ABSTRACT

GROWING TOGETHER IN CHRIST:

IMPROVING MARITAL INTIMACY THROUGH CONJOINT PRAYER

by

Timothy L. Barber

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between conjoint prayer and marital intimacy. The context of the study is the First Church of Christ, Burlington, Kentucky. Intimacy is understood in terms of connectedness with God and with one another.

This study identifies barriers to conjoint prayer and assesses marital intimacy in a pretest, posttest, posttest design using a control group and an experimental group in a six-week program.

A significant correlation was demonstrated between conjoint prayer and affectional expression. Two reported primary barriers to conjoint prayer were lack of time and lack of discipline.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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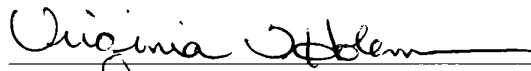
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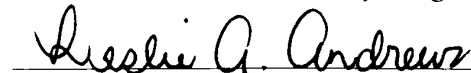
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

FIGURES

x

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

In September 1999, I was sitting in a workshop in the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, listening to David and Jan Stoop talk about "Helping Couples Develop and Experience Spiritual Intimacy." I had chosen this particular workshop because I have sensed a need for couples to learn to develop greater spiritual intimacy. From a more personal perspective, I wondered if I might learn something that would help my own marriage in this area. While I am thankful for the quality of my marriage, I would have to admit that spiritual intimacy has not been one its strong points.

Much of the workshop involved outlining the new book David and Jan had just finished writing, When Couples Pray Together; however, when Dr. Stoop reported statistics on the frequency of prayer among married couples and the divorce rate of those who pray together on a regular basis, I was hooked. According to Dr. Stoop only 4 percent of married couples pray together on a regular basis. Further, of those who do pray, only one in 1,500 ever get divorced ("Helping")[1].

My mind began racing with questions about why prayer is so rare among couples. What prevents conjoint prayer? What is the relation of conjoint prayer to marital satisfaction? I began to question the statistics and compare them with others I had heard about the divorce rate. I began talking with fellow pastors and counselors about their own experiences in conjoint prayer. What I found confirmed the claims by Dr. Stoop. Few couples pray together on a regular basis; however, what I could not document was the value of prayer in anything beyond a subjective way.

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[1]Dr. Stoop was contacted via e-mail to determine the source of this statistic. The response attributed the statistic to a study done by the Gallup Organization. However, when the Gallup Organization

As I researched the topic, I discovered several studies have been completed about the positive value of religiosity in marriage. Yet, this too was frustrating because religiosity is such a broad term. Rarely did conjoint prayer come into play as a variable.

I felt the significance of this topic warranted further study. While the divorce rates have tapered off in recent years, they remain at or near 50 percent (Regensburger 6). Even more troubling is the report of the Barna Research Group that states Christians are more likely than non-Christians to end their marriage in divorce (Barna Research Online). Other studies have documented a correlation between marital satisfaction and religiosity (Anthony; Bahr and Chadwick; Dudley and Kosinski). While studies that indicate a positive correlation of religiosity and marital satisfaction are encouraging, I decided to focus more narrowly on the correlation of conjoint prayer and marital satisfaction.

This project was designed to examine how conjoint prayer contributes to marital intimacy. It is primarily quantitative in its approach but has a qualitative element. The project involved a six-week group in which conjoint prayer was encouraged and barriers to conjoint prayer were explored. Couples were encouraged to begin regular prayer. Testing of marital satisfaction was done before the group experience, immediately following the six-week experience, and one month following the close of the group. A control group was also utilized.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The Bible establishes the mandate for such intimacy early and powerfully. One need look no further than the creation accounts of Genesis to find the theme. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he

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was contacted by phone, they had no record of the study.

created them" (Gen. 1:27). Part, but certainly not all, of being created in the image of

God means that humankind is designed to be in relationship.

Adam and Eve, before the Fall, serve as the model demonstrating God's intention

for marriage. While sin prevents intimacy at that level, significant strides toward that

union are possible.

Furthermore, the creation accounts demonstrate four types of relationship

intended for God's crowning achievement in creation. Men and women are intended to

be in relationship with God. Regarding his creation God said, "It is not good for man to

be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Thus, women and men are created to be in relationship with one

another. Adam and Eve were placed in dominion over the garden and the living creatures

within (Gen. 2:15-20). Their relationship with the world around them was thus important

to God. Lastly, implied through this and other portions of Scripture is a right relationship

with oneself. Wholeness thus involves, in part, living in right relationship with God,

others, and the world.

Writers have noted the significance of these four aspects of the *imago Dei*. Holt

writes of "four basic relationships that constitute spirituality: our relationships to God, to

self, to others, and to creation" (16).

Closely associated with the *imago Dei* is the Trinity that serves as a model for the

family (Joy and Joy; Campbell; Stanton; Brown). "What the 'family model' for the

Trinity will do for us is to give us the message that 'to be created in the image of God' is

to be placed 'in community'" (Joy and Joy 62). They go on to identify the family as

"God's first curriculum" and the Trinity as "God's second curriculum" (64). Enhancing

our understanding of the first may increase our experience of the second.

Focusing more narrowly on the family, and in particular on the marriage

relationship, the biblical example of family is largely patriarchal and sometimes

polygamous; however, the function of the family is more relevant to the topic. "The

family functioned as a religious community, preserving past traditions and passing them

on through instruction and worship" (Baab 238). In other words, within the context of

family, spirituality is nurtured.

Marriage served, at times, as a symbol for the relationship of God and Israel, for

example with Hosea and Gomer, and depending upon the interpretation, the entire book

of Song of Solomon. Marriage was rarely discussed by Jesus except in reference to

divorce.

The apostle Paul's writings on the topic of marriage may be seen as somewhat

problematic. For example, he seems to disparage marriage, suggesting that it is a

hindrance to service to Christ (1 Cor. 7:33). At other points, he provides direction to the

family and suggests the husband love his wife sacrificially as "Christ loved the church

and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

Subsequent chapters deal with several thorny issues. For example, I examine

God's design for the family. I explore the declaration in Scripture that humankind is

created in the image of a Triune God. The impact of sin upon the marriage relationship is

explored, as is the nature of genuine intimacy. The impact of culture's tendency to glorify

the self and how this has detracted from genuine intimacy is examined.

In summary, from a biblical-theological point of view, the marriage relationship is

intended by God to be one of intimacy, nurture, and mutual support. The family, with the

mother and father at the center, is seen as the source of spiritual life and vitality, passing

the spiritual heritage on to succeeding generations (Deut. 4:9). Strengthening the

spiritual bond between two marriage partners can be seen as a major step in returning the

spiritual vitality to the family as a whole, a means of strengthening the community of

faith and, indeed, strengthening society at large.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to improve marital intimacy through a six-week

small group experience focusing on conjoint prayer. Two issues drove this project. The

first was the report that only 4 percent of married couples pray together on a regular basis

(Stoop and Stoop, "Helping"). Secondly, research demonstrates a positive correlation

between religiosity and marital satisfaction. This study narrows the topic of religiosity to

conjoint prayer and evaluated the affective and behavioral changes in group participants

following a six-week small group experience.

Research Questions

Three key questions arose.

1. What were the beliefs about and practices of conjoint prayer among group

members before the group experience?

2. What effect did the group experience have on changing beliefs about and

practices of conjoint prayer?

3. What effect did the practice of conjoint prayer have upon marital intimacy

among group members?

The Project

The project revolved around a six-week group experience. Sessions lasted 1 and

1/2 hours. Couples were randomly assigned to participate in either an experimental group

or a control group. Both groups were tested before the group experience, immediately

upon the close of the group experience, and one month after the close of the group.

The group was designed to identify and remove barriers to conjoint prayer and to

facilitate conjoint prayer among group members. Group exercises helped identify and

remove barriers to conjoint prayer. A prayer log was maintained to document times and

frequency of prayer. It also gave the participants an opportunity to log personal

comments that added a qualitative element to the project. An evaluation at the close of

the six-week group experience provides additional data regarding the identification and

removal of barriers to intimacy.

Context

This project took place at the First Church of Christ, Burlington, Kentucky. First

Church is a growing church averaging 2,500 in attendance. The church has an aggressive

outreach and many young to middle-aged couples attend regularly.

Although I am not a member of this church, nor do I serve on staff, I have

developed a relationship with this church through my counseling ministry. I have

facilitated small groups at First Church of Christ in the past dealing with male sexual

addiction.

Definition of Terms

Several key terms appear throughout this study are defined below to avoid

ambiguity.

Conjoint prayer. In this study, conjoint prayer was defined as vocal prayer of

each partner in one another's presence. Length of time may vary but should be no shorter

than five minutes of prayer by each partner.

Intimacy. Prager provides a threefold definition of intimacy in terms of intimate interactions, experiences, and relationships. Honesty, vulnerability, and commitment will demonstrate an intimate union (402). Intimacy is not static but rather "is expressed in varying degrees in the ebb and flow of day-in, day-out living" (Clinebell and Clinebell 24). While Prager and Clinebell and Clinebell inform this study, it utilizes an operational definition of marital intimacy as understood by Spanier. This definition includes expressions of affection and sex within the relationship (Spanier, Dyadic 12). As such, the understanding of marital intimacy is behavioral in nature. That is, intimacy is understood as how the couples behave toward one another in terms of expressions of affection and demonstrations of affirmation.

Marital happiness. Happiness is an affective concept. In terms of a marriage, each partner must decide his or her own level of happiness. While satisfaction, intimacy, and happiness are closely related and may overlap in some areas, intimacy was the primary focus in this study.

Marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is a cognitive response and has to do, at least in part, with longevity. A successful (i.e., satisfactory) marriage is defined by some as a marriage that remains intact (Glenn). For this study, marital satisfaction was defined as a marriage that not only remains intact but one in which the partners have a reasonable degree of contentment. Such contentment, or satisfaction, is subjective and will be defined differently by individuals at different times over the course of the marriage.

Marital quality. As noted, happiness, satisfaction, and intimacy are terms that often overlap in meaning. In this study, marital quality was understood as a broad term that encompassed all of these terms.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was an experimental, multiple group time series design. It may be illustrated as thus with "O" being the measurements and "X" being the experiment.

Experimental group: O1------X-----O2-----O3

Control group: O1------------O2-----O3

The prayer log provided the qualitative element of this study. The prayer logs were collected at the conclusion of the six-week group experience. Participants were encouraged to journal daily, noting length and topic of prayer. They also had the opportunity to enter comments about the experience. These comments were examined to determine themes, particularly as they related to identifying and removing barriers to conjoint prayer. Additional information was collected via an evaluation form completed at the end of the group experience.

Subjects

Subjects were selected from the First Church of Christ, Burlington, Kentucky. Burlington is a town of nearly eleven thousand and, according to 2000 Census data, is the fastest growing community in the state of Kentucky (Oppenheimer A13). The city is located in Boone County, which has a population of nearly 86,000. Boone County is one of the northern-most counties in Kentucky and borders Cincinnati, Ohio.

Announcements were made in the bulletin, during Sunday school classes, and during the worship services soliciting couples that would be interested in participating in a program to enhance spiritual intimacy. The program was entitled "Growing Together in Christ." The size of each group was ten couples each.

Variables

The dependent variable was marital intimacy. It was understood that measures of this variable should reflect an increase in the level of intimacy perceived by participants in the experimental group.

The independent variable for this study was the six-week experience entitled "Growing Together in Christ." This group experience focused on getting the couples to increase their frequency of conjoint prayer. It also sought to identify and remove barriers to conjoint prayer.

This group focused on the biblical design of marriage, the consequences of sin, and the role of spiritual disciplines. It especially encouraged conjoint prayer among the participants. It was also designed to identify barriers to conjoint prayer and facilitate prayer between married individuals. Three particular barriers were addressed—anger, forgiveness, and trust.

Instrumentation

Both the control group and the experimental group completed three surveys—at the beginning of the group experience, at the close of the group, and one month following the close of the group.

The surveys consisted of a demographic survey, a survey to measure practices and beliefs about conjoint prayer (see Appendix A), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, "Measuring" 28). A system to assure anonymity but at the same time allow me to track the surveys over the course of the project was utilized. Identification numbers were on the assessments. The numbers were composed of the first five digits of the participants' social security numbers and the last four digits of the home phone numbers.

Both husband's and wife's number appeared on each assessment. This enabled responses to be paired with spouses.

In addition to the surveys, couples in the experimental group maintained a prayer log (see Appendix C). This log consisted of a weekly thought that dealt with a key issue relating to conjoint prayer giving the couple some encouragement as to the value and importance of conjoint prayer. Each partner maintained a log. Daily entries were to be made noting the frequency of prayer, and opportunities were provided for individual responses.

An evaluation was presented to those who had completed the six-week group, "Growing Together in Christ" (see Appendix D). The evaluation was designed to provide information about the perceived effectiveness of the experience in identifying and removing barriers to intimacy.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is found in the divorce rate of our society that, according to some studies, is as high as 67 percent (Gottman 16). Precise figures on the numbers of divorce are difficult to pinpoint; however, Regensburger notes that given the current trends the rate of divorce is at or near 50 percent.

> The National Center for Health Statistics reports that … one-half of all marriages will end in divorce. It should be noted, however, that a certain percentage of people get married and divorced multiple times, thus adding to the overall number of divorces. For those not among this group more than one-half of the marriages will not end in divorce. (6)

While the positive correlation of religiosity and marital satisfaction is well documented (e.g., Anthony; Bahr and Chadwick; Dudley and Kosinski), very little research has been done on the topic of conjoint prayer and marital satisfaction. The

anecdote says, "The family that prays together, stays together." Even when studies

demonstrate that prayer and marital satisfaction may be more highly correlated than other

areas of religiosity (Stoop and Stoop, When 31; Fuller 12), few researchers have

replicated studies or demonstrated the value of prayer in increasing marital satisfaction.

Barna Research Online has recently indicated trends in society that have a bearing

on this study. A release dated 21 December 1999, states that "one out of every four

American adults have experienced at least one divorce" (Barna). More troubling yet is

that "born again Christians are more likely to go through a marital split than are non-

Christians" (Barna Research Online). Barna and Hatch note further that the trends

regarding divorce have remained

> quite consistent since the mid-'90's. Based on nationwide surveys
> among adults 18 and over, the percentages of people who have
> been married and have experienced at least one divorce are 27
> percent among born-again Christians and 24 percent among non-
> Christians. (49)

Stafford suggests that one reason for this trend is that the world has vastly changed in the

changed in the last fifty years. "Baby boomers brought consumerism to everything they

did, including marriage. Consumerism is about happy choices, not about commitment."

Such a mentality was unheard of in the 1950s. Stafford refers to Wallerstein's work on

the influence of divorce on children and notes that "half of the men who divorce and 80

percent of the women are glad, years later, that they did."

Organizations have attempted to address the issue of divorce in society. Marriage

Savers attempts to prevent divorce by providing help for troubled marriages, mentoring

young marriages, and establishing community policies that require premarital counseling.

Marriage Savers claims to have made a significant difference in the divorce rate in cites

where community policies have been enacted (McManus). As noted, the emphasis is on divorce prevention, as opposed to the improvement of troubled marriages, and the focus is on equipping the partners with communication skills prior to the marriage.

Drs. Stanley and Markman write of government's attempt to reduce the divorce rate. Efforts center around two trends, namely, making divorce more difficult for couples to get and requiring premarital counseling. Drs. Stanley and Markman are skeptical of government's ability to influence the divorce rate and suggest educational programs in the place of legislation.

Delimitations and Generalizations

A significant limitation of this study was the sample size. In order to facilitate dialogue within the group experience, group size was limited to ten couples. Ten couples completed the group, and ten couples served as the control group.

The homogeneity of the group limits ability to generalize this study to others. The First Church of Christ is a predominately white, middle to upper-middle class congregation. Since this study occurs within the context of a Protestant church, generalizations to Catholics, Jews, and non-Christians are unwarranted.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 of this study provides a review of selected literature that relates to marital intimacy and prayer. The biblical and theological foundation for marriage is examined. In addition, historical perspectives on marriage and the role of the spiritual disciplines are surveyed. Contributions to the discussion from object relations theory are noted. Past studies dealing with the issue of religiosity and marital satisfaction are discussed.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the methodology including the research methods, instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on an analysis of the data following the group project. Chapter 5 provides summaries and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

As a pastor for over eighteen years and as a professional counselor, I clearly believe that one of the greatest challenges in society today is maintaining healthy marriages. Referring to a University of Wisconsin study based on 1985 U. S. Census records, Gottman reported that over a forty-year span, a couple has a 67 percent chance of getting a divorce (16). Compare that to an unpublished study by Jernigan and Nock that states the divorce rate for couples that pray together is less than 1 percent (qtd. in Fuller 12). If the statistics from Gottman, who states couples have a 67 percent chance of divorce, and Jernigan and Nock, who suggest less than 1 percent of couples who pray together experience divorce, are correct, then conjoint prayer may point to a great source of help in combating the high divorce rate in our culture.

