46%). Typically, mentoring curriculums were designed to last only a few months. For instance, PREPARE/ENRICH trained "facilitators" (mentors) to provide 4 to 8 "feedback sessions."<sup>3</sup> Although mentoring may last only a few months, some couples continue to meet with their mentors. Couple S indicated that the "official" mentoring lasted a year, but mentoring had lasted informally for 15 years— this same couple said that their mentor became their friends and if they needed marital advice, then they would see them on an "as needed" basis.

### **Interview Question 6**

The sixth question was "What were some of the conflicts or difficulties that you encountered in your marriage. Do you still experience some of the same conflicts or difficulties now?" According to the interview results, the majority of participants (11 references) indicated that communication was the main source of conflict or difficulty in their marriage (see Table 6). Communication was a problem for a wide range of couples— those who had been married only a few years to those who had been married for decades. For example, Couple G, married three and a half years cited communication as a "major difficulty" because they "come from different backgrounds" and were not used to "sharing each other's feelings." Another couple, Couple N, who had been married for 33 years stated, "We had a very difficult time in communicating after the children left and we became empty nesters."

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<sup>3</sup>*What is PREPARE/ENRICH* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 11 May 2011; available from [https://www.prepare-enrich.com/webapp/pe/faq/template/DisplaySecureContent.vm;pc=1314923399600?id=pe\\*faq\\*overview.html&emb\\_sch\\_id=0&emb\\_lng\\_code=ENGLISH](https://www.prepare-enrich.com/webapp/pe/faq/template/DisplaySecureContent.vm;pc=1314923399600?id=pe*faq*overview.html&emb_sch_id=0&emb_lng_code=ENGLISH); Internet.

Table 6. Conflicts and difficulties in marriage

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>
Communication	11
Infidelity	3
Children/child rearing	2
Lack of trust	1
Money/finances	1
Attraction for someone other than spouse	1
Strong will	1
Work/Work schedule	1
Unresolved issues from previous relationship	1
Problem solving	1
Lack of respect	1
Not seeing other's perspective	1
Anger	1
Pornography	1

Although some couples only named one conflict in their marriage, ten described two or more conflicts and difficulties they had experienced in their marriage.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Couple I stated that communication and finances were sources of conflicts in their marriage, while Couple S stated that they encountered five different conflicts—infidelity, trust issues, anger, rebellion/strong will, and communication.

### **Interview Question 7**

The seventh question was “How has participating in mentoring changed the way you handle conflict and difficulties that come up in your marriage? (Please be specific).” The results of this question are illustrated in Table 7. There were equal numbers of references (4 each) where couples indicated that they were able to communicate better or communicate more, had more patience or understanding for one

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<sup>4</sup>Couples C, E, G, I, J, V, R, S, T, and W.

another, were able to slow down conflict in order to prevent things from escalating, or that the tools they learned helped changed the way they handled conflict in their marriage.

Table 7. Mentoring and handling conflict and difficulties

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>
We communicate better/more	4
More understanding/patience	4
We can slow down and prevent things from escalating	4
Tools we use	4
Pray together	3
We listen to each other	2
Rely on God more	2
Biblical understanding of marriage	1

Four couples disclosed two or more changes in the way they handled conflict and difficulties.<sup>5</sup> As the findings revealed, couples were able to handle many conflicts and difficulties following mentoring. For example, Couple N who was married for 33 years commented, “We learned many different techniques—praying together, for each other, learning to hear what your mate is saying . . . . we did a personality test, learning what our self is about— that God created them the way they are so we shouldn’t try to change them. But the most important was learning that we need to pray for each other every day.”

### **Interview Question 8**

The eighth question was “Would you have seen a marriage mentoring couple if

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<sup>5</sup>Couples C, G, R, and W.

you did not have marital issues?” Based on the results, it was clear that the majority of couples (92%) would not have seen a mentor if they did not have a problem in their marriage (see Table 8). Couple R commented, “Everybody hears about someone going to a marriage counselor but a marriage mentoring couple was totally new.” After going through mentoring, some of the couples who stated that they would not see a mentor if they had no marital issues realized that it would be beneficial for all married couples to see a marriage mentor.

Table 8. Those with no marital issues who would see a mentor

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No	12	92%
Yes	0	0%
Maybe	1	8%

Couple W mentioned, “Knowing what we know now, we probably should have had one years ago and maybe we wouldn’t have gone through the troubles we’ve been through because we didn’t have any accountability. It would’ve been very helpful to have one now that I know what I know.” Couple N emphasized, “We did learn that even good marriages can stand mentoring so that when things arise you know how to handle conflict versus waiting and thinking. We learned that it would be a good thing for all couples to have a mentoring couple.” It was obvious that after going through mentoring that couples realized its usefulness and value for any marriage.

### Interview Question 9

The ninth question was “How has marriage mentoring helped strengthen your marriage? (Please be specific).” The responses to this question are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. How mentoring strengthened marriages

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>
We communicate better	5
We pray for each other	3
It gave us the tools to use	3
We understand each other/ See other’s perspective	2
We listen to each other	1
We focus more on God and Bible	1
We have more “together” time	1
We can handle conflicts	1
Mentoring gave us encouragement	1
It transformed us individually and it transformed our marriage	1

The findings showed that following mentoring, the majority of couples (5 references) felt that they communicated better (“We communicate better”). The references demonstrated that couples believed mentoring helped their communication problem. Couple C, who believed that the communication process they learned strengthened their marriage, voiced: “For me it was about opening more communication lines . . . . this is what I’m supposed to be doing, telling [my spouse] how I feel, so we would slow it down and try and take it back to that role playing where not a lot of emotion got into it—say this is the way we’re supposed to resolve it, let me go and listen and you’re supposed to repeat it back to me. We would reference that.”

Couple R described, “If [my wife] says she needs to talk then we take the time to talk. If I say there’s something that’s bothering me then we can both approach it

without being defensive or not as defensive. It at least opens that door of communication so we can express what the concern has been.” Couple T illustrated, “I am more likely [now] to step aside and say let’s talk about this later. I used to never let him walk away when we were fighting. I just want to fight with him; but now we’re more able to just walk away from each other and cool down and come back and actually talk and not just fight.”