A key question in this study is how to achieve and maintain spiritual connectedness. This review examines literature that relates to prayer as a means of developing spiritual intimacy within families in general and within marriages in particular. The issue of marital intimacy is set within the context of a biblical-theological model of community. The discipline of prayer is examined as a means of spiritual growth and development. Insights from spiritual writers as well as from psychology and counseling inform the discussion. Past studies, dealing with the issue of marital satisfaction and marital quality, are surveyed.

MARITAL INTIMACY

The major focus of this study involves the question of how to regain the intimacy intended by God in marriages. Such a statement presupposes several issues that are

examined in the following pages. The two key presuppositions are the biblical precedent

for marital intimacy and that marriages are failing to achieve that level of intimacy. First I

address the issue of defining intimacy. Second, I explore the theological foundations for

intimacy. These foundations are found in the Trinity, the *imago Dei*, and the concept of

the self. The relation of marital intimacy and humankind's creation in the image of a

triune God is explored. The individualized self, which has become a part of our

postmodern culture, is briefly discussed as it has contributed to the loss of intimacy.

Third, I discuss the biblical foundations for intimacy. In particular, I address how sin has

contributed to the loss of intimacy and how God's plan of redemption and reconciliation

restore intimacy through grace. Fourth, I explore how key formative writers have

contributed to the understanding of marriage and family in general, and intimacy in

particular.

Approaches to Understanding Intimacy

Over the past decades, numerous writers have examined the correlation of

religiosity and marital intimacy. Frequently they focus on the relationship of religiosity in

general to marriage. Intimacy is a broad term, worthy of clarification. This section will

focus on various definitions of intimacy. Spanier's understanding of affectional

expression is identified as the operational definition of intimacy for this study (Dyadic

12).

The Issue of Definition: Intimacy

A valid question is, "What level of intimacy within a marital dyad is realistic?"

Or, to phrase it somewhat differently, "What does intimacy look like within a marriage?"

Clinebell and Clinebell list twelve types of marital intimacy (37-38). They also describe

five types of relationships, which are seen as degrees of intimacy moving from distant to

close (34-37). These types are the conflict-habituated, the devitalized, the passive-

congenial, the vital, and the total relationship. The lives of conflict-habituated couples are

filled with discord. While a type of intimacy can be experienced at this point, it is far

from the biblical model. Clinebell and Clinebell suggest that the tension itself in conflict-

habituated couples is the source of cohesion. Devitalized couples once experienced deep

love for one another, but that love has now evaporated. Passive-congenial relationships

are marked by little conflict but at the same time little zeal. Rather than experiencing a

sense of loss, as with the devitalized type; the passive-congenial couple simply continues

to go through the motions of the marriage. Vital relationships experience high degrees of

intimacy. Genuine sharing takes place with one another. The total relationship is like the

vital type, however, they differ in that sharing occurs at many more points with the total

relationship couple (34-37).

> These five types of marital relationships do not necessarily represent
> degrees of marital stability.... What they represent is five styles of relating
> and different degrees of intimacy.... What is the optimal degree of
> intimacy in a marriage? There is no arbitrary way of determining this.
> Rather each couple must work out its own most-satisfying pattern of
> intimacy. *Intimacy is different for different people* [original emphasis]. In
> all marriages there are cycles of moving toward and moving away from
> one's spouse. In some marriages contact can be maintained for a brief time
> only. In others the tolerance for intimacy is so low that the partners
> seldom, if ever, really touch. Still others, like the *vital* [original emphasis]
> and *total* [original emphasis] relationships, can luxuriate depth relatedness
> only a small part of the time and in certain limited areas of our
> marriages.... Most of us long for more intimacy than we have found. (36-
> 37)

The Clinebells note two primary means by which spiritual intimacy may be

developed. One necessity is "communion with the timeless" (192). They focus on values,

living with a sense of the eternal in everyday life, and a commitment to individual

spiritual growth as ways to build intimacy. A second necessity of intimacy is "spiritual maturing [that] occurs when a couple lives their religion; that is, when they relate so that realities like faith, hope, and love come alive in their relationship" (196). Many long for greater intimacy than what is experienced. The Clinebells write not only of the will to relate but also of the forces that block intimacy. "The fact that so many couples achieve almost no genuine intimacy suggests that the counterforces to the will to relate must be very strong indeed" (41).

Prager defines intimacy in terms of intimate interactions, intimate experiences, and intimate relationships. Intimate interactions have to do with exchanges between people. "[M]ost definitions of intimate interaction converge on a notion of sharing the personal (innermost, private) aspects of the self" (402). Intimate experiences, on the other hand, have to do with the "feelings and thoughts people have during and as a result of their intimate interactions" (402). Intimate relationships have to do with the interactions of people over a period of time. Thus, intimacy for Prager is a combination of intimate interactions, experiences, and relationships. Prager refers to the work of Chelune, Robison, and Kommer in regard to how intimate interactions help build intimate relationships.

> They suggest that intimate experiences arises from the meaning-fulness of intimate interaction, which in turn facilitates mutual understanding between partners. They suggest further that the repetition of intimate interactions over time creates in partners an expectation of rewarding interaction in the future. It also creates an expanding base of mutual knowledge. These likely become important ingredients in intimate relationships. (403)

In terms of defining intimacy. Prager suggests that

> an intimate relationship is, minimally, one in which intimate interactions occur on a frequent (or at least regular) basis; partners have a history of

repeated intimate interactions, and each partner in the relationship can count on and expect intimate interactions with the other at acceptable intervals. (403)

As noted in Chapter 1, marriages are often described in terms of marital happiness, marital satisfaction, or, more broadly, as marital quality. Each of these definitions carries their own nuances. Marital happiness implies an affective element. Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) includes a measure of this affective element and has therefore been adopted as the operational definition of marital intimacy for this study ("Measuring" 17). While the DAS is not the only instrument to assess marital intimacy, it makes a valuable contribution to the field, and studies of validity and reliability demonstrate the DAS to be an effective assessment tool (18).

Spanier understands marital adjustment as a process that moves along a continuum from "well adjusted to maladjusted" ("Measuring" 17). As such, adjustment is not a fixed state but remains fluid, or changing, within a relationship and is behavioral in nature. The DAS has the ability to provide a snapshot of the level of marital adjustment at a given point in time. According to Spanier,

> dyadic adjustment can be defined as a process, the outcome of which is determined by the degree of: (1) troublesome dyadic differences; (2) interpersonal tensions and personal anxiety; (3) dyadic satisfaction; (4) dyadic cohesion; and (5) consensus on matters of importance to dyadic functioning. (17)

While each of the above definitions of intimacy informed the following discussion, the focus, particularly in terms of testing, was on the affective element of intimacy. Focusing on the affectional expression subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale provided this element. "Affectional expression measures the individual's satisfaction with the expression of affection and sex in the relationship" (Spanier, Dyadic

12). Such intimacy reaches far beyond physical expressions. As Prager noted, intimacy is broad and includes interactions, experiences, and relationships.

Theological Foundations for Intimacy

Three threads come together to form the theological foundations for intimacy in general and prayer in particular and are addressed in this section. They are the nature of God as Triune, humankind's creation in the image of God, and the development of the concept of the self. They are discussed in that order. These three, taken together, form the foundation for intimacy, as well as for prayer.

A Brief History of the Rise of Trinitarian Thought

The Bible does not articulate a clearly defined doctrine of the Trinity. Patristic writers put into words an understanding of the Trinity, often in response to heresy. Grenz traces the development of Trinitarian thought along two lines described as structural, or substantial, and relational (141). In this section I briefly discuss the rise of Trinitarian thought from those two perspectives—the structural, or hierarchical perspective and the relational perspective.

Structural trinitarian thought. The challenge facing patristic writers was to express the unity of God while at the same time hold to the biblical revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fox describes the process succinctly as a response to Sabellianism built on the assumption of the Cappadocians that each member of the Trinity was a full and complete being.

> What the Cappadocian leaders did was to take the word *hypostasis* which meant *concrete* and *full being* and identified it with "person." God as Trinity was therefore to be understood as three *hypostases*, three full beings. Then, to avoid introducing trithesism into God, they suggested that *ousia* should be taken to mean "substance" in the generic sense, and therefore applicable to more than one being. (38)

The result was the classic description of God as one being, existing eternally in three *hypostases*, or persons. This formula was approved by a general council in Constantinople in 381 and is known as the Nicene Creed (Olsen 137-200). Patristic writers did not think in terms of structural or relational views of the Trinity. However, they provided an understanding of the Trinity that has stood the test of time.

What constitutes this view of the Trinity as substantial, or structural, is an ontological understanding of God that views God's being as organized around three persons. How this has been understood, and, more particularly, how this carries over into humankind as the *imago Dei* has been expressed differently over the years.

"[S]ince the patristic era, the Christian concept of reason as comprising the divine image has routinely been linked to the faculty of will or volition" (Grenz 144). Irenaeus not only made this connection explicit, he also made the distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God, drawn from Genesis 1:26. He "taught that reason and will are central to the image of God and remain despite the fall" (Grenz 145). Further, he held that Christ is the true image of God and that this image is the goal towards which humans move.

In other words, Irenaeus introduced an eschatological element into the concept of the image of God. The teachings of Irenaeus have had a significant impact upon Christian thinking through the years. According to Grenz, Irenaeus "set the parameters for the understanding of the *imago Dei* not only for the patristic era but also for the next 1,500 years, perhaps even for the entire subsequent Christian tradition" (144).

Others echoed the thought of Irenaeus with some adding a variation of their own. Grenz continues his discussion with Augustine.

> Augustine's greatest contribution to the discussion of the image of God within humankind is the connection he draws between the structure of the human soul as the *imago dei* and the divine reality mirrored in the soul. In Augustine's estimation, the Trinity is prefigured in the structure of the human mind, specifically, in the three faculties of memory, intellect, and will. (156)

Aquinas marks, according to Grenz, the high-water mark of the development of structural Trinitarian thought (161). Aquinas wrote of the image of God as capable of grace, and also linked the *imago Dei* with divine glory. For Aquinas, the intellect was the locus of the image of God within humankind.

> Aquinas developed a highly intellect-focused understanding of the divine image. In his estimation, the human person is fundamentally an intellectual creature for whom the "ultimate beatitude" consists in "the operation of the intellect." Moreover, this "highest [human] function" is oriented toward the attainment of intellectual knowledge of God in the form of the vision of God's own essence. To this end, God has placed within the soul of every person the intellectual faculty as the natural capacity within the structure of human nature that is capable of receiving the illuminating grace of God already in this life but more completely in the next. This anthropological proposal marked the final flowering of the structural view of the *imago dei* that had been developing since the second century. (161)

Christian tradition continues to be influenced by Aquinas' thinking. However, with the Reformation, an alternative to structural trinitarianism was sought more earnestly.

Relational trinitarian thought. "The relational understanding of the *imago Dei* moves the focus from noun to verb" (Grenz 162). The structural view "presupposes that a relationship exists between Creator and creature and views the image as what occurs as a consequence of the relationship—namely, the creature 'images' the Creator" (162).

The roots of relational trinitarian thought are found in Luther. He moved beyond an understanding of the image of God as a capacity to know God as set forth in medieval anthropology. Luther's concept of the *imago Dei*

involves the right ordering or right functioning of reason and will so that the human person in fact does know and love God. "Man is not only like God in this respect that he has the ability to reason, or an intellect, and a will," Luther writes, "but also that he has a likeness of God, that is, a will and an intellect by which he understands God and by which he desires what God desires, etc." (Grenz 164)

Others writers built upon the work of Luther. Calvin's contribution to the understanding of the divine image in humankind has been far-reaching. For him, the divine image is found in persons reflecting God, as a mirror. By doing so, powers such as reason and the will function in a manner that reflect God. "Man, therefore, was created in the image of God, (Gen. 1:27) and in him the Creator was pleased to behold, as in a mirror, his own glory" (493). In other words, the issue is not so much that a person has the powers of reason and will but that those powers actually mirror God that is important to Calvin.

Jonathan Edwards contributed to a relational view of the Trinity primarily through his cosmology. Edwards wrote in reaction to a deist view of God as a machine, and his work has implications for this study in that Edwards criticized Christian theology's acceptance of the category of substance. For Edwards, God, or the exercise of his power, held matter together at the atomic level.

The power that resists an atom's division must be superior to "any finite power whatsoever," that is, must be infinite. Which is "as much" as to say "that it is God himself, or the immediate exercise of his power, that keeps the parts of atoms ... together. (qtd. in Jenson 28)

In other words, Edwards locates the power that holds the universe together in God himself. When God is seen as Triune, this has implications for everyone. Individuals are in community with one another as a reflection of being created in the image of God. Thus, the line between the individual and the community disappears. For Edwards, the

eternal purposes of God are found in the idea of the relational nature of the triune God

being made manifest in individuals who come together in community.

> "Why did God become man?" The final answer in Edwards' sense must
> be: in order for the triune Community and the created community to make
> one. The "happiness of society," he wrote in an early journal entry,
> consists "in the mutual communication of each other's happiness." (Jenson
> 141)

More is said of the contribution of Edwards below. At this point, note simply that

in some ways Edwards prefigured the writings of more modern trinitarians such as

Moltmann and Zizioulas. Moltmann, in History and the Triune God, describes the divine

unity in terms of *perichoresis.*

> [*Perichoresis*] denotes that trinitarian unity which goes out beyond the
> doctrine of persons and their relations; by virtue of their eternal love, the
> divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another and in
> one another that they constitute themselves in their unique, incomparable
> and complete unity. (qtd. in Grenz 44)

In other words, the unity of the Trinity is so complete that each member of the

Trinity defines its essential identity as being a part of that Trinity. For example, one

cannot speak of Jesus without understanding that he is a part of the Father and of the

Spirit. The same is true for each member of the Trinity.

Zizioulas stresses the necessity of understanding the personal nature of God. With

the Cappadocians, Zizioulas locates the source of God's being in the person of the Father.

> He wants to emphasize that the ontological principle of God is a person,
> that the being of God is identified with a person. The significance of this
> for trinitarian theology is that God exists on account of a person, not on
> account of a substance. (qtd. in Fox 40)

Thus for Edwards, Moltmann, and Zizioulas, the being of God is rooted in his

personal nature. This constitutes a "'cosmic *perichoresis*' for 'a mutual indwelling of the

world in God and God in the world'" (Grenz 45).

In summary, classic, structural trinitarian thought focuses on the nature of substance and is defined in such concepts as reason or the will. Relational trinitarian theology is centered in God as he is in relation with himself and with the world. This relationship provides the foundation for intimacy, and indeed for prayer. Without such an intimate relationship, prayer would be speaking to a distant God. With such intimacy, God is part of everything that happens, as well as a part of every individual and every family.

Imago Dei

This section focuses more specifically on the nature and role of the imago Dei. After a general discussion of the relational nature of the Trinity, four particular areas are discussed. First, the Trinity is set forth as the model for genuine community. Second, the question of power, or authority, is discussed in terms of how it relates to two models of the family—hierarchical and the egalitarian. Third, community is discussed in terms of its function as a metaphor for the family. Fourth, the contribution of Jonathan Edwards to the discussion of the nature of community is considered.

In the creation accounts of Genesis 1-3, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Theologians differ on the definition of the imago Dei and on how much of the image of God humanity maintained after the Fall. Brunner maintained a dual definition of the imago Dei.[2] Such a definition focuses on the use of Tzelem and Demuth, or image and likeness, in Genesis 1:26. Brunner addressed the question of how much of the image of God remained within humankind after the Fall. He argued that a formal image of God

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[2] See Dunning, Grace, Faith and Holiness for an excellent summary of this debate, particularly the contribution of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, p. 151 ff. See also, Grenz The Social God and the Relational

remains within fallen humankind and is marked by the capacity for reason. Such a

remnant becomes the basis for a natural theology. Barth, on the other hand, argued that

all knowledge of God comes through revelation (Dunning 151).

A Wesleyan understanding of the *imago Dei* seems to hold both elements in

tension. According to Dunning, the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace provides a

way to speak of the *imago Dei* as essentially a relational dimension (157). Prevenient

grace also has the advantage of being able to hold in tension the idea that we, as God's

creatures, have both lost the image, through broken relationship, and yet retain that

image, through responding to the grace of God.

> What we are suggesting here is that prevenient grace is simply another
> way of talking about that aspect of *imago Dei* as a relationship within
> which humanity perpetually stands, while at the same time recognizing
> that this grace is not, in and of itself, saving grace, even though it may
> become so if properly responded to. (158)

This understanding will play a significant role in understanding the nature of

redemption below. The key point is that this doctrine points to humankind's essential

nature as created in the image of God (i.e., as a relational being). "Humanity is, thus,

imago trinitatis. Therefore, when we look for analogies of God we must look not to

solitary individuals but to humans in community" (Campbell 9). The *perichoresis* of God

is carried over into an essential element of personhood.

Another important element that stems from this understanding of the *imago Dei* is

the level of intimacy available to Adam and Eve. That they are pictured as "both naked,

and they felt no shame" in Genesis 2:25 is symbolic of more than physical nakedness.

Such nakedness is symbolic of a guilt-free relationship with God as well as with one

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Self, pp. 144 for the contribution of Irenaeus on this subject.

another.[3] Such intimacy is all encompassing in that it impacts every area of marital life. Honesty, vulnerability, openness, and mutual sharing take place in such an intimate relationship.

Thus, spiritual intimacy was a part of God's original design for marriage. The incredible intimacy between Adam and Eve and God is seen in the evening walks with God (Gen. 3:8-10). Wenham notes this evening walk seems not to have been unusual. "Maybe a daily chat between the Almighty and his creatures was customary" (76).

Prayer is thus seen as a part of God's plan for his creation. It is rooted not only in the nature of God as Triune and thus continually communicating with himself but also in his plan for his creation. His desire was to "walk in the garden" (Gen. 3:8) in intimate connectedness with humankind. Indeed, the whole creation narrative may be seen as a demonstration of God's love and desire to share his creation with us, the created. Curtis and Eldredge picture this beautifully.

> Real love creates a generous openness.... The best things in life were meant to be shared. That is why married lovers want to increase their joy by having children. And so it is with God. "Father," Jesus says, "I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am. I want them to be one heart and mind with us" (John 17). Overflowing with the generosity that comes from the abundance of real love, he creates us to share in the joy of this heroic intimacy. One early mystic says we were created out of the laughter of the Trinity. (73-74)

The breadth of this intimacy extends beyond the relationship with God and the relationship between Adam and Eve. Holt notes the creation accounts demonstrate four important relationships. Individuals are to be in relationship with God, with others, with

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[3] Bradshaw's work on shame makes a similar connection suggesting that Adam and Eve's nakedness was symbolic of their true selves. While much of his work focuses on an individual's experience of toxic shame, it also relates to the impact of shame on relationships. Indeed, shame may be said to be relational in nature as it stems from our perceptions of other's rejection of us or of our behavior [25-26]. (See Fitzgerald for a through discussion of the psychological and theological roots of shame (49-103).

the world around them, and with themselves. According to Holt, such wholeness is key to healthy and whole spirituality (16-23).

More is said of the impact of guilt and shame upon relationships below. At this point, note that openness and intimacy such as experienced by Adam and Eve before the Fall is exceedingly difficult to achieve in an atmosphere surrounded by mistrust, deceit, and selfishness. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve lost not only intimacy with one another but also intimacy with God. Nakedness now conveyed a new, shame-laden meaning. The need for salvation and the restoration of this connectedness with God and with one another is huge.

The Trinity as a model for community. According to some, the Trinity serves as a model for the family. "What the 'family model' for the Trinity will do for us is to give us the message that 'to be created in the image of God' is to be placed 'in community'" (Joy and Joy 62).

Indeed, the ideas of humankind as created in the image of God and the triune nature of God are so closely connected that separating them is impossible. As was noted above, the essence of this connection involves relationship. Grenz and Franke note that the destiny of men and women demonstrates this community in their lives.

> This dynamic conception of the *imago dei* arising out of the relational model launches us on the road toward an understanding of the self that can speak within the postmodern context. At the heart of the divine image is human destiny as designed by God. Human beings are the image of God insofar as we have received, are now fulfilling, and one day will fully actualize the divine design for human existence, which is our destiny. (198)

Such a destiny is rooted in the biblical accounts of creation and has a definite social nature to it. Grenz and Franke continue:

The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be. Consequently, each human is related to the image of God ultimately only within the context of life in relationship. Only in community can we truly show what God is like, for God is the community of love, the eternal relational dynamic enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity. (201)

Such an understanding of the Trinity is at the heart of a Christian marriage according to Stanton.

The historical Christian tradition teaches that humanity was created in the image of the Trinitarian God who is intensely relational…. The primary characteristics of this metaphysical community of persons are love, intimacy, cooperative creativity, communication, exclusiveness, and permanence. The persons of the Trinity are alike but distinct beings who cannot be fully appreciated apart from their relation to each other.

In this image humanity was created, male and female. Neither male nor female can be fully appreciated in themselves, but rather, they find complement and completeness in one another. Therefore, to the Christian, marriage and family are inherently Trinitarian, for it is the closest earthly model we have of the eternal, heavenly reality.

Brown notes that such a theology of family "is a product of the inner and outer conversation among Scripture, the tradition of the church, cultural experience, and our own personal experiences with the living God" (66). He describes three essential components of a trinitarian-based theology of family.

Since humanity was created in the image of God, the essential human relatedness is a reflection of relatedness that constitutes the being of God, that is, dynamic, communal, loving relatedness. Humanity is *imago Dei*, and thus by necessity *imago trinitatis*. (67)

The essential point here is that as individuals created in the image of God, men and women are intended to be in relation, or in community, with God, with one another, and with the world at large. Just as Zizioulas and others demonstrated theologically the communal nature of God, so too, the biblical witness demonstrates a basic design that is communal in nature. A sense of community is a part of God's basic design and purpose.

As such, it has been selected as a cardinal metaphor for understanding marriage and family in this study.

The question of how this relational, or communal, image of God is demonstrated within marriages is important to this study. In particular, two views of marriage and family structure are examined. These two views are the hierarchical and the egalitarian models. These models are discussed here in terms of how power and authority is distributed within the family as well as how that distribution of power effects marital satisfaction.

Authority and marital satisfaction. Power and authority within marriages and families have been topics of study for decades (Stuart 252-83). Power is relational in nature. Stuart defines power as "the ability of one person to change the probability of another person's behavior" (254).

Stuart notes that while most American families appear to support the ideal of egalitarianism, such a relationship "is more a goal than a reality" (260). Furthermore, according to Stuart, the question of the extent of this egalitarianism is challenging.

> If egalitarianism is taken to mean "absolute equality," then husbands and wives must open every decision to negotiation and possible dispute.... On the other hand, if egalitarianism is understood to mean "relative equality" or "equitable parity" in decision making, then each spouse could claim authority in areas of his or her particular interest or expertise, while sharing those of common concern in an effort to facilitate the flow of events in marital life. (261)

Not only is understanding the dynamics of equality difficult within the marriage, marital satisfaction is also impacted by the distribution of power within the marriage. Kemper and Reichler write, "spouses can be happy regardless of who dominates" (224). According to their article, "husbands can be happy, regardless of who is dominant, as

long as the power relations between husband and wife are unambiguous" (224-25). The

situation is different for the wives. "Satisfaction of wives... tends to be inversely related

to husband's dominance" (225). In other words, according to Kemper and Reichler, as a

husband's dominance goes up, the marital satisfaction of the wife goes down.

Furthermore, when wives in a husband-dominance relationship find increased levels of

satisfaction, it is because "they have accommodated themselves to husband's values and

orientations" (225). Dangers to the relationship exist when disparities in power exist.

According to Kemper and Reichler, "when disparities of power are too great, instead of

accommodation, unhappiness and divorce are likely" (225).

As for wives having dominance, Kemper and Reichler suggest that husbands may,

or may not, be happy in such a situation. However, the wife is most generally not

satisfied with a position of dominance (225).

The suggestion from the work of Kemper and Reichler, as well as that of Stuart, is

that disadvantages of men having too much power in a marital relationship are real.

Furthermore, advantages of wives having at least enough power to approach equality are

genuine. Stuart states the matter well.

> It can be concluded that egalitarianism is a generally accepted ideal.
> Sensitively operationalized egalitarianism does not call for equality in all
> matters; rather, it would suggest that couples should develop an equitable
> means of allocating decision-making authority between the spouses
> according to their sanctioned roles, expertise, or interest in the various
> areas in which decisions must be made. If the resulting balance is
> imperfect, however, the available evidence suggests that slightly more
> husband influence may be more conducive to marital and family happiness
> than greater influence by the wife. (265)

The hierarchical model of the family is assumed by some to be the most biblical.

Joy and Joy note that while many have adopted a view of the Godhead as structural, or

hierarchical, this is based on Greek philosophy rather than Scripture (61). Some have

extended this hierarchical view of God to the family. Gothard, as an extreme example,

relies heavily upon a chain of command that places the father first, followed by the wife

and then the children (qtd. in Bockelman 69-83). According to Gothard, through

following this chain of command character is developed within each person.

Robbie and Don Joy suggest this hierarchical model of the family appears to work

so well because it is based upon the natural predispositions of both men and women (77-

78). However, as they note, this is a model that has baptized the Fall, and it reflects a

pagan culture that devalues women and children (83).

Perhaps the most challenging scriptural passage in terms of the headship-

servanthood debate is Ephesians 5:21-33. Stevens deals with this passage effectively by

writing about the need to "reverse the curse" (145). "Originally the man and woman were

side-by-side companions in the Garden (Gen. 2:18-25). There is nothing in the creation

story that suggests inequality or subordination" (149).

However, the relationship between Adam and Eve changed after the Fall. After

the Fall, one of the consequences of that sin is described in terms of the husband ruling

over the wife (Gen. 3:16). Unfortunately, many have chosen this hierarchical structure as

the model for a Christian marriage, rather than God's original design as demonstrated in

Adam and Eve prior to the Fall.[4] Stevens continues,

> How tragic it would be for Christians to base the politics of marriage on
> the curse, rather than on Calvary grace. Yet this is exactly what I see many
> believers doing. By missing the grace of mutual submission, they reduce
> spiritual intimacy. (149)

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[4] Gothard's work serves as an example of the hierarchical model and is described in Gothard, by
Bockelman.

This certainly does not imply that the grace of Calvary removes all consequences of the Fall. The point Stevens is making, and that is germane for this study, is that mutual submission in Christ is a more appropriate alternative as a model for marriage and family than the hierarchical, or headship, model.

> Our life together in Christ is not based simply on mutual submission or on a male-female hierarchy, but on Christ who chooses to dwell in the covenant.... Mutual submission is the key not because it takes politics out of marriage by requiring each to lay down rights, but because mutual submission is our "reverence for Christ." (150-51)

Stevens is referring to Bonhoeffer's view of Christ as Mediator. "He is the Mediator, not only between God and Man, but between man and man, between man and reality.... He is the sole Mediator in the world" (Bonhoeffer 95). As such, all relationships, including that of the husband and the wife, are incarnational in the sense that Christ is a very real part of each person. Servanthood is not simply a matter of one person submitting to the other person, or even one submitting to Christ through the other person. Rather, when we love and submit to another, we love and submit ourselves to Christ as well.

Commenting on the Ephesians 5 passage, Jerome notes love as the basis for service. This love differs from secular concepts of power and authority. "The difference between secular rulers and Christian rulers is that the former love to boss their subordinates whereas the latter serve them" (qtd. in Edwards 194).

Martin looks to Ephesians 5:31 as the key to understanding the nature of the relationship of husband and wife. Verse 33 completes the *inclusio*, that began in 5:21, with the call of the wife to φοβηται (fear) her husband. The quote from Genesis 2:24 and the reference to this as representative of the relationship of Christ to the church

demonstrates that what Paul has in mind is "the heavenly Lord and his spouse, the church" (69). As such, this controls our understanding of the call to submission. In other words, Paul applies the image of Christ and the Church to that of the husband and the wife. Love permeates this relationship (5:25). This love that marks a healthy, biblical marriage is described in terms of self-surrender, which differs greatly from a demanding spirit that expects servitude.

Rather than stressing control over the wife, Paul's point in Ephesians 5:23 was to encourage a loving, tender, nourishing, mutual relationship of submission that is modeled after the self-giving example of Christ. The authors above agree that the hierarchical model, commonly offered as the biblical model, be replaced by a servanthood model (Joy and Joy 126; Stevens 150).

Community as a metaphor for family and marriage. Another way to think of the issue of power and authority within marriages and families is in terms of community. Moxnes writes that, "neither in Greek nor in Latin is there a term for our word 'family' in the meaning of 'husband and wife with one or more children'" (20). References to *oikonomia*, or household, as well as the Latin words *familia* and *domus* do appear in Greek and Latin literature, however, according to Moxnes, *familia* is too broad a word to refer simply to a nuclear family as the term is commonly used today. As evidence, he notes that its use includes possessions, as well as persons (21).

> *Domus* was used in the meaning of "household," so that it included husband, wife, children, slaves and others living in the house. In a broader sense it could also be used of the descent group, and was larger than *familia* since it also included descendents through women. (21)

This is not to say that the idea of family has no bearing on this study. Writers point to the meaning of community in the New Testament in general, and in Pauline

writings in particular, as a means of understanding the nature of the family. These studies

are helpful in addressing the debate between two competing models of Christian families

(viz. the hierarchical, or headship model, and the servanthood, or community model).

The servanthood, or community model, is based on an understanding of the

family as created in the image of a relational God, thus drawing upon the relational view

of the Trinity, as well an understanding of the pre-Fall state of Adam and Eve as God's

original plan for the family. "The moving prayer of Jesus recorded for us in John 17

evokes intimate images of the Trinity and calls the church and the family to the unity that

comes only in community" (Joy and Joy 63).

Chartier writes of the connection of community and family in Paul's epistles in

terms of faith, hope, and love (9). Others focus on God's call to community as a means of

addressing the issue of the structure of the family. For example, Park explores the issue

of authority within the family and calls for a servanthood model opposed to a hierarchical

model.

> The major difference between Paul's view of marriage and that of his
> culture was the apostle's understanding of the concepts of "love" and
> "respect" illustrated by the analogy of Christ's relation to the Church.
> Thus, the apostle equated *kephale* to *agape* and Christ's atoning death
> thereby redefining *kephale* not structurally with one person dominant over
> another but christologically in terms of servanthood, sacrifice, and love.
> Husbands were to fulfill their roles as "head" of the household by being
> servants, expressing their authority and power through selfless acts of
> love. (18)

For Park, the essential message of Ephesians 5 is that of love and respect.

> One could say that the husband fulfills his role as "head" through "love"
> and the wife fulfills her role as "subordinate" through "respect," the two
> become servants to one another, uplifting each other as Christ uplifts the
> church. Their mutual subjection grows out of their life together in the
> Spirit marked by reverence for Christ. (18)

Lessen supports a similar view pointing to the impact of Roman cultural attitudes on early Christian writers.

> Whereas the Roman family signaled, first and foremost, the hierarchical power relationships, the family metaphors as used by the first Christians did not primarily support a hierarchical order on earth. When in the Gospels, to take the most prominent Christian texts, family metaphors were used to describe inter-human relationships, their function was primarily to create equality and a new sense of belonging. (114).

Gamisko, translated marriage, is a more biblical word, coming "from the root *gam* or *gem*, to fit together" (Gunther 575). According to Gunther,

> in the OT marriage is clearly regarded from the husband's standpoint and serves above all for the begetting of offspring.... At the same time the wife is loved and taken seriously as a partner (Gen. 2.23) ... and in the second creation narrative she is described as a "helper" (Gen. 2:18). (576)

According to Gunther, the New Testament builds upon these ideas.

> Marriage as an institution is clearly presupposed in the NT. It is not based on human regulations but on God's commandments.... It always refers to the shared life of a man with a woman. Though the NT also essentially looks on marriage from the man's standpoint (as the *kephale*, head, 1 Cor. 11.3; Eph. 5.23), the Greek and the OT traditions are so transcended that the man's special rights fall away, and throughout the NT the shared life of husband and wife stands in the foreground. (579)

Grenz and Franke also address the issue community. As noted above. Grenz and Franke write of the nature of God as relational. They write of three qualities of genuine community. "[A] community consists of a group of people who are conscious that they share a similar frame of reference" (216). That is, they have a similar view of life and share common values. A second quality "operative in all communities is a group focus" (216). A sense of interdependency exists among community members. Lastly, community has a "person focus" (219). That is, in such a group, one draws a sense of identity from being a part of that community.

In terms of marriage, such a definition of community means that those within the marriage experience connection at several levels. They share a common frame of reference, they experience interdependency, and they define their own personal identity from within the marriage. The relationship becomes a "we" rather than just two individuals who are living parallel lives. Thus, Grenz and Franke's work helps ground the idea of community in a larger theoretical framework of contemporary theological discussion.

Jonathan Edwards and community. The writings of Jonathan Edwards provide another way of thinking about the issue of the *imago Dei*, as well as the issue of community. Edwards is often remembered as the evangelist associated with the Great Awakening in eighteenth century America; however, he was a theologian of immense significance whose work was both a critique and an attempt to contextualize the Enlightenment in America.[5]

The freedom of the will was a popular topic of discussion in the days of Edwards, just as it had been in the Reformation. Edwards considered

> the reassertion of the "free will" as the root error among all the eighteen century's departures from original Calvinism.
> For the Arminian gravamen against Calvinism was that its denial of *liberum arbitrium* must, if taken into practice, undo moral responsibility and disorder the community. It was the same claim made by Erasmus against Luther; Luther's reply, On the Bondage of the Will, is the most notable predecessor and parallel to Edwards' book. But whereas Luther was inclined to let society fall, if the truth had that result, Edwards turned the Arminian charge against itself and denounced the delusion of "the free will" as the great solvent of modern communities. (Jenson 156)

For Edwards, the issue was not simply the determinism of God versus a more absolute freedom as espoused by the Enlightenment. For Edwards, the issue was a moral

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[5] This critique and contextualization of the Enlightenment is a major theme of Jenson's work.

one, rooted in the call to serve God. In short, the question was, how can individuals selfishly serve themselves and serve God at the same time?