There were three references each to “We pray for each other” and “It gave us the tools to use.” Couple Z expounded, “Praying together every night, there’s not a lot of room to allow conflict to last too long if we’re committed to doing that. And truthfully, when we don’t do it we quickly see the effects of it—it’s an attitude, we’re short with each other. Because of the tools that they taught us, that’s what strengthened our marriage. We’re doing our relationship with the Lord but the process would be key—praying together and using the tools they gave us.” The husband in Couple X said, “Marriage mentoring wasn’t just the transformation of our marriage—it totally transformed the way I viewed my relationship with Christ.”

### **Interview Question 10**

The tenth question was “Have you ever heard of marriage mentoring before seeing a marriage mentoring couple? If so, what was your impression of marriage mentoring prior to your mentoring experience?” The responses for this question are presented in Table 10.

Only two couples had heard of marriage mentoring:

1. Couple J stated, “I heard of it [marriage mentoring] on the radio, on Focus on the Family. I thought it was a great idea—to have another couple to observe and share.” The impression on Couple J was that marriage mentoring was a unique way to help couples.

Table 10. Those who have heard of marriage mentoring prior

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No	11	85%
Yes	2	15%

2. Couple N said, “I heard it through church. I was speechless to say the least. There was another couple that went through it [marriage mentoring] and as this one couple gave their testimony, I knew right away it was something I wanted to do but my husband didn’t. I made an appointment that week and told him I would go through it without him. He went, digging his heels, but after the first session, it grabbed him and he went to each one after that. We still pray together every night. I was so grateful that one couple had gone through it [marriage mentoring] and were willing to give their testimony.” The basic impression to Couple N was that marriage mentoring would save their marriage.

The majority of the couples interviewed (85%) never heard of marriage mentoring before they saw a marriage mentor:

1. Couple R: “We never paid attention to it— we heard of counseling.”
2. Couple I: “I heard of counseling, but not mentoring.”
3. Couple G: “I heard of mentoring for kids.”
4. Couple E: “I think more commonly is marriage counseling, but we never heard of marriage mentoring or knew what it was about.”

### **Interview Question 11**

The eleventh question was “In what other way(s) has your marriage relationship benefited from the mentoring process?” This question was shortened during the interview to, “In what other way(s) has your marriage benefited from mentoring?”

The results are shown in Table 11.

The benefits of mentoring were broad and varied among couples, and some stated more than one benefit. For example, Couple N not only learned how to see things

Table 11. Benefits of mentoring

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>
We are willing to acknowledge problems and work through them	3
We can talk to each other	3
It brought us closer	2
We listen more	2
We do things together/ work as a team	1
See things from the other person's perspective/understand each other	1
Taught us how to mentor other couples	1
We are a united front with our parenting	1
Our mentors became our friends	1
We weren't alone in our struggles	1
Taken marriage to "a higher level"	1
Put each other first	1
Share our experiences with other married couples	1
Gave hope that marriage could work	1
The mentors are there to help us whenever we need assistance	1
It reduced the stress in our marriage	1

from their spouse's perspective, but they also gained other benefits: "We can talk to each other without fighting, we listen more, and to pray for [the spouse] every day . . . . understand [the spouse] more." The specific benefits of mentoring were expressed by other couples. Couple T stated, "Ever since we went [to mentoring] we put each other first, then as parents, to be together." Basically, the couple spent more time as parents than they did as a couple, but mentoring helped them to focus on being a couple. Couple E admitted, "Even today it's an ongoing effort to learn how to communicate better and it [mentoring] helped us in communicating with our kids and helping our kids to communicate with us—being able to slow down and not be in the mix of all the emotions and just talk to each other."

The category "We are willing to acknowledge problems and work through



them” received three references. An equal number of references (two each) were cited in the following categories: “It brought us closer,” “We listen more,” and “We can talk to each other.” These numbers showed that couples’ marital issues improved through marriage mentoring.

Couple Z disclosed, “I’ve heard people say, ‘We’re more in love today than when we first got married’ and in my heart I’m like, ‘How is that possible?’ But as a result of this process we’ve gone through [marriage mentoring] it’s totally true. I love [my husband] more today than I did the day we got married.”

### **Interview Question 12**

The twelfth question was “What aspect of marriage mentoring did you find most helpful and why?” The responses to this question are shown in Table 12. The most references given were regarding the tools received from mentoring (6 references) — tools included information about “love languages,” specific communication techniques, lessons on handling conflict, and the marital survey. Couple T asserted, “They [the mentors] made us take a survey and it showed where we are separate and where we are the same or really different. Then they were able to work with us on where we needed strength and where we didn’t and where we saw eye-to-eye and other things.”

Four couples thought that it was helpful to have both the husband and wife mentoring. Couple W, who enjoyed having the male and female perspective from the mentors said, “Every couple needs accountability—the women do with women, the men do with men. That’s lacking in a lot of marriages. In marriage mentoring, when someone comes along side you for a period of time, week to week or month to month, they can notice when something’s changing and you need to get back to doing the healthy thing.”

Table 12. Most helpful aspects of mentoring

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>
All the tools used	6
Both husband and wife mentored	4
Safe/relaxed environment to talk	3
The mentors had experienced the same issues	3
Mentors provided accountability	3
The mentors were unbiased	2
One-on-one time with mentor	2
Friendship with mentors	1
We had to work together [on issues] and come to an agreement	1

Some couples indicated that having a safe or relaxed environment to talk was also helpful (3 references). Couple G mentioned, “Just being able to sit and talk, compare experiences and discuss your problems [is helpful]. They [the mentors] can describe ways that they worked through it [issues] and their ways might help you with other ways to work through the same issues.”

### **Interview Question 13**

The thirteenth question was “If you could change anything about marriage mentoring, what would it be?” Table 13 showed the results.

Forty-two percent of couples referenced “nothing” or “no suggestions” as an answer to this question. Some of these couples who thought mentoring did not need to be changed said the following: Couple C, “They had a great game plan. I don’t think I could have done any better,” and “Everything was so good” (Couple N). These couples could not suggest anything to change because they had such a positive mentoring experience.