Freedom is found, according to Edwards, in doing God's will rather than freely choosing to do whatever the individual wishes to do. Such a person, who chooses his or her own actions, is not free according to Edwards. Such supposed freedom is in actuality bondage to one's selfishness. True freedom is found for Edwards in doing God's will, a will that is determined in the sense that God has chosen it.

> The "determinism" Edwards constructs is very different than we are likely to suppose it. In Freedom of the Will, he creates it by the axiom that every event, choices included, is as it is on account of its causes, and that the chain of causes always reaches to past events, which *must* [original emphasis] be what they are. (Jenson 163)

Edwards' discussion of the freedom of the will is rooted in the nature of the Triune God. As noted above, Edwards viewed the Trinity as permeating every aspect of life. This has a direct bearing on this study in that God is relational in nature. That is, God's will is to be in relationship with individuals, and individuals live in relation with one another. As such, God causes community. Since God desires community, it does not occur as a free choice of individuals but rather occurs an expression of living in obedience to God. It is not a mechanistic determinism by God but a matter of individuals living in obedience to God's will that causes community to exist. Carse summarizes Edwards' position on this matter.

> We cannot talk about man and God apart from what man *actually does* [original emphasis] in the world. But along with the mechanistic view of the soul's operation we must abandon any such causal terms to discuss the manner of God's influence on man. According to the old doctrines of predestination it was necessary to say that God *caused* [original emphasis] the will of man to go in one direction or another; but in Freedom of the Will Edwards has given shape to an altogether new way of talking about

America's Theologian.

the will of God: God can have no part in determining what man actually does in the world unless he becomes man's reason for doing it. (64)

In conclusion, Edwards has reminded us of another danger of the selfishness of society (viz., that we find ourselves bound to that selfishness fooling ourselves into thinking that we are free in making our choices.) Edwards has reminded us that we are free only in so far as we follow God's design for our lives. Since humankind is created in the image of a relational God, men and women are "determined" to be like God. That is, we are destined to be in community with others. To choose to do otherwise is not expressing freedom but is a demonstration of one's being bound to one's own selfishness.

In summary, the biblical model for marriage is a close, intimate relationship between a man and a woman that includes not only physical, emotional, and sexual intimacy but also spiritual intimacy. Intimacy is to be experienced through mutual submission in reverence to Christ. Hierarchical models may be seen as having been derived from interpretations of Scripture that were influenced by Greek philosophy; moreover, such models tend to ignore God's original design for marriage that favors community and equality. Admittedly, some find happiness within the hierarchical model of marriage. However, as demonstrated above, a model of marriage based on mutual submission more closely relates to God's original design for marriage.

A relationship of mutual submission opens the door for intimacy in a way that hierarchical models of the family cannot. Prayer, and the incredible spiritual intimacy modeled by Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, continue to serve as valid models of how to pursue intimacy in marriages and families today. Clearly, the introduction of sin into God's original design has marred the marriage relationship; however, as will be seen, this flaw does not negate the fact of God's original purposes. Before addressing the issue of

sin from a biblical point of view, another related issue is worthy of attention (viz., how our culture has come to view the self as a separate, autonomous, individual).

A Brief History of the Concept of the Self

Another thread that forms the theological foundation for intimacy is the idea of the self or the person. Again, the *imago Dei* plays an essential role. In this section I examine the rise of the concept of the self from its Greek origins through modernity to the loss of self in postmodern thought. This discussion is germane to this study in that it helps explain the isolation that is prevalent in society today.

The rise of the self. Ancient Greek thought is primarily non-personal with no concept of the individual, the self, or the person.[6] All being was seen as one, united in a way that prevented anyone, even God, from escaping that union and looking at himself or herself objectively from without. Stepping back objectively and viewing one's self was impossible. Such unity provided harmony, order, and stability. Ancient Greek theater often picked up on the theme of harmony and the inescapable consequences of fate.

> The central drama inevitably enacted in every play was each character's struggle to resist the oppression of the inexorability of this harmonious unity that predetermines her or his fate. The freedom "to become one's own person" was impossible within such a world. (Fox 33)

According to Fox, the concept of the person has its origin in Greek theater. Fox draws upon the work of Zizioulas to discuss the development of the idea of the person through history.

> It was used to denote the actor's mask. Therefore, before the concept of person had been conceived, the theater became an arena wherein the masked players explored what it was to be a person—"to exist as a free, unique and unrepeatable entity." In the plays the outcome was always tragic; the freedom of the person was always overcome by fate. The

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[6] For a fuller description of the ancient Greek and Roman mind-set see Zizioulas, Being as Communion, pp. 27-65

message was consistent: a human being does not have the freedom to escape fate and to become a unique self. It was not deemed possible for a human being to *be* [original emphasis] in such a way. (33)

Augustine and his desire to "know thyself" is generally credited as developing the modern concept of the self. LaCugna writes of his influence:

Largely due to the influence of the introspective psychology of Augustine and his heirs, we in the West today think of a person as a "self" who may be further defined as an individual center of consciousness, a free, intentional subject, one who knows and is known, loves and is loved, an individual identity, a unique personality endowed with certain rights, a moral agent, someone who experiences, weighs, decides, and acts. (qtd. in Grenz 60)

Grenz traces the rise of the self through Boethius who defined the person in terms of individual rationality (65). The legacy of this definition is "the modern assumption that the true person, the individual human, lies in some 'inner self'" (66).

The Enlightenment brought a focus not only on the individual as suggested by Boethius but more importantly on reason. Descartes located certainty within the individual in a radical way with the individual becoming the source of knowledge "arising from the knowing subject's own personal self" (Grenz 70). Descartes' focus on the individual had a profound impact on later thinking. According to Grenz, "Descartes exercised immense influence on all subsequent thinking, perhaps even to the extent of setting the philosophical agenda for the next three hundred years" (70).

In Kant the line of thinking reached its zenith. For Kant, reason was not limited to theoretical knowledge but extended also to practical knowledge. Such knowledge described not only what is, but also what ought to be. Kant wrote of a

rationally moral way of living as "duty," which culminates in the supreme principle of morality, his famous categorical imperative. In a sentence, the categorical imperative declares, "Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a Universal law of Nature." (Grenz 75-76)

The final stage in the rise of the modern self was brought about by the psychological theories of James, Maslow, and others. James wrote not only of the self but also of the "me." According to James, the me is "the sum total of everything a person can claim as one's own—material possessions, family and friends, honors and esteem—everything that triggers emotion" (qtd. in Grenz 90). Everything now became located within the individual in a stream of experiences, thoughts, and emotions.

Erikson and Fromm added their own pieces to the understanding of the self. Erikson added his emphasis on the development of the social self, and Fromm added his emphasis on achieving the aims of human life. Maslow and his hierarchy of needs elevated the psychological self. Self-actualization now became the goal and the measure of the self. Such a journey of the self was profound in its impact on society and culture but the emphasis has changed.

> The modern self emerged as the product of a 1,500-year intellectual journey that stretched from Augustine to Maslow. This pilgrimage netted a self-assured, self-sufficient, centered self that constituted a stable identity in the midst of a chaotic world. Yet the reign of the modern self seems to be one of the casualties of the post-modern dethroning of all ruling monarchs. (Grenz 97)

The loss of the self. The analytical mind-set of the Enlightenment did not set well with everyone. Romanticism arose, in part, as a reaction to the influences of the Enlightenment. Grenz traces this shift, which has produced the legacy of postmodernism.[7]

Rousseau, probably more than anyone else, elevated the role of introspection, intuition, and feeling. "In his estimation, feeling, rather than rationality or thought, lay at the heart of the self" (Grenz 105).

A religious dimension also exists in the move toward introspection. This religious

dimension is found in Schleiermacher's insistence on feeling and Emerson's suggestion

that the link between God and humankind is in reason, rather than emotion. However,

this link, according to Grenz, proved to be the undoing of Romanticism as it was an

"unstable center" (118).

Nietzsche's nihilism proved to be another link in the chain of the development of

the loss of self. He rejected both the Enlightenment's stress on self-mastery and

Romanticism's emphasis on self-expression. Nietzsche's writings celebrated the demise

of truth and morality.

> The ideal of Nietzsche's new order is the Superhuman (*Ubermensch*), the
> Nietzschean Romantic self who loves its fate and, having lived life in
> every detail, gladly wills to live it again and thereby gains its own identity,
> its own Self (Grenz 124).

Grenz looks to Foucault as an example of the disciples of Nietzsche who could

not only write of the death of God but also of the death of self (132). Thus the stage is set

for postmodernism. Grenz notes that this is not just an extension of developments over

the course of the years. Something new develops in postmodern thought. "The

postmodern ethos is characterized not only by the loss of self but also by the *embrace*

[original emphasis] of its demise" (133).

The new self that arises in postmodernism is much different from its modern

predecessor. It is self-referential in "a constant state of re-creation of itself through the

selective reorganization of the disorder present in the surrounding world and within

itself" (Grenz 134). The postmodern self is also a social self. Its identity is found from

within the social group. A person becomes a cultural artifact, a product of his or her

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See especially pp. 98-137 of Grenz, The Social God and the Relational Self.

environment. This environment is also seen as a web of influences. As such, a person's

sense of self may shift depending upon where and with whom she or he is interacting.

> Hence the postmodern self becomes the final extension of, and
> contradiction to, the central assumption of the Romantic movement,
> namely, the coherence between the inner self and the external world
> mediated by the presence of the infinite within the finite. (Grenz 136)

In summary the theological foundations for intimacy, and for prayer, lay in an

understanding of God as Triune. God is relational in nature. As was noted above, and will

be noted further below, this serves as the foundation for an understanding of genuine

community. Postmodernism has isolated the idea of being a person. Social dimensions to

the postmodern self exist; however, postmodernism is more like a chameleon, shifting to

draw its identity from the setting and the situation. Community, and the intimate

connections that genuine community provides, has lost its foundation. The result is that

prayer and community have no place of prominence in this postmodern culture. The

individual is not grounded in eternity, as one created in the image of God. Nor is God

seen as immanently involved in the affairs of humankind, as was taught by Edwards and

others. Prayer has lost its philosophical footing in this postmodern worldview.

Postmodernism differs greatly from a theological understanding of the self as

created in the image of an unchanging God. As be seen below, this postmodern view of

the self differs greatly from the biblical representation of the *imago Dei.*

Biblical Foundations for Intimacy

The biblical foundations for intimacy, as well as for prayer, are found in the

imago Dei. Scripture reveals that humankind is created in the image of a relational God.

The Trinity serves as the model for genuine community. When such community is

modeled within a marriage, an egalitarian relationship serves as the basis for marital

intimacy. Prayer also has its foundation in the interpenetrating nature of the triune God. By virtue of his continual relationship with himself, God is in constant communication with himself. As such, the nature of prayer grows out of God's continual communication with himself as the three persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Four areas in particular are noteworthy and are addressed in the section below. The first issue to be addressed is a theological understanding of how sin contributes to the loss of intimacy. This loss of intimacy has impacted not only humankind's relationship with God, and thus our ability to pray, but also our intimacy with one another. Second is the impact of shame upon intimacy. Again, shame has an impact upon the vertical dimension in our relationship with God as well as horizontal relationships with others. Third distorted views of intimacy that perpetuate this loss of intimacy are explored. A fourth area is also briefly introduced, viz. extreme examples of sin that perpetuate themselves in destructive communities. While not exhausting the impact of sin in individuals lives, each of these areas inform the discussion in terms of how sin has impacted marital intimacy.

Sin's Impact upon Intimacy within Marriages

God's original design for humankind involved both intimacy with him and intimacy with others. As noted above, four areas of relationship are demonstrated in the creation accounts. We are to be in relationship with God, with others, with the world, and in right relationship with ourselves.

The Genesis accounts of creation depicted the first three of these relationships as healthy and whole. Communication with God was demonstrated by walks in the garden in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3:8). This spiritual fellowship with God was apparently

both a routine meeting, and it was experienced together by Adam and Eve. Genesis 2:25

describes Adam and Eve as naked in one another's presence, but they were not ashamed.

Such openness implies trust, acceptance, and vulnerability within the relationship. Adam

and Eve were placed in dominion over the garden and the animals within (Gen 1:28).

Thus, Adam and Eve experienced intimacy with God, with one another, and were in right

relationship with the world around them prior to the Fall.

This incredible intimacy changed drastically after the Fall however. Fellowship

with God was broken as demonstrated by Adam and Eve hiding from God as he

approached for the evening walk (Gen. 3:8-10). Shame entered into the relationships of

Adam and Eve, both with God and with one another. God provided skins to cover the

nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). Blame entered into the relationship as Adam

blamed Eve for his disobedience (Gen. 3:12). Adam and Eve were banished from the

garden, thus breaking their relationship with the world around them (Gen. 3:23).

Clearly, sin has marred God's original design for marriage, and an accurate grasp

of the meaning and nature of sin is essential to understanding its impact upon marriage

and family in today's world.

Sin and the loss of intimacy. How sin is manifested in relationships depends

upon the theoretical framework of the person making the description. Dunning points to

the lost relationship with God as the heart of the sin problem. "Man's sinful state of being

is his lost relation to God" (297). Such a state has lasting consequences, not only for

one's relationship with God but also for marital intimacy.

According to Berkouwer, Scripture is silent concerning a theoretical conception

of the essence of sin; however, the common trait is that "sin is always against God"

(242). Such rebellion has a strong interpersonal aspect to it as well. "Where the biblical indictment is heard—that sin is sin against God—there is no suggestion that the relation of sin and our fellowman is of little importance" (242). In other words, a sin against man is also a sin against God.[8]

Berkouwer also emphasizes that the dual commands of loving God and loving our neighbor are of equal importance.

> The 'like'-character of the second command eliminates the possibility of playing down the importance of that command. Here the command of neighbor-love is set on an equality with the command of God-love, both in significance and in binding force (246).

From such a perspective, having a close personal relationship with God without experiencing healthy relationships with those around us is impossible.

Peck writes from a psycho-theological point of view and distinguishes between sin and evil. "It is not their sins per se that characterize evil people, rather it is the subtlety and persistence and consistency of their sins. This is because the central defect of the evil is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it" (69). Pecks continues,

> Sinning is most broadly defined as "missing the mark." This means that we sin every time we fail to hit the bull's eye. Sin is nothing more and nothing less than a failure to be continually perfect. Because it is impossible for us to be continually perfect, we are all sinners. We routinely fail to do the very best of which we are capable, and with each failure we commit a crime of sorts—against God, our neighbors, or ourselves, if not frankly against the law. (70)

Referring to Fromm, Peck describes the essence of human evil as a form of "malignant narcissism" (78). Such narcissism is characterized by a will that refuses to submit to God. "There are only two states of being: submission to God and goodness or

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[8] Berkouwer points to the sin of Cain against his brother Abel (Gen. 4:10), as well as David's prayer of contrition in Psalm 51 to make the point that "when we offend our neighbor we do injury in precisely that way to God" (243).

the refusal to submit to anything beyond one's own will—which refusal automatically

enslaves one to the forces of evil" (83).

Bellah et al. wrote of the dangers of such radical individualism, like narcissism,

from a sociological perspective. Such individualism may be destructive, not only at the

level of marriage, but even at the societal level.

> [T]he tendency of our individualism to dispose "each citizen to isolate
> himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family
> and friends," that so worried Tocqueville, indeed seems to be coming true.
> "Taking care of one's own" is an admirable motive. But when it combines
> with suspicion of, and withdrawal from, the public world, it is one of the
> conditions of the despotism Tocqueville feared. (112)

The description of marriage as "therapeutic" by Bellah et al. is another example of

how sin, here expressed as individualism, destroys intimacy (98-102). The therapeutic

marriage is based on "self-knowledge and self-realization" (98). Bellah et al. continue:

"[I]n a world of independent individuals who have no necessary obligations of one

another, and whose needs may or may not mesh, the central virtue of love … is

communication" (101). The therapeutic marriage falls prey to the trap of looking at the

relationship from the perspective of what it can do for the participants rather than as a

lifelong commitment designed and blessed by God.

Sin is destructive to relationships in general and to marriages in particular,

primarily because the individual chooses in a willful manner to exert his or her own will

over that of God's. In so doing, relation with God is broken and relation with others is

broken, or, at the very least, a pale reflection of what was intended by God. The essence

of such sin is a life turned in upon itself narcissistically.

Berkouwer and Dunning establish the relational aspect of the nature of sin. Peck

writes of sin as a form of narcissism. In either case, sin has created a barrier between

humankind and God and destroyed the spiritual intimacy that marked Adam and Eve

prior to the Fall. The intimate, close communication demonstrated by God walking in the

garden in the cool of the evening with Adam and Eve is lost. In its place are alienation,

shame, and guilt.

Shame's impact on intimacy. Not only has Adam and Eve's sin effected a loss

of intimacy, it has also introduced guilt and shame into interpersonal relationships.

Understanding how sin has introduced guilt and shame into relationships clarifies of how

sin destroys intimacy. Authors frequently distinguish between guilt and shame.

> The difference between guilt and shame is very clear—in theory. We
> feel guilty for what we *do* [original emphasis]. We feel shame for what we
> *are* [original emphasis]. A person feels guilt because he *did* [original
> emphasis] something wrong. A person feels shame because he *is* [original
> emphasis] something wrong. We may feel guilty because we lied to our
> mother. We may feel shame because we are not the persons our mother
> wanted us to be.
>
> In reality, the feelings of guilt and shame overlap. We do feel guilty
> for what we do, but we can also feel shame because of something we do.
> A person my feel guilty for telling a lie to his wife and feel shame for
> being the sort of person who would do such a thing. (Smedes 9-10)

Indeed, guilt and shame have a distinctively interpersonal character to them.

Tangney and Fischer suggest that shame has its origins in social scripts where individuals

have learned to respond to the feeling of not meeting another's expectations (9-11). Thus

the origins of shame are found within personal relationships.

Furthermore, Tangney and Fischer suggest that guilt and shame have different

impacts on relationship behavior, and that the impact of shame may be more serious than

that of guilt. As the consequences of guilt work themselves out in relationships, guilt is

often managed in a healthy way by those experiencing the emotion. That is, guilt leads to

reparative action. Shame however, leads to a series of negative relational consequences.

> First, the self-focused experience of shame is likely to "short-circuit" feelings of other-oriented empathy. The person who feels shame upon harming another is more likely to react with self-focused personal distress, and less likely to experience other-oriented empathic concern. Second, shamed individuals are likely to engage in behaviors that impede subsequent constructive action in interpersonal contexts. Rather than promoting reparative action, shame appears to motivate either active avoidance or a tendency to blame others involved in the shame-eliciting situation. Third, there appears to be a special link between shame and anger. (135)

Avoidance, blame, and anger may well constitute a destructive triad of actions within the relationship. Weiss identifies five roadblocks to intimacy, the first of which is anger. While shame is not the only source of anger, it is one source and is illustrative of the ways sin subtly destroys intimacy (47-66).

Distorted views of intimacy. Yet another aspect of sin's damage to relationships is distorted views of intimacy. The foundational concept of the Trinity is helpful at this point. As noted above, the Trinity is the model for healthy community, especially within the family. Heinrichs writes of parataxic distortions from an object relations point of view. Such a perspective is helpful in demonstrating how sin perpetuates itself within relationships.

> Parataxic distortion is defined as any attitude toward another person which is based on a fantasied or distorted evaluation of that person or on an identification of that person with other figures from past experiences. It is further defined as a phenomenon in which feelings, thoughts, or expectations originating in one relationship are reenacted in another relationship, serving to distort the character of that latter. (121)

The point, according to Heinrichs, is that individuals may have faulty concepts of God precisely because of distortions that have occurred in relations with significant others. Particularly,

> parataxic distortions in the image of God arise when what we teach our children propositionally is discordant with what we teach them

> relationally…. The nucleus of trust is laid down early in the mother-child relationship. If, in that verifiable relationship, the mother has responded to the child's needs in a capricious manner, distrust in the mother is born such that not only are subsequent relationships imbued with distrust but also that child's "grown-up" image of God becomes similarly distorted by distrust. (127)

One work is particularly helpful in seeing how the sin of willful narcissism and the damage of parataxic distortions impact individuals. Curtis and Eldredge write of having a deep love, or romance, with God. They note two basic desires that characterize the human heart: "the longing for adventure that requires something of us, and the desire for intimacy" (19). Referring to the words of Simone Weil, Curtis and Eldredge note that "there are only two things that pierce the human heart…. One is beauty. The other is affliction" (23). Affliction, or the pain that comes our way in life, often serves to divide us from God and from one another.

> At some point we all face the same decision—what will we do with the Arrows we've known? Maybe a better way to say it is, what have they tempted us to do? However they come to us, whether through a loss we experience as abandonment or some deep violation we feel as abuse, their message is always the same: Kill your heart. Divorce it, neglect it, run from it, or indulge it with some anesthetic (our various addictions). (27)

In summary, one of the ways sin is perpetuated within relationships is through distortions of intimacy within significant relationships. Inconsistent or hurtful messages from those who should be models of love and grace distort our concept of both our relationship with God and with others. The tendency then is to withdraw from relationship. Unfortunately, this perpetuates brokenness.

Destructive communities. Unfortunately the hurt that comes to individuals does not just come from other individuals. Sometimes communities or institutions themselves become the source of the pain.

As Isaiah wrote, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). Families, communities, or institutions as a whole have the potential to become destructive as sin perpetuates itself through hurtful relationships. Peck writes of the problem of evil within institutions, or communities, as a multifaceted problem. He notes the puzzling way in which "groups tend to behave in much the same ways as human individuals—except at a level that is more primitive and immature than one might expect" (216). One reason, according to Peck, is the problem of specialization. He describes this in terms of the "the fragmentation of conscience" (217).

> Whenever the roles of individuals within a group become specialized, it becomes both possible and easy for the individual to pass the moral buck to some other part of the group. In this way, not only does the individual forsake his conscience but the conscience of the group as a whole can become so fragmented and diluted as to be nonexistent.... The plain fact of the matter is that any group will remain inevitably potentially conscienceless and evil until such time as each and every individual holds himself or herself directly responsible for the behavior of the whole group—the organism—of which he or she is a part. (218)

When the self becomes isolated and loses its foundation as postmodernism has done, the results can be devastating. Peck's example of the massacre at Mylai serves as one powerful example (212). However, the problem relates to every person and to every institution, including marriages. Kinlaw refers to a statement of William Temple who "once said that if your concept of God is wrong, the more religion you get, the more dangerous you become to yourself and everyone else" (27). Thus simply being a religious person is not an adequate response to the loss of self in this postmodern society. The self must be rooted in a healthy and theologically sound concept of God.

In summary, whether the sin is a willful, malignantly narcissistic act of defiance that turns against God and away from others or a defense against the arrows of a hurtful

past, the consequences of sin are the same. Relationships are broken, damaged, and

become a shadow of the incredible intimacy modeled by God in the Trinity and

manifested by him in the creation of the first marriage in Adam and Eve. Sin perpetuates

itself in relationships by distorting the image of God within individuals and, even within

institutions themselves. Only grace can restore the relationship once damaged by sin to

one of wholeness. Only grace can open the door to healing that will enable individuals

and families to begin to regain the intimacy that was a part of God's original design.

Redemption and Reconciliation within Relationships

As noted above, a vitally important element of understanding what being human

means is the imago Dei. However, as a result of the Fall, this image of God is lost. Or, at

the very least, only a relic of that image remains.[9] In this section I address how grace is

active in the redemption and reconciliation of broken relationships. First I discuss how

redemption as set forth in Scripture restores the imago Dei within fallen humankind.

Second I explore how this impacts broken relationships, viz. through reconciliation with

God and with others.

Redemption and the restoration of the *imago Dei*. The primary whole work of

salvation and sanctification is the restoration of the image of God within men and

women. Dunning addresses this point forcefully.

> The New Testament and John Wesley speak with one voice in proclaiming
> that the great purpose of redemption is to restore man to the image of God.
> This is "the end of religion." Salvation is defined as "the renewal of our
> souls after the image of God." The total process of sanctification from its
> beginning in the new birth, its "perfection in love" at entire sanctification,
> and its progressive development toward final salvation has as its objective
> the restoring of man to his original destiny." (478)

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[9] The extent to which the *imago Dei* is lost or marred has been rigorously debated (see Dunning 297 ff; Brunner 57-61).

Dunning focuses on both the negative, the elimination of sin, and the positive, the restoration of the *imago Dei* within women and men. As noted above, sin has impacted the image of God within humankind through four key relationships—our relationship with God, with others, with the world, and with ourselves. Dunning notes that the restoration of these relationships constitutes the process of salvation and sanctification. Furthermore, "these four relationships constitute what the Hebrew *shalom* (peace) signifies" (486). Dunning continues:

> Thus *shalom* best describes the Edenic, pre-Fall state; but even more, it is the summary term that encompasses the goal toward which all God's redemptive acts are directed. He desires to transform the present fragmented state into healing and wholeness. Holiness is wholeness and is embodied in the beautiful *shalom* of God's plan for His people. (486)

This plan of salvation that God has set into motion includes the reestablishment of prayer as a means of communication with him. One need only look to the example of Jesus as a person of prayer to see its importance in staying connected with the Father (Matt. 14:23; Luke 6:12).

Reconciliation: healing grace for relationships. God's plan of salvation is descriptive of a righteousness that is grounded in relationship. Redemption deals with an individual's standing before God. However, grace not only redeems: it also reconciles. In other words, relationships are reconciled, both in a vertical dimension with God and in a horizontal dimension with others.

Entire sanctification is often defined as loving God with one's whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving one's neighbor as one's self. The point is that such love extends to those around us as well (Berkouwer 243; Dunning 486; Holt 20). Christian perfection has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. To speak of sanctification as

the restoration of the image of God within believers is to suggest that a major component of holy living is living in right relationship with others. Holy living means moving away from narcissistic defiance of God. However, it also means turning away from the past injustices perpetuated against us and turning toward the healing grace of God given in Christ (Curtis and Eldredge 29-34). Such grace manifests itself in relationships in general and in marriages in particular. The challenge is to discover how this healing takes place.

Prayer has the potential of being a tremendous instrument of healing, not only in one's relationship with God but also in one's relationship with others. If sin is a narcissistic defiance of God, then prayer can be the place of surrender. Coming under the Lordship of Christ can have far reaching implications. As Paul noted in Ephesians 5, the relationship of Christ and his Church is the model of the relationship of the husband and wife. Just as Christ loves the Church as sacrificially gave himself for her, husbands are to love their wives and give themselves sacrificially. Complete submission to God and humble submission to one another are God's plan for intimacy.

In summary, redemption and reconciliation are each works of grace that have the potential of recreating intimacy within individual lives, as well as within relationships. Redemption has a vertical dimension as the individual is redeemed by God and restored in a right relationship with him. Reconciliation includes the divine-human element but also extends horizontally to those around us. Prayer is involved in both redemption and reconciliation. Not only is it the primary means of communication with God, it also has the potential of being a key part of the healing process in interpersonal relationships.

Formative Writers and Their Understanding Marriage and Family

The spiritual writers throughout the centuries have taken differing views toward

the value of marriage. Many writers forged their opinions in response to heresies such as

Gnosticism (Clement). For others, such as Gregory of Nyssa, their commitment to

celibacy was simply an expression of deep devotion to God (Quasten 3: 271). This

section will focus on some who have viewed marriage in terms of spiritual union and thus

helpful to spirituality in general. First I discuss briefly the contribution of writers such as

Chrysostom and John of the Cross, who view marriage as an instrument of spirituality.

Second I explore the writings of John Wesley regarding marriage. While Wesley

maintained a rather austere view of the marital relationship, he valued personal as well as

family prayer.

Marriage as an Instrument of Spiritual Intimacy

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 20 on Ephesians reflects a supportive view of

marriage. He writes of marriage as a union not only of flesh but also of spirit. Referring

to the marriage of Isaac, Chrysostom writes,

> Yea, a marriage it is, not of passion, nor of the flesh, but wholly spiritual,
> the soul being united to God by a union unspeakable, and which He alone
> knoweth. Therefore he saith, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one
> spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17) Mark how earnestly he endeavors to unite both flesh
> with flesh, and spirit with spirit. (311)

Chrysostom writes in this passage in a manner similar to a Trinitarian model of

marriage noted above. The giving of one's self to another is a reflection of the union of

God within the Trinity.

John of the Cross uses marriage as an analogy for what he views as a spiritual

marriage.[10] In "The Spiritual Canticle" John depicts a dialogue between the bride and the

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[10] John of the Cross writes of both spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage in "The Spiritual
Canticle." John pictures a threefold development of spiritual union. The first twelve stanzas represent the
beginnings of the spiritual life. This stage is marked by a time of purification and is the stage of spiritual
betrothal. Spiritual marriage is pictured in stanzas thirteen though thirty-five. Such union is marked by "the

bridegroom or Christ and the disciple. Stanza 27 is especially descriptive of spiritual marriage when the bride says,

> There he gave me his breast;
> There he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;
> And I gave myself to him,
> Keeping nothing back;
> There I promised to be his bride. (225)

While this is not an exhaustive list of spiritual writers who look to marriage as an instrument of spirituality, those noted above are representative. Marriage is seen as an extension of one's relationship with God. As such, spiritual intimacy with God and with one another go hand in hand.

Wesley on Marriage

Wesley's views regarding marriage are an enigma. John's failed courtships and his less than ideal marriage often comprise lengthy discussions about how and why John was married (Coe; Petry; Telford). Wesley placed a high value on celibacy, but his commitment to celibacy was tested twice, once with Grace Murray and once with Sophia Hopkins. John finally consented to marriage while recovering from a severely sprained ankle at the home of Molly Vazeille. This marriage proved to be difficult.

> In a letter written less than a year before his death, Wesley recommended celibacy to all who could continue in that state, and then observed regarding his own life, "I married because I needed a home in order to recover my health; and I did recover it. But I did not seek happiness thereby, and I did not find it." (Coe 125)

According to Coe, William Whateley, had considerable influence upon Wesley's views of marriage. "Wesley recommended the Directions for Married Persons ... not only to husbands and wives, but also to couples about to be married" (Coe 99).

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abundance and fullness of God" (Kavanaugh 217). The final five stanzas point to the glory of this continued union.

At the same time Wesley upheld the benefit of marriage, commending it as

beneficial to Christian living. "We highly reverence marriage, as greatly conducive to the

kingdom of Christ. But neither our young men nor women enter into it till they assuredly

know they are married to Christ" ("Journals" 8: 162). The interesting thing about this

reference in Wesley's journal to marriage is that he notes both marriage to Christ,

reminiscent of John of the Cross, as well as Christian marriage.

In some ways, Wesley's views of marriage were ahead of his times. He

encouraged equality in marriage, especially in the area of spirituality. In his commentary

on 1 Corinthians 11:11 Wesley wrote that "nevertheless in the Lord Jesus, there is neither

male nor female—Neither is excluded; neither is preferred before the other in his

kingdom ("New Testament" 531). Wesley clearly had a high value of the place of

women. "Wesley not only admitted women to religious societies, but put them in

positions of leadership" (Coe 101).

At the same time, Wesley retained a hierarchical model of the family. For Wesley,

the subordination of women to men within the family was a consequence of the woman's

role in the Fall, and in particular, a consequence of the curse upon women. In his

comments on Genesis 3:16 Wesley notes that

> we have here the sentence past upon the woman; she is condemned to a
> state of sorrow and a state of subjection: proper punishments of a sin in
> which she gratified her pleasure and her pride. She is here put into a state
> of subjection: the whole sex, which by creation was equal with man, is for
> sin made inferior. ("Old Testament" 34-35)

According to Coe, Wesley viewed leadership as the duty of the man. Whateley's

advice, which is included in Wesley's Christian Library, is to the point.

> No general would thank a captain for surrendering his place to some
> common soldier, nor will God an husband, for suffering his wife to bear
> the sway. It is dishonourable to the prince, if subordinate officers yield the

honour of their places to meaner subjects; and the contempt rebounds upon God, which a man is willing to take upon himself, by making his wife his master. (qtd. in Coe 103)

Interestingly then, Wesley seems to afford women a degree of equality to women in the church, giving them positions of leadership, but maintains a hierarchical model with male dominance in the home. One can only speculate why the egalitarian thinking in the church did not extend to the home. This study has focused on an egalitarian model of marriage based on mutual submission—a view quite dissimilar to Wesley's.

More to point for this study is Wesley's view on the importance of familial prayer. Following Whateley, Wesley placed a high value on prayer within the family. "Whateley urged married couples to pray with each other and for each other: 'for it is impossible that any should not love that person much and earnestly, for whom they pray much and earnestly'" (Coe 106).

John Wesley's attitude toward marriage as a whole was rather austere and somber. At one point he encouraged a couple to avoid frivolity (Coe 106). Another time he confessed to his wife he was wrong to "laugh and trifle away time with her as he had. He expressed to her his determination that he would not fall into such a lapse again!" (106).

In Wesley's understanding, if not in his life and his marriage, the benefits of conjoint prayer are clear. For Wesley, prayer was understood as something to draw the couple, as well as the family as a whole, together. Praying for and with children was emphasized.

Nothing should be more important to parents than the spiritual nurture of their children. "The great thing we should desire of God, for our children, is, that they be kept in covenant with him, and may have grace to walk before him in their uprightness." (Coe 107)

A model of spiritual love based on Ephesians 5:25 tied this together. "This text …

was, for Wesley, the best description of marital love. 'Here is the true model of conjugal

affection. With this kind of affection, with this degree of it, and to this end, should

husbands love their wives'" (Coe 108).

Formative writers also view men and women as created in the image of a

relational God. Those discussed above recommend marriage as a legitimate means by

which to serve God. Marriage is seen as a context in which spiritual intimacy should

thrive. A precedent for intimacy is clearly established. This precedent is based on the

biblical call to wholeness and the nature of God as relational. Unfortunately, research

about the state of marital intimacy only beginning to emerge. More will be said of this

below, particularly regarding studies on the relationship between prayer and intimacy.