Although thirty-eight percent of couples indicated that they would make no changes to mentoring, 62% total said that they would make changes. In fact, Couple R

Table 13. Changes to marriage mentoring

<i>Name</i>	<i>References</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Nothing/No suggestions	5	38%
Promote it more	2	15%
Allow mentoring to last a longer time	2	15%
Mentors should know their limits/what they can handle	1	8%
Mentoring should be tailored to fit the needs of the couple	1	8%
Have a “next step” after mentoring or follow up	1	8%
Make sure mentoring is readily available so couples do not have a long time to wait for a mentor	1	8%

thought that there should be a “next step” or “follow up” to mentoring and pointed out, “They want to run you through a plan but there’s no litmus test to see if that’s where you’re at—‘at this point you should be like this’.” Couple G explained, “We could benefit from having more sessions. There were seven sessions but I think we could’ve used more.”

Couple S claimed that mentoring should be promoted more and believed that mentoring should be available in all churches so that “more people would do it.” Couple Z said, “It [mentoring] needs to be more accessible because there’s so many people out there who need it, but I think their first thought is to see professional help . . . . If people were more aware that it [mentoring] was out there that it wasn’t like making these big appointments but it was going to people who are just real people, I feel like a lot more couples would go to that.” It was apparent that couples felt strongly about mentoring and had a desire for other couples to experience it too.

#### **Interview Question 14**

The fourteenth question was “Have you mentored couples? Describe in general

terms how this has occurred.” Thirty-one percent of the couples interviewed mentor other couples (see Table 14). Some of the couples who said that they do not mentor mentioned that they do “informal” mentoring: (1) Couple N: “Indirectly you can mentor to friends and family—pass along what we learned,” (2) Couple R: “I offer suggestions to co-workers,” and (3) Couple Z: “For some reason in the last year, I’ve kind of mentored 2 or 3 men who had been dealing with similar situation and none of it was scheduled—it just came up. People would confide in me.”

Table 14. Couples who mentor

<i>Response</i>	<i>References</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No	9	69%
Yes	4	31%

Although couples praised marriage mentoring, 69% of the couples interviewed did not mentor other couples. Couple N asserted, “We’re not in that program to become mentors but indirectly you can mentor.” Couple R expressed, “We are in the process of mentoring a premarital couple.” Finally, Couple V explained, “It’s not our time, it’s not our season, we have kids to raise. We are intending to, but not at this point.” Even though the majority of the couples do not formally mentor other couples, there is still a desire to be a mentor for friends and family. In fact some couples expressed an interest in becoming formal marriage mentors sometime in the future.

### **Interview Question 15**

The last query was “Please share any additional comments regarding the mentoring you received.” The comments received during the interviews are below:

1. Couple C: “We had seen a traditional counselor but the difference [in mentoring] is that they’re a couple who had gone through what we went through.”
2. Couple G: “It was very useful. More useful than the marriage counseling we went through.”
3. Couple I: “I would say for couples having a problem, mentoring doesn’t tell you what to do. They give you the tools to use. How to do certain things.”
4. Couple J: “It’s a really great idea especially when you have a couple that shares your Christian faith and bring God into the picture.”
5. Couple N: “I wish we would have learned these kind of tools long ago ‘cause it would have saved a lot of grief on both parties. We benefited greatly going through this. Our marriage wouldn’t have lasted—we would have been a part already. We’re stronger. It saved our marriage.”
6. Couple R: “Sometimes abnormal marriage becomes normal. The mentor couple [sic] helps bring it back to normal. Mentoring is very much needed in society. There’s a shortage.”
7. Couple S: “We’ve seen dozens of marriages preserved based on marriage mentoring. I would say that it exponentially raises your chances of having a successful marriage. Some people think it a successful marriage to be married 40 or 50 years. They think it’s successful because they’ve stayed together—they have no emotional connection to one another or the Lord—that’s not success.”
8. Couple Z: “We will forever be grateful to our mentors. Their guidance changed our marriage. I can’t image where we’d be if it hadn’t been for them.”
9. Couple X: “I run across couples both in my family and friends that are going through divorce and there’s been little things in my life that I’ve been more passionate about than this [marriage mentoring] because of how it totally transformed who I was in our marriage. Next to Christ dying on the cross, this is God’s greatest gift to me.”

### **Evaluation of the Study’s Design**

The qualitative approach of the study allowed for rich, descriptive data to be collected. The interview process gave couples an opportunity to express their ideas about mentoring, and the interview questions provided a guide for the interview. The couples in the study represented a wide range of ages and stages in life, which enabled an array of

responses to be compiled. Although insightful information was gained, the process in collecting data varied in that some couples provided brief answers while others offered more detailed responses. This proved somewhat challenging to the coding process. The main purpose of interviewing couples was to gather responses to the interview questions. The interpretation of data for coding purposes was more subjective than objective—perhaps adding a qualitative survey in addition to the interview questions would have provided a balance of subjective and objective data. Including multi-raters would have been useful too; for instance, richer data might have been obtained if the input of marriage mentors' evaluation of the marriage mentoring process had been included. The inclusion of tables made it possible to visualize trends and other phenomena of the data that was collected.

In addition, some couples were interviewed together while others were interviewed separately. The couples that were interviewed separately tended to yield differing responses. For example, Couple G's husband mentioned that mentoring was helpful in that it gave them the tools to use in their communication, but the wife said they did not really use the tools so mentoring was not helpful. Based on these findings, all couples should have been interviewed separately.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION

This final chapter includes some conclusions related to the study's findings. It also includes a discussion of the implications for church practitioners, church counseling ministries, mentors, and churches in general. A summary of possible opportunities for further research are included.

#### **Conclusions of the Study**

The marriage mentoring model was examined as a possible method to restore marriages among believers. The initial step of the study assessed the dissolution of marriages through divorce in order to understand its causes, and included a study of the Scriptures regarding divorce and the topic of marriage. The current literature was then reviewed in an attempt to better comprehend how mentoring worked and how it may be utilized as a divorce prevention method for troubled marriages. The results of the current study not only supported the findings of previous research on marriage mentoring, but it showed that previous findings can be applied to couples in established marriages.