In summary, in this section on marital intimacy, I first addressed the nature of

intimacy. A definition, based largely upon Spanier's work was the guiding image of

intimacy. Intimacy is not static, but moves along a continuum. Second, I explored the

theological foundations for intimacy. The development of the concept of Trinity, as well

as that of the self was explored. It was demonstrated, thirdly, that marital intimacy is

related to humankind's creation in the image of a triune God. Fourth, I discussed the

biblical foundations for intimacy. In particular, I addressed how sin has contributed to the

loss of intimacy and how God's plan of redemption and reconciliation restore intimacy

through grace. Fifth, I reviewed how three formative writers, including John Wesley,

have contributed to the understanding of intimacy within marriages.

PRAYER

Prayer and marital intimacy are the foci of this study. A major theme throughout

the Bible and writings of the Church is the call to genuine intimacy with God and with one another. A variety of literature, both current and historic, demonstrates this clearly. First this section explores the connection of prayer and marital intimacy. Prayer, particularly conjoint prayer, is considered a significant means by which to enhance marital intimacy as well as a means to build a sense of genuine community within relationships. Prior studies that have examined the issue of religiosity and marital intimacy inform the study throughout. Second, this section discusses prayer as a means by which barriers to intimacy are removed. The primary barriers addressed in this study are anger, the need for forgiveness, and the lack of trust.

Prayer and Marital Intimacy

The correlation of religiosity and marital satisfaction has been a topic of studies for decades.[11] Prayer, when identified as a variable, has been demonstrated to enhance marital intimacy and is a means to help recapture a sense of genuine community within relationships. This section first explores literature relating to empirical studies dealing with religiosity and marriage in general and, particularly, those studies that identify prayer as a variable. Second, it discusses prayer as a means to build genuine community.

Empirical Studies on Religiosity and Marriage

Studies have noted the positive correlation of religiosity, a more broadly-defined term, and the quality of marriages (Anthony; Bahr and Chadwick; Dudley and Kosinski). However, for the most part, recent studies have not focused on prayer as a variable.

Several researchers have explored the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Dudley and Kosinski note that while several variables, including

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[11] For a historical perspective on the development of the study of religiosity and marital satisfaction see articles by Anthony; Glenn; Hicks and Platt; Spanier and Lewis; and Gottman and Notarius.

intrinsic orientation, private and public ritualistic practices, religious experience, salience, congruence, and family worship, [were statistically significant,] the strongest predictors were those that represented a sharing of religious activities such as family worship, perceived congruence in church attendance and perceived congruence in religiosity. (82)

Similar correlations were found by Wilson and Filsinger. Their study used the Religiosity Scale (DeJong, Faulkner, and Warland 867) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier). Wilson and Filsinger examined correlations of religiosity and dyadic adjustment along four dimensions—ritualistic, experiential, belief, and consequential. They reported

a strong pattern of positive relationships among dimensions of religiosity and marital adjustment. The pattern is most closely associated with the ritualistic, experiential, and belief dimensions. The higher the ritualistic involvement, the higher the reported religious experience, and the more conservative the beliefs, the greater the dyadic adjustment. (149)

Using the Allport's Religious Orientation Scale to measure religious orientation and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to measure marital satisfaction, Anthony reported "those who scored highest in marital satisfaction were intrinsically motivated in their religious orientation" (100).

Bahr and Chadwick revisited a 1920s study of "Middletown USA" and reported family ties were at least as strong in the late 1970s as in the mid-1920s. They concluded, "[R]eligion in Middletown is at least as strong as it ever was, and local observers affirm its promise and positive future rather than lament its decline" (407). Data from Bahr and Chadwick's study supported the conclusion that both religious affiliation and church attendance are positively associated with marital satisfaction.

King and Hunt note, "persons with more years of schooling were less religious on all scales except that they scored higher in religious knowledge" (14). In an earlier,

twenty-three item, multi-survey study, Hunt and King supported a hypothesis that "a positive relationship exists between greater religiosity of married partners and their evaluations of marriages as more successful" (400). "The six variables that are clearly related to quality of marriage seem to form a cluster of intentional commitment" (403). These six items were organizational activity in the church, extrinsic religious motivation, tolerance of others (i.e., minorities), creedal assent, orientation to growth and striving, and religious agreement (401).

Other studies demonstrated a positive correlation between prayer and marital satisfaction. Gruner examined devotional practices among couples in four groups that extended along a continuum from conservative to liberal. The study demonstrated that those of a more conservative religious background tend to utilize prayer more frequently. Gruner further notes, "the relationship of marital adjustment and prayer use is significant. While only 15% of the respondents who perceived high marital adjustment did not use prayer as means of addressing problems, 53% did use prayer almost all the time" (52).

Others have replicated these findings. In a study similar to the present one, Friesen demonstrated "a slight, but definite, correlation between conjoint prayer and marital adjustment" (120).

Other studies have produced different results. Hatch's concluded "the frequency of personal prayer had less influence on marital adjustment and satisfaction than the amount of time spent together in devotional practices" (149). Indeed, according to Hatch, "the most well-adjusted couples were those who both had high levels of time spent in personal devotions and,... the most dissatisfied and poorly adjusted were those couples in which the wives had frequent devotional periods and the husbands did not" (156). In

other words, the time spent together in prayer is a stronger factor contributing to martial satisfaction than the frequency of prayer. This finding is consistent with the position in this study that community is essential to marital satisfaction.

The issue of social desirability, or marital conventionalization, has also been examined. Even when allowances are made for marital conventionalization, studies conclude a positive correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich 240; Wilson and Filsinger 149).

DeJong, Faulkner, and Warland examined the connection of religiosity and marital satisfaction from a cross-cultural perspective. They concluded that while the two groups studied (Americans and Germans) differed widely in beliefs and practices, "they are strikingly similar in the structure of religiosity" (879). Further, "there is clearly continuing evidence for multidimensions of religiosity" (879). "In summary, our cross-cultural data reveal a picture of religiosity which is essentially similar for these two cultures" (883). As such, the studies above provide sufficient reasons to believe the results of studies examining the question of religiosity and marital satisfaction are generalizable to other cultures.

Prayer as a Means of Community Building

Differing views of the nature of prayer are consistent with the idea of prayer as a means to enhanced community.

Two classic approaches to spirituality have been noted as apophatic, or self-emptying, and kataphatic, which is more image-based spirituality (Holt 18; Holmes. History 4-5; Spirituality 22). Some spiritual writers tend to lean more toward one approach than the other. Apophatic writers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius,

John of the Cross, and the anonymous writer of the <u>Cloud of Unknowing</u> stress a way of unknowing. That is, they tend to focus on the transcendence of God as being beyond human understanding. "Any such prayer whose purpose is to empty the mind of images is called apophatic prayer" (Holmes, <u>Spirituality</u> 22).

Kataphatic writers include Francis of Assisi, Thomas à Kempis, Brother Lawrence, and Therese of Lisieux. While apophatic prayer tends more toward silence, kataphatic prayer is generally more verbal and often focuses on scriptural images to aid prayer.

Neither apophatic nor kataphatic spirituality are inconsistent with the idea of community emphasized in this study. They are simply two examples of how individuals with differing personality styles may be drawn to different expressions of spirituality. In terms of one's overall spirituality, May seems to favor the apophatic over the kataphatic; however, he notes that in the final analysis each individual must make a personal preference as to which style to follow. Genuine community will recognize the value of varying styles of prayer and will honor the style that best fits any given individual.

> The ultimate value of a person's approach to spiritual growth is finally the business of that person and God. Regardless of the orientation, it is important that spiritual directors have a deep appreciation of the benefits and risks of both kinds of spirituality. (13)

Another way of thinking about individual differences is based on personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers 1-16; Kroeger and Thuesen 26-48; Keirsey and Bates 27-66). For example, some Christian writers focus on personality types as a means of understanding preferences for types of prayer and styles of spiritual expression (Johnson 22-32; Michael and Norrisey 21-30; Mulholland 64-73). Such differences may also be a factor in couples that are exploring conjoint prayer. Knowing

one's own and one's partner's MBTI may be beneficial in working through barriers in

conjoint prayer.

Few doubt the importance of prayer in the development of personal piety. Biblical

injunctions to prayer abound (2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 32:6; Jer. 29:12, 42:3; Matt. 6:5-15,

24:20, 26:41; Col. 4:2-4; 1 Thess. 5:17, 25; Jas. 5:13-16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 20). Friesen

notes the important role that corporate prayer has played in the history of the Christian

Church. Referring to a work by Killinger, Friesen writes that "for the early Christians

prayer was 'a communal event even more than it was a private one'" (16-17). Consistent

with the theme of community as noted above, Friesen concludes that "corporate prayer

has interpersonal value" (15). Friesen continues,

> For example, analogies may be drawn between the intensely personal
> nature of our relationship with God and our relationship with other people.
> Howard maintains that as we develop personal, specific prayer with God,
> we also learn patterns of openness, honesty and intimacy that can be
> applied to our interactions with people. (15-16)

The focus of the salvation process is the restoration of the *imago Dei* within

individual lives. Such restoration includes both a vertical and a horizontal dimension.

Spiritual disciplines play an essential role in restoration if the *imago* Dei in that they are

used by God, as a means of grace, to shape the character of disciples. The goal is that,

through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, true Christlike living can become the

natural expression of who we are as his followers. While individual personality styles

express spirituality differently, one consistent theme is the relational nature of true

spirituality. Prayer is a communal event. One of its chief values is that it is a tool for

teaching genuine honesty and intimacy with God, which can then be experienced in

horizontal relationships.

Of particular importance for this study is prayer's role in spiritual formation, in general, and in the family, in particular. As a means of grace, prayer has the ability to strengthen not only one's personal relationship with God but also one's relationship with others. "Prayer cannot therefore in any way estrange us from other people; it can only unite" (Barth, Prayer 31-32).

In summary, numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between religiosity and marital intimacy. Those studies that have identified prayer as a variable also demonstrate a positive correlation with prayer and marital intimacy. Prayer was also as a means by which genuine community, especially between a husband and a wife, can be regained.

Prayer as a Means of Removing Barriers to Intimacy

This section briefly addresses three barriers to intimacy. They are anger, the lack of forgiveness, and the lack of trust. It also explores how prayer can serve to reduce or eliminate these barriers.

Little research has been done on why couples do not pray together. Hunt surveyed fifty-five people ages twenty-five to fifty about practices of conjoint prayer. His research indicated that 45 percent of those surveyed prayed together, on average, a little over twice a week (5). For those who did not pray together, the number one reason cited (40 percent) was that no one took responsibility to see that it happened. "Lack of time and fear of intimacy were the next largest responses overall" (6).

This study focused on the three common barriers of anger, lack of forgiveness, and lack of trust. While certainly not all of the possible barriers to marital intimacy, these were chosen as a result of their frequent mention in devotional literature. For example,

Weiss deals extensively with anger and forgiveness (47-76). Stoop and Stoop write, in

When Couples Pray Together, of the need for trust (47-48) as well as the need for

forgiveness (164-168).

Another reason for focusing on these three barriers grows out of my experience as

a professional counselor. I often find couples are resistant to change. Stoop and Stoop

define resistance as "a set of behaviors, conscious or unconscious, that interact with other

behaviors in such a way as to block change, even if the change is for the good of both

people involved" (When 100).

Anger

Anger can be especially injurious to intimacy. Fishbane compares the

autonomous, separate view of the self, with a more relational self, and offers therapeutic

approaches based upon a relational view of self. As such, anger itself is a relational event.

> A relational view of conflict, in which conflict is included as part of
> connection, in which *anger is a relational event,* [original emphasis] can
> transform difficult moments in a relationship. But the notion that "anger is
> a relational event" can be experienced very differently for men and for
> women. As Gottman [and Silverman] (1999) has noted, men are often
> flooded emotionally and physically when women bring up conflictual
> issues. The response is often shutting down or escalation. (282)

According to Fishbane, couples often reach an impasse as a result of differing

beliefs about anger. These differing beliefs often arise from family of origin issues that

shape one's view of anger. Some may consider anger dangerous and avoid it whenever

possible. While at the same time, others may view the relationship as of primary

importance and be willing to endure the anger and the pain to resolve the issues in the

relationship. Individuals bring their different beliefs about anger to the marriage, and this

creates an impasse in dealing with anger.

Relational problems are compounded when attempts to exert one's power over their partner is used to protect their own sense of self. Fishbane suggests helping them

> shift from holding two "autonomous" self-narratives in which each feels victimized and endangered by the other, to a shared relational narrative in which the good of the one can coexist with and facilitate the good of the other—a narrative of the "We." (283)

This relational view of the self and of anger fits well with the trinitarian model noted above. Mutual give and take occurs in a healthy relationship among marriage partners, just as in the Trinity. Sharing of one's self takes place as opposed to a selfishness that demands one's own way. Individuals move away from "malignant narcissism" (Peck 78) and toward a sense of connectedness.

Prayer can facilitate this movement because prayer opens the person, as well as the couple, to God and to others. Evelyn and Chris Christenson note the power of conjoint prayer in this area in an interview:

> [S]hared prayer has the capacity to be so much more [than a marital-improvement activity] for a couple. Every marriage needs some commonality—a place where a husband and wife meet, heart and mind, to share the important things in their lives. With most spouses living in different worlds the majority of their waking hours, shared prayer provides that common ground. (qtd. in Liautaud and Pickett 37)

A sense of interconnectedness, a *perichoresis*, is developed between the husband and the wife as they discover their identity in the relationship rather than simply within themselves as individuals.

Forgiveness

The need for forgiveness in marriages arises from the fact that some conflict is inevitable in every marital relationship. Gottman has suggested that the key factor in determining marital success is the ability to resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise

within a marriage. "If there is one lesson I have learned from my years of research it is that *a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship* [original emphasis]" (28).

However, the role of forgiveness extends beyond conflict resolution. Forgiveness is an essential tool in the removal of barriers to intimacy. Konstam, Chernoff, and Deveney define forgiveness "as a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior. Forgiveness also includes fostering undeserved compassion, generosity, and, perhaps, love toward the perpetrator" (26). Any of these surrendered rights, resentment, negative judgment, or indifferent behavior can be understood as a barrier to intimacy in need of removal.

Baures warns of the consequences of unforgiveness. In addition to negative physical repercussions, "revenge is destructive because when most of one's energy is bound up in wanting to hurt another, there is little left for positive actions" (77-8).

Weiss explains how the biblical concept of sin, including unforgiveness, serves as a barrier to intimacy. Relational plaque, as Weiss defines it, is the buildup if sins that gradually appear in a marriage:

> Sin begins to trickle into a marriage, and if not owned or identified by the person sinning, it will create distance in the relationship. This buildup of sin—or plaque—is not always very obvious. It continues to multiply if continual repentance and forgiveness are lacking in the relationship. (67-68)

Weiss's one hundred-day plan involves three steps, repeated daily. The steps are daily conjoint prayer, a feelings exercise to get the couple talking about their emotions, and daily examples of mutual praise and nurturing (239-40).

Thomas also notes the need for forgiveness. He refers to C. S. Lewis's comments about the difficulty of hating the sin and loving the sinner. A key development for Lewis

in his own life was to recognize he had already done this within himself. That is, he

accepted himself, even though he was far from perfect. Thomas follows Lewis in

challenging people to demonstrate that same grace to others. "We extend this charity to

ourselves, so the question begs to be asked: Why do we not extend this same charity to

our spouse?" (171). Considering the difficulties in marriages that normally arise, Thomas

suggests, "one of marriage's primary purposes is to teach us how to forgive. This spiritual

discipline provides us with the power we need to keep falling forward [Thomas's image

of turning mistakes into opportunities for spiritual development] in the context of a sinful

world" (167).

Thomas also addresses the connection of prayer to marriage although from a

different perspective than was noted above. Rather than viewing prayer as a means of

enhancing marital intimacy, Thomas focuses on improving marriages as a means of

improving one's personal prayer. Referring to 1 Pet. 3:7, he writes of the importance of

improving our marriage in order that our prayers may not be hindered.

> much Christian teaching has gotten it exactly backwards. We're told that if
> we want to have a stronger marriage we should improve our prayer lives.
> But Peter tells us that *we should improve our marriages so that we can
> improve our prayer lives* [original emphasis].... A man might be able to
> preach a sterling sermon, write inspiring books, and quote the Bible from
> front to back. But if he hasn't learned how to be a servant to his wife, to
> respect her, and to be considerate of her, then his spirituality is still
> infantile. His prayer life—the lifeblood of his soul—will be a sham. (76)

As suggested above a relational view of God serves as the basis, or model, of

healthy marriages. In Ephesians 5 the apostle Paul uses the self-sacrificing love of Christ

for the Church as the model of how husbands are to treat their wives. Both Weiss and

Thomas suggest forgiveness is an essential element intimate marriages (Weiss 63-66;

Thomas 166). A large part of why is because it is modeling the behavior Christ himself

exemplified. An additional element suggested by Thomas is an important link between

prayer and the health of a marital relationship.

Giblin has noted, "[N]egative affect expression during marital interaction is a

consistent and powerful determinant of marital quality" (242). In the article he described

differences in responses to anger based on gender. "Wives were found to have fewer but

longer spells of negative affect relative to husbands" (242). Husbands were more

sensitive to the length of time they were in negative affect. In other words, wives tended

to be angry less frequently but tended to say angry longer. Husbands were more

uncomfortable with their anger than were their wives. Thus, for both partners, the need to

resolve these issues is pertinent.

Trust

Stoop and Stoop also write about what is required for spiritual intimacy. They

address the issue of vulnerability, which involves trust.

> The two essential ingredients for any kind of intimacy, including spiritual intimacy, are a willingness to share what is going on in one's life and a willingness to become vulnerable with the other person. Unfortunately, both husband and wife get in the way. Usually the one wanting to talk ... pressures the other, making that one feel frustrated, guilty, and defensive, thus squelching any hope of spiritual intimacy. (When 50)

Thomas suggests that sexual union between spouses can be a spiritual experience

in that in the sexual union we are reminded of the incredible intimacy to which we are

called in God.

> While we must never lapse into worshipping the created, there are those intense moments in which the unity of marriage and even the ecstasy of physical union lead you to stand in awe before another, wanting to fully offer yourself, without reservation. When a wife says to her husband, "Take me, I'm yours," she demonstrates a trust that whatever the husband does will be done out of love and with genuine concern and care. It is a remarkable testimony to self-giving and to the joy of intimacy. (84-85)

Such trust is exceedingly difficult when we are guarded and defensive. As was noted above, Curtis and Eldredge write of the temptation to build a wall of defensiveness around our hearts to avoid further hurts. The defensiveness typically takes the shape of either deadening our hearts or dividing our head and our heart, "where our outer story becomes the theater of the should and our inner story the theater of needs, the place we quench the thirst of our heart with whatever water is available" (31). Without trust, we become isolated, withdrawn, or caught in a cycle of endless efforts to quench the thirst within. Without trust, without opening our hearts to a safe and trusted other, we will never discover the joy of intimacy within our own lives.

In summary, among the many unhealthy patterns into which individuals fall are those of anger, the lack of forgiveness, and mistrust. Marriage partners hold on to anger over past hurts, refuse to forgive one another for wrongs, and as a result of being hurt in times past, lack the trust to become vulnerable in another's presence. Simply put, when an individual is angry, hurt, or lacks trust in their partner, these emotions make conjoint prayer challenging, to say the least, because of the negative feelings they are holding.

Helping a person move to a place in his or her life where such trust may occur can be a difficult challenge. It involves dealing with the anger that has taken root, experiencing forgiveness, both in a vertical dimension and in a horizontal dimension, and finding a person that is safe to which to trust their heart. Certainly other issues may serve as barriers as well. However, anger, lack of forgiveness, and trust are three key issues discussed in this study.

Another unanticipated, impactful, barrier to conjoint prayer arose in the study. Finding the time to pray together was reported as a major barrier to conjoint prayer for

many. This is, I believe, a reflection of the society in which we live. Swenson writes of

the danger of living life without a "margin." He writes of the "pain of progress."

> Progress's biggest failure has been its inability to nurture and protect right
> relationships.... As we have already seen, progress builds by using the
> tools of economics, education, and technology. But what are the tools of
> the relational life? Are they not the social (my relationship with others),
> the emotional (my relationship with myself), and the spiritual (my
> relationship with God)? None of the tools of progress has helped build the
> relational foundation our society requires. (35)

To avoid the dangers that come from living beyond our limits Swenson

recommends four margins be built into the routine of our lives and maintained with

diligence. These margins are emotional energy, physical energy, time, and finances (100).

Research Methodology

A more detailed discussion of the research methods utilized in this study will

follow in the next chapter. However, at this point a potentially problematic issue is

worthy of noting. I have suggested that this is primarily a quantitative study, with some

qualitative elements. Quantitative research provides the objectivity, while qualitative

research broadens the base of data from which the researcher may draw. However,

combining qualitative and quantitative studies may be problematic. Buchanan notes four

problems associated with this combination: how to interpret similar responses, logical

inferences, ideal types constructed from various fragments of data, and universal themes

that are difficult to interpret (117). He concludes,

> [T]here are a number of reasons why the use of quantitative/ positivist
> research methods has become so prominent. Among these are: (1) the
> outstanding and unquestionable success of the "scientific method" in
> gaining control over the natural world; (2) the psychological comfort
> offered by having firm, immutable standards ("hard" science) in an age of
> relativistic uncertainties; (3) the interest in the government and other
> funding agencies in gaining access to the means to control behaviors they
> deem undesirable (drug use, for example); (4) a certain Faustian dream on

the part of some social scientists that, if they could only set up the right experimental conditions, then they could provide indisputable evidence—brute data beyond reproach—to direct policymakers in resolving difficult social problems; (5) a sincere concern on the part of others that, if we do not uphold objective scientific standards, then we will be left with only subjective opinion, which will inevitably lead to skepticism, cynicism, apathy, and despair; and finally (6) a lack of familiarity with the different goals, assumptions, and standards of qualitative, interpretive social research." (128)

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods has the advantage of objectivity derived through surveys and statistical analysis, as well as direct input from participants in an open-ended manner. The crucial element in quality research is found in following the scientific methods. "The key to the scientific method is replicability" (Reswick). This study has combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a manner that hopefully preserves the best of both methods.

Wiersma notes the difficulty in replicating qualitative research (211). However, he also notes that both external and internal reliability can be maintained in a well-designed study. "Internal validity is the extent to which results can be interpreted accurately, and external validity is the extent to which results can be generalized to populations, situations, and conditions" (4).

Summary

A strong biblical-theological foundation for intimacy within marriages exists. Such intimacy is rooted in the nature of God as triune and in the creation of humankind in the image of God. This intimacy is best experienced in mutual submission within marriage. While sin has marred the glory of intimacy as God intended it, grace restores such intimacy both in the vertical dimension with God and in the horizontal dimension with others. Spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer, are one instrument of grace God has

given as a tool for the recovery of intimacy with him and with one another. Spiritual

writers have stressed community and intimacy with God for centuries.

Several studies indicate a positive relationship between religiosity and marital

satisfaction, and when conjoint prayer is identified as a variable, that positive relationship

is maintained. However, intimacy is only beginning to emerge as a research perspective.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem

While marital intimacy has been a focus of numerous studies over the course of the last several decades, very few studies have specifically addressed the issue of conjoint prayer. Even when religiosity has been demonstrated to have a positive correlation to marital satisfaction, research is lacking to determine which aspects of religiosity make the most significant difference.

The biblical precedent for healthy families is established clearly. Through grace and through spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, tremendous healing can take place in the lives of individuals and in marriages. Counseling theory also points to the need for healthy communication and vulnerability. Prayer facilitates both. Yet, for all practical purposes, researchers have ignored the topic.

This study looked at the issue of conjoint prayer and marital intimacy. It attempted to demonstrate that conjoint prayer is an effective tool in establishing healthy communication between couples. Further, it attempted to demonstrate that conjoint prayer results in an increase of marital intimacy, in particular, and marital satisfaction in general.

Research Questions

The context of this study was the First Church of Christ, Burlington, Kentucky. The group experience, "Growing Together in Christ," attempted to identify barriers to conjoint prayer and facilitate conjoint prayer among marital couples. Three research questions arose.

1. What are the beliefs about and practices of conjoint prayer among group members before the group experience?

This question dealt with current beliefs and practices of the group members. Are their beliefs about conjoint prayer based on accurate perceptions of what the Bible says about prayer? Are group members currently experiencing conjoint prayer? If not, what barriers prevent prayer from occurring? Such operational questions were necessary in order to determine the impact the group experience had in the practices of group members could be determined.

2. What effect does the group experience have on changing beliefs about and practices of conjoint prayer?

This question assessed the effectiveness of the group in creating change in the behavior of the group members. In other words, did the group experiences make a difference in the practices of the group members in terms of what they believed about and how frequently they practiced conjoint prayer?

3. What effect does the practice of conjoint prayer have upon marital satisfaction among group members?

This question addressed the issue of conjoint prayer's ability to make a difference in the level of marital satisfaction in the lives of the couples participating in the experimental group.

As noted above, marital quality is a multidimensional issue. As such, stating with absolute certainty that conjoint prayer is the reason for an increase in the level of marital satisfaction, assuming such an increase in the level of satisfaction exists, is presumptuous. However, all things being equal, this question addressed the issue in terms

of what change occurred in the level of marital satisfaction since beginning the practice of conjoint prayer.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was the 2,500 member First Church of Christ in Burlington, Kentucky. This church is predominately white, middle to upper-middle class. The sample was a convenience sample. Volunteers were recruited by making announcements during worship services and Sunday school classes, as well as announcements printed in church publications. Announcements solicited couples to participate in the group experience, "Growing Together in Christ." Those willing to participate were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group. In order to facilitate interaction in the group experience, the size of each group was limited to ten couples.

An identification number was assigned to each person in such a way as to ensure anonymity. The number allowed me to track responses on the surveys and link responses to spouses. The number consisted of the first five digits of the person's social security number and the last four digits of the home phone number.

Instrumentation

Three primary instruments were utilized for this study. Each instrument was administered to each participant at the beginning of the group experience, at the close of the group experience, and one month following the close of the group experience.

A demographic survey was distributed to gather basic data such as age, income level, education level, length of marriage, number of children, etc. (see Appendix A). In this survey, questions about the beliefs and current practices of conjoint prayer were

asked. The survey was pretested by administering it to married students who are a part of the counseling program at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was chosen for several reasons (see Appendix B). A key reason was the availability of components, or subscales. Subscales include dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and affectional expression. This assessment tool has a wide base of usage by prior studies (Spanier and Lewis 831; Wilson and Filsinger 149). Also, an underlying assumption of the study was that conjoint prayer helps develop marital intimacy. While the affectional expression subscale is the weakest of the subscales of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, it is well respected and has a high degree of reliability. Spanier has demonstrated that the Dyadic Adjustment Scale correlates well with similar, well-established measures such as the Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test ("Measuring Dyadic Adjustment" 18). Content, criterion, and construct validity were high with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Reliability for the subscales and the overall scale are reported as follows (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Reliability Estimates for DAS and Its Subscales

	Relia-bility	Number of Items
Dyadic Consensus Subscale	.90	13
Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale	.94	10
Dyadic Cohesion Subscale	.86	5
Affectional Expression Subscale	.73	4
DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE	.96	32

The prayer log gave the participants opportunity to provide qualitative data in the form of journal entries, frustrations, positive experiences, etc. Identifying barriers to conjoint prayer was a key element in this study. The prayer log helped identify those barriers most relevant to the participants. Barriers were also identified during times of discussion within the group sessions. This, too, was a source of qualitative data.

The prayer log also assessed the frequency and length of time spent in conjoint prayer. Each week a short devotional thought provided a focus for couples. The themes of these devotional thoughts correlated with the topic discussed in the group session for that week.

The prayer log was simple and straightforward. Care was taken to guard against this becoming an additional burden that discouraged the participants.

The final instrument utilized in this study was the evaluation (see Appendix D). This instrument sought to determine the perception of the group participants that barriers were actually identified as well as their perception of the effectiveness of the teaching modules.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred at three distinct times. In the organizational meetings of the two groups, the demographic surveys along with the questionnaire about beliefs and practices, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was distributed and completed by those in the experimental group. Expectations of the participants were described and the informed consent was explained (see Appendix E). The identification number was explained and questions answered to ensure anonymity of the participants. The prayer log was also distributed and explained. All data from the control group was gathered by mail.

A third party, a member of my Research Reflection Team, assisted in the gathering of surveys. She gathered the names of the participants and correlated them with the identification numbers to enable follow-up in case someone failed to return his or her assessments. At no time did I did not have access to the list of names. At no time did the research assistant have access to the results of the surveys. This method maintained confidentiality throughout the study.

At the conclusion of the final group session, the assessments were distributed once again to the experimental group and the prayer logs were collected. With the help of the third party, assessments were mailed to the members of the control group.

The final data was collected one month following the close of the experimental group enabling me to determine if the changes demonstrated during the group experience made any type of lasting change in beliefs, practices, or levels of satisfaction. In this instance, all surveys and assessments were mailed to all participants along with a return envelope. With the help of the assistant, all but one set of surveys, were returned.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was accomplished with the aid of a computer-assisted software package. I had access to a software package the SPSS and the help of a statistical expert on the Research Reflection Team. Correlations between frequency of prayer and levels of marital satisfaction were examined, particularly as they relate to the affectional expression scale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Additionally, demographic factors such as age, number of children in the home, and years married were analyzed. Qualitative data was analyzed by organizing responses into themes. A particular focus here was the identification of barriers to conjoint prayer.

Variables

The dependent variable was marital intimacy. This variable should reflect an increase in the level of intimacy perceived by participants in the experimental group.

The independent variable for this study was the six-week group experience entitled "Growing Together in Christ." This experience identified barriers to conjoint prayer and facilitated prayer within the marriages. Three particular barriers were addressed: anger, forgiveness, and trust. Others were sought in group discussion and prayer log entries.

Delimitations and Generalizability

A significant limitation of this study was the population size. In order to facilitate dialogue within the group experience, group size was limited to 10 couples per group.

Another limitation of this study was the length of time. The last data collection was done one month following the completion of the group project. This study, while providing helpful information, does not have the validity that a longitudinal study would have. Follow-up one year, five years, or ten years later would provide data to help a researcher determine whether or not levels of marital satisfaction have been maintained and whether or not the divorce rate has truly been reduced.

The ability to generalize this study to others was limited by the homogeneity of the group. The First Church of Christ is a predominately white, middle to upper-middle class congregation; however, DeJong, Faulkner, and Warland confirmed in a cross-cultural study the generalizability of the positive correlation of religiosity and marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF THE SUBJECTS

The purpose of this study was to improve marital intimacy through a six-week, small group experience focusing on conjoint prayer. The group experience began on 15 October 2001 and ran on consecutive Monday evenings for six weeks. Group members were solicited through announcements made in Sunday school classes, worship folders, and in the worship services. Since the project relied on volunteers, this study was comprised of a convenience sample rather than a true random sample of the congregation. Volunteers were randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group. Ten couples were assigned to each group.

Measurement occurred at three intervals. Surveys were distributed on the first night of the group meeting, at the conclusion of the six-week group experience, and one month following the close of the group experience. In the case of the control group, all surveys were mailed to participants and were returned by mail. The instruments were a questionnaire of basic demographic data as well as beliefs and practices regarding prayer (see Appendix A), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (see Appendix B), and, in the case of the experimental group, a prayer log (see Appendix C) as well an evaluation at the close of the group experience (see Appendix D). With ten couples in each group and three sets of surveys, the study provided the possibility of 120 sets of data. The research assistant tracked individuals who had not returned surveys. Doing so allowed follow-up by mail and phone to those who had not returned surveys. By persistence, and with the cooperation of participants, we were able to collect 118 sets of data. That is, we had 118 questionnaires returned along with 118 Dyadic Adjustment Scales.

The makeup of the experimental and control groups was quite similar. The following areas were measured on a five-point Likert scale (see Appendix A). The control group was slightly older on average (by 1.3 years) and somewhat better educated. The average educational level of the control group was slightly above college education, while the average educational level for the experimental group was slightly below college level. Income levels, length of marriage and number of children in the home were similar (see Table 4.1). The number of participants working outside the home was virtually equal within the two groups.

Table 4.1

Profile of Subjects

	Age	Length of Marriage	Education	Income	Children at home	Work
Experimental	35.75	12.03	1.80	3.70	1.30	1.20
Control	37.05	12.40	2.25	3.30	1.70	1.20

Findings of the Study

This section will concentrate on the findings of the study in light of the variables. Data provided by the study were analyzed in terms of its contribution to the three research questions introduced in Chapter 1. A statistical analysis of the surveys is provided, and the participant evaluations are discussed.

The Focus of the Study

The dependant variable for this project was marital intimacy and was measured by using the affectual expression subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The independent

variable was the six-week group experience. "Growing Together in Christ." The

independent variable was measured via the evaluation questionnaire that queried

attendance at the sessions (see Appendix D). By analyzing information from these

sources. I was able to assess the impact of attendance at the group sessions. In other

words. in this analysis of the effectiveness of the group experience, I addressed the

question, "Did participation in the group experience result in a measurable difference in

marital intimacy?"

Closely associated with the purpose of this study was the identification of barriers

to intimacy and efforts to remove these barriers. Additional data regarding the perception

of these barriers was collected via open-ended questions in the marriage questionnaire

(see Appendix A). Group discussion also proved to be a source of information about

barriers to intimacy and about well as beliefs and practices regarding prayer.

Members of the experimental group were encouraged to spend a minimum of ten

minutes each day in prayer with their spouse. Frequency of conjoint prayer was reported

on the marriage questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Research Questions

Three questions were identified as foundational to this study. In this section, each

question will be discussed in light of the findings of the study.

Question number one. What were the beliefs about and practices of conjoint

prayer among group members before the group experience?