#### **Conclusions Regarding Demographic Questions**

From the interviews it was discovered that the majority of couples were married 26 to 35 years (31%). Of those in the group, Couple W, married 28 years, saw a marriage mentor after 20 years of marriage. Couple J, married for 35 years, sought the

help of a marriage mentor in their thirty-third year of marriage. The relative newness of marriage mentoring might be a reason for these two couples to seek the help of marriage mentors in the latter part of their marriage. In fact, the Marriage Mentoring Initiative, promoted by Les and Leslie Parrott, only started in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

Among couples interviewed, the length of time for mentoring lasted a year (46%), with some couples completing their mentoring between 4 to 6 months (31%). The variance was probably due to a number of reasons; including the curriculum used, mentor availability, and ability and willingness of mentors to continue the mentoring process beyond a certain period of time. Interestingly, fifteen percent of couples indicated that mentoring should be offered for a longer period of time, yet one of the couples, Couple S, continued to meet with their mentors on an occasional basis for fifteen years after the initial mentoring period had ended.

It appeared that among the couples who were interviewed, marriage mentoring was neither a very short term (under four months) nor a very long term (over one year) obligation. Although it can vary in length, it appeared that church leaders can expect for marriage mentors to formally commit to another couple from four months to one year.

### **Conclusions Regarding God in Marriage**

Another conclusion beyond the commitment level needed for marriage mentoring involves the mentored couples' relationship with God. Gadol established that the young married couples' perception of marriage as being sacred was increased through the mentoring experience, especially when the mentoring was received through a

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<sup>1</sup>Les and Leslie Parrott are well-known authors who promote marriage mentoring on their website, <http://www.marriagementorsite.com/>.



“religious organization.”<sup>2</sup> Findings from the current study substantiated Gadol’s conclusion. As a result of the marriage mentoring experience, couples indicated that they prayed together more and that they acknowledged that God was important to their marriage. Couple S shared, “[Mentoring] taught us to bring God into the conflict quicker to seek what He’s doing rather than what each other are doing— looking for God’s agenda rather than our own.” Couple W said, “[Mentoring] teaches us how to deal with conflict [by] putting God first, continually growing in the Word, listening to the Word, and reading the Word . . . . We actually found out what the Bible says [about marriage] from our marriage mentors. We decided we wanted to please God.” All couples received their marriage mentoring from a church or from a ministry associated with a church.

All couples that were interviewed indicted that God played a role in marriage. As Evangelical couples, this is essential in the marriage mentoring process. When a couple has a reverent view of God and the realization that He plays a role in their marriage, then the marriage covenant is elevated and couples are more willing to work on issues. Marriage mentoring appeared to support this view of God’s role in marriage as based on the responses from the couples. For example, Couple G insisted, “In order to have a successful marriage it’s important for both husband and wife to have a belief in God and have a strong Christian background.” Couple X claimed, “Without Him [God] being in the middle of our marriage, in the midst of us, there’s no way we can sustain our love and affection and our marital relationship without Him.” A possible reason for all couples expressing an affirmative view of God on marriage might be due to all couples in

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<sup>2</sup>Eric N. Gadol, “Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 81, 85.

the study receiving marriage mentoring through a church or a Christian counseling center. It is also a possibility that only Christian couples are willing to seek help from a church or Christian counseling center.

### **Conclusions Regarding Marital Conflicts and Difficulties**

Eleven out of 13 couples (85%) denoted that communication was the most common conflict or difficulty in their marriage, but 3 out of 13 couples (23%) stated that infidelity was the source of their conflict. Couple W revealed that they experienced both adultery and communication problems in their marriage. Couples indicated that the benefits of mentoring were better (or more) communication, more understanding and patience, and the ability to “slow down” and prevent the situation from escalating. Marriage mentoring provided couples with another way to address issues—instead of arguing and escalating a negative situation, they learned to listen. Couple E stated, “We really kind of learned to recognize that emotions are high or the other person’s emotions are high, we might need to take a time out so we can think properly and respond, than reacting with emotions.”

Wages suggested that couples work on changing their “attitudes” and “caring behaviors” to ensure “future marital satisfaction and stability.”<sup>3</sup> Couples in the current study indicated that it helped them to see a disagreement from the spouse’s perspective and to learn how to react differently when they are in a marital conflict. Couple R specified, “[Mentoring] gives a neutral point of view, it bring us back to a biblical way of

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<sup>3</sup>Steven A. Wages, “A Formative and Summative Evaluation of a Marriage Preparation Program Using Mentor Couples,” (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 2002), 299.

handling things and they [marriage mentors] let both of us voice our opinions on neutral ground. We're both validated . . . . Even now when they're not here, if [my wife] says she wants to talk then we take the time to talk. If I say there's something that's bothering me then we can both approach it without being defensive or not as defensive . . . . we can talk about [issues] without it turning into a fight." All the couples in the current study indicated that their attitude during a conflict had changed—they were more patient with each other, and this increase in patience resulted in more caring behaviors—showing undivided attention and truly listening to one another. Clearly, Wages' recommendation that couples change their attitude and behaviors to assure marital contentment and permanence in the future was validated by the findings of the current study.

Through marriage mentoring, couples had the ability to identify a potential conflict and because of the advice they received and curriculum they studied during mentoring, they had the skill to communicate through their issues. It seemed that marriage mentoring gave couples an opportunity to practice communication skills (what many couples referred to as "tools"). Couple C described mentoring sessions where they role played a conflict then practiced listening and repeating what the other had said. These exercises seemed to prepare couples for actual conflicts later.

It is a necessity for marriage mentors to include role playing sessions so couples can simulate an actual conflict they had experienced in their marriage. These sessions will enable mentors to see how the couple is interacting with one another and the mentors can give helpful suggestions for them to better communicate with each other. Mentors should incorporate role playing sessions during the marriage mentoring period in order to ingrain into couples the communication skills they need to use during a conflict.

## **Conclusions on the Perceived Benefits of Mentoring**

Although 92% of the couples interviewed indicated that they would not have seen a mentor if they did not have any marital issues, they recommended that married couples (even those without problems) should see a marriage mentor. Couples indicated that not only was their marriage strengthened through better communication, but that they prayed together or prayed for each other. It appeared that couples who were willing to pray for one another viewed God as important or the center or leader of their marriage.

Byington expressed, “If mentoring can increase success, satisfaction, and commitment in the workplace, then it may have the same positive results for marriages.”<sup>4</sup> Couples in the current study expressed a deep satisfaction of their marriage and felt more committed to their spouse as a result of marriage mentoring. Couple Z indicated, “[Mentoring] changed everything about our marriage . . . . conflict resolution, how we edify and build each other up, how we make sure we’re spending time with each other . . . . what my role is as a wife, what his role is as a husband and God’s design for marriage . . . . what God has in mind for us as a married couple . . . . we now pray together . . . . I love [my husband] more today than I did when we first got married.” The results of the current study proves that Byington’s assumption is correct— that mentoring does increase “success, satisfaction, and commitment” in the marriage as it does in the workplace.

It was evident that couples were more willing to acknowledge problems and work through them. In fact, couples felt closer together, listened to each other more, and

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<sup>4</sup>Kristin D. Byington, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Marriage Mentoring Program” (Ph.D. diss., Seattle Pacific University, 2008), 32-33.

talked rather than argued about issues. Couples thought that the tools that were provided by marriage mentors was helpful, but having both mentors, husband and wife, who have experienced the same issues and having a safe or relaxing environment to talk were also helpful. It is vital, then, for church leaders to pair couples with mentors who had experienced the same issues in their own marriage. This aligning of couples with similar experiences would bring hope to the troubled couple by allowing them to see that they too can overcome their own marital problems. This real-life example in the mentors' marriage would also help the healing process as biblical teaching would be taught and practiced.

Church leaders should also find mentors who have good listening skills and the ability to create a comfortable atmosphere to allow for natural conversation to take place. It is crucial that mentors have both the experience and the training to undertake such a significant role in another couple's life. Couples seeking the help of marriage mentors may not open up to persons who have poor listening skills, and if the couple does not feel comfortable with the marriage mentors' inability to create a conducive atmosphere then no one benefits.

### **Conclusions Regarding Counseling and Mentoring**

The claim among couples who had previously had counseling was that marriage mentoring was far more beneficial. Couple X shared, "We sought marriage counseling for a short period of time but before mentoring we never got to the root of the issue and were given the tools to address the issues so we can allow God to use those tools to allow us to reconcile when one wrongs the other." The wife in Couple T stated, "I think that marriage mentoring is so much different than marriage counseling. I think

it's more helping people learn the skills for a long marriage. We've been through counseling and nothing seemed to work as much as mentoring." Couple X described counseling in the following way: The counselor telling the husband that he "needed to do this" or "needed to do that." The couple explained that counseling worked only temporarily and had no lasting positive effect on the marriage.

There was a strong consensus that counseling was useless among those interviewed, however churches are more likely to either provide marriage counseling or refer couples to a marriage counselor. One mentor stated, "Clearly we have seen success in couples when they have not seen success by going to counselors. At first we were surprised, but when people seek God, obey God, God shows up. You typically do not get that in counseling sessions! So, yes, mentoring couples in their spiritual walk, while giving them tools, clearly improves their marriage."<sup>5</sup>

Since marriage mentoring seemed to have had better results of those interviewed, churches ought to offer it or have referrals for another church that provides the ministry. Most couples admitted that they had never heard of marriage mentoring and that counseling was more widely known, so churches who have a mentoring program should heavily emphasize it to their congregation and community.

Churches could have a month of special emphasis on marriages where even the sermon series focuses on marriage. During that time the church can recruit and train couples to become mentors. According to one mentor, training is typically a two day process.<sup>6</sup> Couples who are having problems in their marriage would be encouraged to

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<sup>5</sup>Donald Croley, email correspondence with author, 31 August 2011.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Cronk, email correspondence with author, 9 September 2011.

contact the church. Couples who want to be mentored would be assigned to a mentoring couple. The church-wide emphasis on marriage could conclude with a festive dinner for all married couples in the church. The special emphasis on marriage could be promoted as an annual event thereby replenishing the number of marriage mentors every year and identifying the marriage mentoring ministry to potential new comers.

### **Conclusions on Recommendations for Mentoring**

Sandstrom found that mentoring was beneficial because it provided a “model of a couple with a long-standing, loving marriage, as well as the increased feelings of confidence that comes from feeling supported.”<sup>7</sup> The couples in the current study expressed that it was helpful to them to see another couple who had experienced the same conflicts in their marriage. Couple G said, “[Our mentoring couple] gave us those life experiences of how they dealt with things in their marriage . . . not just tools—real life experiences.” The general consensus among couples in the current study was that marriage mentors were role models who gave them hope that their own marriages would work. Couples also felt supported by their mentors. The findings of the current study indicated that Sandstrom’s contention was accurate—marriage mentoring was beneficial because it provided a model of a good marriage.

Couples felt so strongly about mentoring that they thought more people should be mentored and that all churches should have marriage mentoring available for all couples. The husband in Couple R declared, “It [marriage mentoring] is very much

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<sup>7</sup>Gwen D. Sandstrom, “The Effect of Marriage Mentoring When Utilized in a Premarital Program” (Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2004), 73.

needed in society and there's a shortage [of marriage mentors]. Every place you go there are aspects to this that can be very beneficial to people and that's why we want our kids to go through it because they really learn things that gives them a life line. It brings them back into communication again instead of the emotion. It's extremely important." Some couples enjoyed the mentoring experience so much that they wanted to have more mentoring sessions. Couple G reported, "We made friends with our mentoring couple. We have a lifelong counselor, basically. If we have a conflict we can always go to our mentoring couple. We can ask questions and they will help us." It seemed that couples not only benefitted from marriage mentoring with a better marriage, but they also had confidants who would essentially be their friends for the rest of their lives. Couple S's friendship lasted until the death of one of their mentors.

Marriage mentoring should include follow up care. For example, mentors should meet with the couple a month after the last mentoring session, then again at three month intervals (3, 6, and 9 months) until the one-year mark. Having a set time for follow up will keep lines of communication open between marriage mentors and the couples they mentor. This open line of communication is helpful because if any problems arise, the couple can readily contact the mentors.

### **Conclusions on Couples Who Become Mentors**

Even though the majority of the couples interviewed (69%) do not formally mentor other couples, these couples try to provide mentoring for friends, family, or co-workers. Couple W remarked, "We have had several couples, not through the mentoring program, but we've met with other couples who have experienced difficulties, here in our kitchen and out to eat and different areas, on the phone. We try to encourage them in that



way.” Evidently, there was a strong desire among these couples to share what they learned with other couples who were struggling. This deep desire to help other couples in distress showed that they believed in marriage mentoring.

Byington claimed, “Mentor couples may not significantly increase their marital satisfaction through participating in a marriage mentoring program.”<sup>8</sup> Although only four of the couples in the study became marriage mentors, all four seemed satisfied about their role as mentors. Couple E stated, “We went through mentor training ourselves and became mentors and that [also] has helped us . . . . we’re giving back and being the mentors, we get as much out of it as the couple that we mentor so I think that helps our marriage as well.” This statement seemed to refute Byington’s claim. For this particular couple, mentoring increased their marital satisfaction in being marriage mentors.

Ideally, the church leader should have each mentored couple to agree to mentor another couple, as doing so will ensure that other couples will be able to benefit from mentoring and it will not overburden the existing mentors. The commitment to mentor could last a year—4 to 6 months of weekly mentoring then six months of follow ups (once a month or 2 month increment sessions). As an incentive, couples who agree to mentor after they have completed mentoring might, for example, go through the mentor training program for free or reduced cost. One mentor mentioned that the cost of marriage mentoring training material was \$100 for each mentoring couple.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Byington, “Evaluating the Effectiveness,” 91.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Cronk, email correspondence with author, 9 September 2011.

## Summary of Implications of the Study

Based on the findings from this study, it appeared that the process of marriage mentoring was instrumental in restoring the marriages of couples in the study. The couples in the study advocated for all couples to participate in marriage mentoring. The problem is that marriage mentoring is not widely known, and only a few churches offer it. Several churches that were contacted indicated that they were only at the beginning stages of their marriage mentoring program and thusly they did not have any couples to refer for the study. One mentoring pastor commented, “My wife and I only started a few months ago with our first couple. Through sharing with, and praying with and for, this couple, we have seen the trust factor begin to grow again between them; we have observed a re-blossoming of their relationship; and we have watched the husband come from being uncomfortable with praying in front of others, to pray out loud with us and also lead out (a little) in prayer at his home— this is a major positive shift that affects several facets of his relationship with her and with our Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

Some of these marriage mentoring programs started because a married couple in a church had the desire to help newly married couples. One such mentor stated, “Our passion to mentor couples in marriage grew as we watched so many unprepared couples getting married before they are ready to commit to a life-time together. We desire to help couples by sharing from our own experiences and pass on tools we have found to be helpful in our marriage. It's a way to give back to our church community and in gratitude to our Lord for without Him we would not be here together today.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Dennis Noblett, email correspondence with author, 4 September 2011.

<sup>11</sup>Lisbeth Rhodes, email correspondence with author, 31 August 2001.

## What Churches Can Do

It is evident that the couples interviewed felt churches should have marriage mentoring programs; in fact, couples in the current study thought that it would be beneficial for all married couples to go through marriage mentoring and none of the couples in the study had anything negative to say about marriage mentoring. Information on starting a marriage mentoring ministry is available from sources such as FOCCUS Inc.,<sup>12</sup> PREPARE/ENRICH,<sup>13</sup> and Les and Leslie Parrott.<sup>14</sup> A marriage mentoring ministry can be implemented in three stages; first, develop a plan including the selection of appropriate curriculum for the church then recruit potential mentors.

A criterion for prospective mentors should be set. For example, enlist couples who have been married for approximately 10 or more years then train selected couples to become mentors. Training can be obtained through other churches that have an established marriage mentoring program or through specific sources previously mentioned. Couples in the study expressed that it was helpful to have both husband and wife as marriage mentors and that having a couple who had experienced the same conflicts in their own marriages was beneficial. Couples also felt that it was good to have both male and female mentor perspectives as they sought to understand their own marital conflicts.

Crawford believed that marriage mentoring was the element that was needed in

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<sup>12</sup>FOCCUS Inc., *REFOCCUS Marriage Enrichment Inventory* (n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 16 May 2011; available from <http://www.foccusinc.com/refoccus-inventory.aspx>; Internet.

<sup>13</sup>Life Innovations, Inc., *Helping Build Strong Marriages and Healthy Relationships* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 16 May 2011; available from <https://www.prepare-enrich.com/>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup>Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Marriage Mentoring Initiative* (2011) [on-line]; accessed 16 May 2011; available from <http://www.marriagementorsite.com/>; Internet.

marriage education programs in order for young married couples to practice the skills they learned.<sup>15</sup> Couples in the current study indicated that marriage mentors provided specific tools for handling conflict then enabled them to practice these tools during the mentoring sessions. Couple C stated, “What we have learned from [our mentors] was, for example, I would say this is what I’m supposed to be doing. We would try to slow it down and take it back to that role playing where not a lot of emotions got into it . . . . [the role playing] was a reference of what [we] were supposed to be doing.” Crawford’s contention (that mentoring provided a platform for couples to learn and practice skills) was supported by the findings of the current study.

Finally, advertise the marriage mentoring ministry and assign marriage mentors to a couple. As the majority of couples in the study had no prior knowledge of marriage mentoring, it would be helpful to explain to the congregation some of the features and benefits of the marriage mentoring ministry then encourage them to refer their friends, family members, neighbors, and co-workers who are experiencing marital problems. The results of the current study indicated that marriage mentoring was also beneficial to couples who had been married for several years and were on the verge of divorce— not only to couples who were planning on getting married or to newly married couples (as previous studies have shown).

Churches that are contemplating the implementation of a marriage counseling program should instead consider starting a marriage mentoring ministry. Marriage mentors not only teach communication skills and other tools, but they share their lives

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<sup>15</sup>Shannan C. Crawford, “Efficacy of the Parrott's Couples Mentoring Program in a Community Setting” (Psy.D. diss., Regent University, 2009), 27.

with the couples they mentor. Couple W described how special it was for their mentors to take them out to eat or to invite them to their home. Marriage mentoring allowed for this type of close relationship. This type of relationship truly reflected the “koinonia” that was described of the early church in the book of Acts: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . . Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:42, 46, NASB). Marriage mentoring seemed to align more with these biblical practices.

In addition, a marriage mentoring ministry will allow people with the gift of mercy and encouragement to practice their gifts. Those people who have a heart to help young married couples can do so through an organized venue. Marriage mentoring will help mend broken marriages and enable couples to grow closer to God; plus it can be the first step in getting the couple to become active in the life of the church.

### **Potential Pitfalls**

As with any new ministry, there are pitfalls to avoid. One mentor reported the following:

I’m working with two churches right now to get marriage mentoring off the ground. I’m discovering some interesting things. For example, we’re not calling it ‘mentoring’ because (1) most couples have a hard time seeing themselves as a ‘mentor,’ (2) many couples aren’t interested in being ‘mentored’ in the traditional sense of the word. So we’re working on changing the name. Also, we’re discovering that we need to lessen the age gap between mentors and mentees. At one church we’re working with, the younger couples didn’t connect well with couples that were a lot older, so we’re trying to set a general rule of 10-20 years difference, and no more.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Stephen Buckner, email correspondence with author, 22 August 2011.

Since the gospel is a lifelong journey in Christ, marriage mentors are an apparent model of a changed life in Christ for couples being mentored. This example is clearly a natural part of the mentoring process because mentors can illustrate how God has worked in their marriage and how He could do the same for others. The clear application of the gospel in the presence of mentored couples results in a powerful testimony.

Another pitfall to avoid is having an excessively high expectation of marriage mentoring. Although all the couples in the study had success with marriage mentoring, it may not help all marriages. Even unsuccessful outcomes can yield useful information. For example, one mentor commented, “I wanted to let you know more about our experience with a couple on the brink of divorce. We met with this couple 4 times. Unfortunately, by the end of the meetings they decided to pursue a divorce anyway, despite making some good progress during our sessions. We later found out the wife had a personality disorder and the husband had a gambling addiction, so there were many factors at work there.”<sup>17</sup> So even though marriage mentoring was successful among couples in the study, marriage mentoring may not work for all couples; as illustrated in the previous statement, some couples may have personal difficulties that might be too challenging for marriage mentors to handle.

### **Further Research**

All of the participants attributed their saved marriages to God. It would be interesting to compare the results of mentoring on non-Christian couples to Christian

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<sup>17</sup>Todd Thomas, email correspondence with author, 26 September 2011.

couples. For example, is there a higher success rate for Christian couples who go through marriage mentoring? Does a covenant view of one's marriage contribute towards successful completion of marriage mentoring?

Some people indicated that they would have preferred a follow up from their mentors. Since the couples in the study were from different churches across the country, it is likely that they all used different curriculum. Some received follow-up visits or phone calls from their marriage mentors, while others did not. A study to compare the satisfaction of mentoring based on the curriculum used would be a good way to evaluate and determine the best curriculum for churches contemplating a marriage mentoring ministry.

Since couples indicated that counseling did not help their troubled marriage, it might be useful to compare and contrast the results of mentoring with the results of counseling. A longitudinal study could be conducted of marriages measuring the satisfaction level of several couples after completing marriage mentoring or marriage counseling at one year and at year 5, post mentoring or counseling. Comparing marriage counseling to marriage mentoring would assist churches and institutions of higher learning in better understanding the effectiveness of marriage mentoring.

### **Final Conclusions**

Thirteen couples participated in the study. The couples lived in various states across the country: Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The purpose of this research was to examine the marriage mentoring model as a method to restore marriages among believers. This study relied on interviewing couples in established marriages who have experienced marital distress but

received marriage mentoring in order to prevent divorce. Couples were sought through churches and Christian counseling centers in the continental United States that have a marriage mentoring ministry and also through the recommendation of select seminary professors, church practitioners, or online marriage mentoring websites.

As no academic research on marriage mentoring of couples in established marriages existed, a study on this topic was expected to be beneficial to pastors, churches, and researchers. This study has been helpful in understanding marriage mentoring. Pastors, church leaders, and educators might find these conclusions to be beneficial as they consider a marriage mentoring ministry. The ultimate goal of the study was to help marriages to last and to provide hope for marriages that are on the brink of divorce. This study has shown that no matter the severity of the marital distress, marriages can be repaired and can flourish with marriage mentoring. Most of all, it shows that “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).



APPENDIX 1

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MARRIAGE MENTORING

	Steven A. Wages 2002	Gwen Sandstrom 2004	Eric N. Gadol 2007	Kristin D. Byington 2008	Shannan C. Crawford 2009
Focus of Study	A Formative and Summative Evaluation of a Marriage Preparation Program Using Mentor Couples	The Effect of Marriage Mentoring when Utilized in a Premarital Program	Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education	Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Marriage Mentoring Program	Efficacy of the Parrott's Couples Mentoring Program in a Community Setting
Findings of the Study	Premarital couples can learn about marriages from their mentors. They can see how communication is exchanged and how difficulties are resolved. Mentors can offer advice in various areas of the marital relationship.	Mentoring provides an environment where young married couples can learn how an ordinary marriage functions from a seasoned couple.	Mentoring was helpful to those with a higher risk factor for divorce, and mentoring that is provided by churches help to form a biblical understanding of marriage for all couples.	Couples increased in the amount of time they spent together and increased in their communication through mentoring.	Young married couples can benefit from mentoring by watching the interaction of older couples; in addition, older married couples can help younger couples by offering a listening ear and by providing a safe place to ask questions.
Population	Pre-married	Pre-married and newly married	Pre-married	Newly married	Newly married
Author Recommendations	“Further research is needed to study the effectiveness of the program with a group of couples assessed to be at a high risk of marital disruption . . . . how enduring or lasting are mentoring effects?” (290-91).	“Further research would be helpful in studying the merits of mentoring after the wedding . . . . A follow-up study is needed concerning ‘Conflicted’ couples and the use of mentoring” (74).	“Further research is needed both in the general area of relationship education programs for couple with longer histories and in the specifics of the marriage mentoring model” (86).	“Long-term follow-up assessments would give important information about the ability of the program to decrease the typical life cycle’s decline in marital satisfaction” (90).	“Monitoring the divorce rate 5 years following marriage mentoring would be helpful in determining if marriage mentoring affects distress and/or divorce rates” (153).

## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to find out if mentoring is an effective technique in repairing marriages. This research is being conducted by Teresa Trascritti for purposes of examining the marriage mentoring model as a method to restore marriages among believers. In this research, you will verbally answer 15 questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By answering the interview questions you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Interview questions:

1. When did you get married?

*If couple indicates that they have been married for less than 3 years then they will be thanked for their time, but the interview will stop.*

2. How many years were you married when you sought the help of marriage mentors?

*If couple indicates that they were married less than 3 years at the time they started mentoring, then they will be thanked for their time, but the interview will stop.*

3. How long has it been since you had your last mentoring session? (i.e., 6 months, 1 year, etc.).

*If couple indicates that they are still involved in mentoring, then the follow-up question will be asked:*

What is your reason for continuing the mentoring relationship? Are you in mentoring to work on the original issue(s) that brought you to mentoring in the first place?

*If couple indicates that they are still working on the same issues then the interview will stop.*

4. How do you view God's role in marriage?

*If couples do not view marriage as a covenant, then the interview will stop.*

5. How many months or years were you mentored as a couple?
6. What were some of the conflicts or difficulties that you encountered in your marriage? Do you still experience some of the same conflicts or difficulties now? If so, do you handle them differently? How is this different from the way you handled it before participating in mentoring?
7. How has participating in mentoring changed the way you handle conflict and difficulties that come up in your marriage? (Please be specific)
8. Would you have seen a marriage mentoring couple if you did not have marital issues?
9. How has marriage mentoring helped strengthen your marriage? (Please be specific)
10. Have you ever heard of marriage mentoring before seeing a marriage mentoring couple? If so, what was your impression of marriage mentoring prior to your mentoring experience?
11. In what other way(s) has your marriage relationship benefited from the mentoring process?
12. What aspect of marriage mentoring did you find most helpful and why?
13. If you could change anything about marriage mentoring, what would it be?
14. Have you mentored couples? Describe in general terms how this has occurred.
15. Please share any additional comments regarding the mentoring you received.

## APPENDIX 3

### EXPERT PANEL SELECTION

*William Cutrer*, M.D., professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and co-author of *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*. Dr. Cutrer teaches a marriage enrichment class, as well as other classes, at the seminary.

*Gwen Sandstrom Ebner*, Ph.D., is a professor of Christian Ministries at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, and author of the dissertation, *The Effect of Marriage Mentoring When Utilized in a Premarital Program*. Dr. Ebner's dissertation was utilized in the current study.

*Penny Hudson*, co-founder of the Marriage and Education Resource Center in Crestwood, Kentucky. Mrs. Hudson and her husband, David, provide marriage mentor training.

*Brandi K. Walters*, M.A. Ms. Walters is a Marriage and Family Therapist who has a private practice office at Sonrise Church in Hillsboro, Oregon.

## APPENDIX 4

### LIST OF CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

*Cape Christian Fellowship, Cape Coral, Florida*

*Christian Life Center, Dayton, Ohio*

*Door Creek Church, Madison, Wisconsin*

*Harmony Christian Church, Georgetown, Kentucky*

*Harvest Church, Cody, Wyoming*

*MiGi/Marriage in God's Image for Imago Dei Community, Portland, Oregon*

*Marriage Resource Center of Miami Valley, Springfield, Ohio*

*Palm Valley Church, Goodyear, Arizona*

*Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas*

*Sherman Bible Church, Sherman, Texas*

*Sonrise Church, Hillsboro, Oregon*

*SOS Marriage Care, Springfield, Nebraska*

*The Marriage Education and Resource Center (MERCY), Crestwood, Kentucky*

## APPENDIX 5

### PARTICIPANT CODES

Couple C was interviewed together on August 24, 2011.

Couple E was interviewed separately on August 25, 2011 (wife) and September 4, 2011 (husband).

Couple G was interviewed separately on August 25, 2011 (husband) and September 5, 2011 (wife).

Couple I was interviewed separately on August 26, 2011 (wife) and September 5, 2011 (husband).

Couple J was interviewed separately on August 26, 2011 (wife) and September 3, 2011 (husband).

Couple N was interviewed together on August 29, 2011.

Couple R was interviewed together on August 30, 2011.

Couple S was interviewed together on August 31, 2011.

Couple T was interviewed together on August 31, 2001.

Couple V was interviewed together on August 30, 2011.

Couple W was interviewed together on September 5, 2011.

Couple X was interviewed together on September 19, 2011.

Couple Z was interviewed together on September 6, 2011.

## APPENDIX 6

### EMAIL LETTER

From: Teresa Trascritti <teresa4christ@gmail.com>  
Subject: Marriage Mentoring Research

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing because I am in the Ed.D. program with the School of Church Ministries at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and I am working on a doctoral thesis about mentoring as a possible method of preventing divorce. I was wondering if you knew of any couples who have encountered marital problems (and were on the brink of divorce) but whose marriages were restored after spending time with a mentoring couple.

I can assure you that the couples I interview will remain anonymous. I also want you to know that they can tell me as much as they feel comfortable in telling me regarding their circumstances.

I would greatly appreciate any help you can provide.

Thank you and blessings,

Teresa Trascritti



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## ABSTRACT

### MARRIAGE MENTORING WITH COUPLES IN MARITAL CRISIS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Maria Teresa Trascritti, Ed.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011  
Chair: Michael S. Wilder, Ph.D.

The current study sought to examine the marriage mentoring model as a method to restore marriages among Christian believers. This thesis first assessed the dissolution of marriages through divorce in order to understand its causes, and included a study of the Christian Scriptures regarding divorce and the topic of marriage. In addition, current literature was reviewed in an attempt to better comprehend how mentoring worked and how it may be utilized as a divorce prevention method among troubled marriages. Interviews were then conducted with Christian couples who had experienced marital distress but were reconciled. The responses were then analyzed.

The study was unique in that it examined Christian couples in established marriages that were in marital distress when they started the mentoring process. Thirteen couples participated in the study. The couples lived in various states across the country: Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Christian couples were sought through churches and Christian counseling centers in the continental United States that have a marriage mentoring ministry and also through the recommendation of select seminary professors, church practitioners, or online marriage mentoring websites.

Past studies on marriage mentoring have shown that mentoring resulted in an increase in communication and a decrease in marital conflict among pre-marital or newly married couples. The results of the current study indicated that marriage mentoring was also beneficial to Christian couples who had been married for several years and were on the verge of divorce. This study has shown that no matter the severity of the marital distress, marriages can be repaired and can flourish with marriage mentoring.

**KEYWORDS:** marriage, mentoring, divorce, marital crisis, reconciliation, restoration, communication, ministry, family

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