Question one focused directly on the participants' beliefs about and practice of

conjoint prayer prior to the group experience. Participants were asked to respond to the

following statement according to a five-point Likert scale. "I believe the Bible instructs

people to pray regularly." They were to choose one response: strongly agree, somewhat

agree, uncertain, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree (see Appendix A). The belief in

personal prayer was very strong for both groups, with the control group scoring slightly

higher. One hundred percent of the surveys from the control group (n=20) said they

strongly agreed the Bible instructs people to pray regularly. Only two persons did not

mark "strongly agree" in the experimental group (n=20). Table 4.2 provides a summary

of the results.

Practices of conjoint prayer were weaker than practices of personal prayer for

both groups. The control group was once again slightly higher in their scores but only

marginally. Here the difference between the control group and the experimental group

was only .01.

In other words, at the beginning of the study, participants in both groups reported

they prayed individually nearly every day. However, participants in both groups reported

they prayed with their spouse only about once a week.

Table 4.2

Beliefs and Practices of Prayer

	Survey 1			Survey 2			Survey 3		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
Experimental Group									
Belief in Prayer	20	4.85	0.49	20	5.00	0.00	20	4.90	0.45
Personal Prayer	20	4.45	0.69	20	4.45	0.60	20	4.50	0.69
Conjoint Prayer	20	2.95	1.76	20	3.55	1.32	20	3.15	1.31
Control Group									
Belief in Prayer	20	5.00	0.00	20	5.00	0.00	18	5.00	0.00
Personal Prayer	20	4.65	0.49	20	4.65	0.49	18	4.61	0.50
Conjoint Prayer	20	3.05	1.36	20	3.05	1.36	18	3.22	1.31

Question number two. What effect did the group experience have on changing beliefs about and practices of conjoint prayer?

In the experimental group, there was strong agreement to the statement regarding belief in prayer (see Appendix A, Question 10) even before the group sessions began (see Table 4.2). Agreement to the statement rose at the second measurement but declined on the third survey to very near the level measured on the first survey. However, the variation over the six-week period was so slight it should not be considered important. Belief in the practice of prayer remained high consistently throughout the study for the control group.

In terms of practices of personal, or individual, prayer, the experimental group displayed a generally consistent pattern of prayer throughout the entire study. Individuals in both the experimental and the control groups reported they prayed privately almost every day.

In terms of the control group, practices of personal prayer remained relatively consistent throughout the study. A slight increase in the practice of conjoint prayer in the third set of surveys was reported, but it was not important.

Reports of the practice of conjoint prayer are more germane to the focus of the study. Table 4.3 is a simplified table to illustrate the practices of conjoint prayer for both groups. The table shows an increase in the practice of conjoint prayer reported by the experimental group at the second survey. Conjoint prayer increased from a pattern of praying together about once a week to nearly every day.

However, the increase in frequency of conjoint prayer was not maintained, and instances of conjoint prayer had returned close to the original level within thirty days

after the group experience ended. Conjoint prayer for the control group remained

relatively consistent but showed a slight increase at the third survey. More will be said of

the significance of the increase of the practice of conjoint prayer for the experimental

group below. At this point, simply note the experimental group reported a significant

increase in the practice of conjoint prayer during the six-week period of the group

meetings.

Table 4.3

Practices of Conjoint Prayer

	Survey 1		Survey 2		Survey 3		Total		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Range
Experimental Grp	2.95	1.76	3.55	1.32	3.15	1.31	3.22	1.47	0.60
Control Grp	3.05	1.36	3.05	1.36	3.22	1.31	3.10	1.32	0.17
Combined	3.00	1.55	3.30	1.34	3.18	1.29	3.16	1.40	0.30

Open-ended questions in the questionnaire provided additional information about

beliefs and practices of conjoint prayer (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to

respond to one question about the perceived benefits of conjoint prayer by identifying

what they believed to be the greatest benefit of praying with their spouse. Asking

participants to identify what they believed to be the greatest barrier to praying with their

spouse identified barriers to conjoint prayer. Of the 118 surveys returned, eighty-four

open-ended responses were provided for the question about perceived benefits while

seventy responses were provided for the question about perceived barriers to shared

prayer. Few differences were found in the experimental group and the control group in

terms of what they perceived as either benefits or barriers to shared prayer.

After coding the responses for the greatest perceived benefit of conjoint prayer, they were categorized and are listed below (see Table 4.4). Responses to the request, "Please identify what you believe to be the greatest benefit to praying with your spouse," provided a short list of responses. Statements referring directly to a perceived benefit within the marriage were coded as, "Intimacy with spouse." One representative example is a statement by a husband that conjoint prayer helps him "stay in tune with her inner most thoughts, cares, and feelings."

Statements that spoke of spiritual intimacy within the marriage were coded as "Intimacy with God." For example, one participant responded that "as our relationship grows with the Lord so does our relationship with each other." Obviously, some overlap occurs in terms of spiritual intimacy and marital intimacy in the minds of the respondents.

Communication within the marriage was an important area of perceived benefit of conjoint prayer. Statements such as, "I gain an understanding of what he asks God for and why," speak to the issue of an enhanced ability to talk about important issues. Issues that might otherwise not be discussed are disclosed in times of shared prayer. "Sharing concerns," "Knowing my partner's heart and mind," are similar examples of communication.

A few persons noted an affectual benefit from conjoint prayer. "I feel good when we pray together, I don't know how else to put it," is one example. Others spoke of a sense of unity and peace that comes as a result of shared prayer. These were coded as "Feelings of Peace" (see Table 4.4). Thirty-five surveys left the question about perceived benefits blank and were coded, "No Response."

Table 4.4

Perceived Benefits of Conjoint Prayer

Combined Groups n=118

Intimacy with Spouse	40	34%
Communication	25	21%
Intimacy with God	15	13%
Feelings of Peace	4	3%
No Response	35	29%
	118	100%

The perception of barriers to conjoint prayer was more varied than those of the benefits (see Table 4.5). The lack of time was the most frequently listed barrier for both groups. Fifty-six percent of the experimental group cited lack of time as the major barrier while thirty-five percent of the control group listed time constraints as the number one barrier.

Other perceived barriers were more varied. Some answers were coded as "Lack of Discipline." These included responses such as laziness, forgetfulness, or a lack of willingness to follow through on plans to pray together. The fear of embarrassment was a barrier for some. Also, anger was an issue for some as was lack of trust. The lack of trust was not mentioned often, but when it was reported it came across powerfully as can be seen by the following statement: "I can take anything to God and rest assured all is still well through His grace. I fear such grace isn't as easily attained from my wife and I am afraid to leave myself vulnerable." Such a statement powerfully validates the assumption

of the researcher that lack of trust is a powerful barrier to conjoint prayer. While not

mentioned frequently, lack of trust is clearly an issue for some couples.

Table 4.5

Perceived Barriers to Conjoint Prayer

Combined Groups n=118

Lack of Time	36	30.2%
Lack of Discipline	10	8.4%
Fear of Embarrassment	9	7.5%
Anger with Spouse	4	3.3%
Lack of Trust	3	2.5%
Fatigue	3	2.5%
Pride	2	1.6%
Inexperience	1	0.8%
No Response	48	41.1%
	118	99.5%

Perhaps among the most poignant responses was offered on one questionnaire. In

responding to the question about the greatest perceived benefit to shared prayer, the

answer given was, "Really seeing each other for who we are and what we're made of."

Then, when responding to the question about the greatest perceived barrier to

conjoint prayer, the same answer was given. Such a response to the questions of

perceived benefits and barriers of conjoint prayer strikes at the heart of both the intended

purpose of this project and the fear that prevents many couples from experiencing greater intimacy in their marriages through conjoint prayer. Conjoint prayer requires a greater level of vulnerability and genuineness than some individuals are comfortable experiencing.

Question number three. What effect did the practice of conjoint prayer have upon marital intimacy among group members?

This question addresses the heart of the project. What difference did participating in the six-week group experience make in terms of marital intimacy in the lives of participants? The experimental group reported an increase in the practice of conjoint prayer during the six-week group (.6). The question is, did the increase in conjoint prayer make a difference in the level of marital intimacy for those couples?

The affectual expression subscale on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was the primary measure of marital intimacy. The surveys indicate a significant change in affectual expression over the course of the project for those in the experimental group (see Table 4.6). In fact, the upward trend was maintained at the third measurement. This upward trend was maintained thirty days after treatment ceased and after reports of actual participation in conjoint prayer had dropped to levels near the beginning of the experiment (see Table 4.2 p. 81). On average, scores moved from 7.80 to 8.85 in the experimental group with a range of 1.05. In statistical terms, this amounts to a significance of 0.021 in terms of the connection of conjoint prayer and affectional expression (see Table 4.8) when comparing the paired samples of conjoint prayer and affectional expression. Also, as Table 4.9 illustrates, a 0.04 level of significance was demonstrated when the statistical interaction of the two groups is compared.

Table 4.6

Affectional Expression

	Survey 1		Survey 2		Survey 3		Total		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Range
Experimental Group	7.80	2.26	8.80	1.44	8.85	1.60	8.48	1.84	1.05
Control Group	8.75	1.89	8.90	1.86	8.67	1.78	8.78	1.82	0.23
Combined	8.28	2.11	8.85	1.64	8.76	1.67	8.63	1.82	

Statistical Analysis

This section compares the experimental and control groups with one another from a statistical point of view in four ways. Comparison of the experimental and control groups to one another without reference to time is done as well as the interaction of the two groups. Third, the two groups are compared in terms of the effect of treatment over time. Finally, comparison of the effect of attendance with affectional expression is done.

Comparison of the two groups. A comparison of between-subjects effects looks at the two groups as a whole, without reference to time. From this perspective, no significance was determined. Table 4.7 provides a summary of the two groups as they compare to one another.

Table 4.7

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Tests of Significance for T1 using UNIQUE sums of squares

Sources of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig of F
WITHIN + RESIDUAL	311.82	36	8.66		
GROUP	3.48	1	3.48	.40	.530

With a .530 significance of F, no important difference in the between-subjects effects was demonstrated. However, this is not to say that no difference between the two groups appeared. As noted above, the greatest change in the practice of conjoint prayer for those in the experimental group was reported during the interval between survey 1 and survey 2, that is, during the six-week group experience. This was a change from 2.95 to 3.55, a range of .6. A noteworthy increase (1.0) was reported in the affectional expression during the same period. By doing a t-test, and comparing the paired samples of reports of conjoint prayer and the affectional expression subscale, a high level of significance (.016) at affectional expression shows for this time period. Table 4.8 illustrates the change reported during the interval from survey 1 to survey 2.

Table 4.8

Conjoint Prayer and Affectional Expression in the Experimental Group

| n=40 | Paired Differences | | | | | Sig. |
	Mean	Std. Dev	Std Error Mean	t	df	(2-tailed)
Conjoint Prayer 1	-0.30	0.79	0.13	-2.40	39.00	0.021
Conjoint Prayer 2						
Aff. Expression 1	-0.57	1.45	0.23	-2.51	39.00	0.016
Aff. Expression 2						

Clearly then, a strong correlation is found between the participation in the six-week group experience with its increased practice of conjoint prayer and affectional expression. When a paired samples test is done on the second and third sets of surveys, the significance is not maintained. At this point the practice of conjoint prayer had begun to decline to levels near the beginning of the study (see Figure 4.1 p. 92). Affectional

expression remains high at this point but with the decline in conjoint prayer the significance is lost (see Figure 4.2).

In other words, comparing the experimental and control groups as a whole does not indicate levels of importance in terms of a correlation of conjoint prayer and affectional expression. However, by isolating the time frame between survey 1 and survey 2, significance was found in the correlation of conjoint prayer and affectional expression. However, since this significance was not maintained over the course of the study, a significant difference in the two groups as a whole was not demonstrated.

Table 4.8 illustrates a high level of significance in terms of affectional expression for those participating in the six-week experimental group. The group experience was clearly effective in raising the levels of affectional expression for those who participated.

Interaction of the two groups. Another way to think about the data is to think of the interaction between the control group and the experimental group over the course of the study. Whereas the comparison above simply looks at the two groups as they compare to one another, this analysis looks at how they interact with one another over the course of the entire study.

Briefly, some significance was found in the interaction of the control and experimental groups. This analysis examines how the two groups interacted statistically and demonstrates an advantage, in terms of affectional expression, to being in the experimental group. Table 4.9 notes a .04 level of significance in the interaction between the experimental and control groups. This level of significance was maintained over the course of the study.

Table 4.9

Statistical Comparison of Group Interaction

Multivariate Tests of Significance (S=1, M=0, N=16 ½)

Test Name	Value	Exact F Hypoth.	DF	Error DF	Sig. of F
Pillais	.16820	3.53880	2.00	35.00	.04

With a .04 level of significance, participation in the experimental group and the

subsequent increase in the practice of conjoint prayer once again demonstrate a positive

impact upon affection expression.

Another way to conceptualize the significance of the interaction between the two

groups is illustrated in Figure 4.1. The advantage of being in the experimental group is

demonstrated in increased affectional expression reported by participants. As noted in

this graph, the increase in affectional expression was maintained over the course of the

study.

In an ideal situation, both the control group and the experimental group would

have begun at the same level of affectional expression at the beginning of the study.

Then, with treatment, those within the experimental group would have demonstrated an

increase in affectional expression while those in the control group would have remained

at the same level. Unfortunately, this ideal situation was not the case. The lack of

similarity of the two groups at the beginning of the study indicates a lack of statistical

control. However, the differences in the two groups statistically does not negate the

significant increase in affectional expression reported by those in the experimental group.

Clearly, participation in the experimental group was effective in raising the levels of

affectional expression.
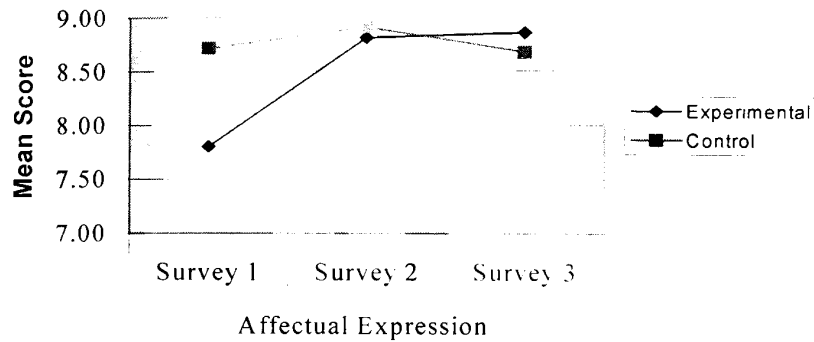
Figure 4.1

DAS Affectual Expression

Comparison of the two groups over time. The groups were compared to one another in terms of the effect over time. Here a marginally significant difference was found (.056). Table 4.10 reflects an analysis of the experimental and control groups over the length of the study. Since .05 is generally considered the cutoff in terms of what is significant, this can only be considered marginally significant at best.

Table 4.10

Effects over Time

Multivariate Tests of Significance (S=1, M=0, N=16 ½)

Test Name	Value	Exact F Hypoth.	DF	Error DF	Sig. of F
Pillais	.15151	3.12488	2.00	35.00	.056

In other words, the data from the perspective of a comparison between groups as a whole over time yields significance only when the time frame between survey 1 and

survey 2 is isolated. Doing so indicates high significance of 0.016, as seen in Table 4.8. when the results from survey 3 are included the importance is lost.

Examining the interaction between the control and experimental groups, without reference to time, also yields a significance of .04. While not as strong an indicator as the 0.016 level of significance reported during the six-week group experience, this nonetheless does indicate significance. Finally, the effect over time indicates a marginal significance of 0.56. As such, a positive correlation between the practice of conjoint prayer and affective expression was indicated in this study.

Briefly the overall scores of dyadic adjustment appear to follow the same trends as those of the affectional expression subscale. That is, where an increase in affectional expression occurred an increase also showed in dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

	Survey 1		Survey 2		Survey 3	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental Group						
Dyadic Consensus	51.15	7.01	53.60	5.00	54.40	5.05
Dyadic Satisfaction	35.45	2.56	35.45	2.54	36.15	1.79
Affectual Expression	7.80	2.26	8.80	1.44	8.85	1.60
Dyadic Cohesion	15.00	3.55	15.90	3.52	16.55	3.14
Total	109.40	12.06	113.75	9.17	115.95	9.37
Control Group						
Dyadic Consensus	52.50	5.20	52.65	4.91	52.94	5.33
Dyadic Satisfaction	33.89	3.55	34.10	3.06	33.00	3.03
Affectual Expression	8.71	1.89	8.90	1.86	8.67	1.78
Dyadic Cohesion	16.40	3.14	16.10	3.21	16.28	3.34
Total	111.60	11.23	111.75	10.24	110.89	11.87

An increase in mean scores of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale appears in every area for those in the experimental group over the course of the study. The mean score for dyadic consensus rose 3.25 over the course of the study, while dyadic satisfaction rose .65 and dyadic cohesion rose 1.55. As noted above, the mean scores for affectual expression rose 1.05 for the experimental group. The mean score for total dyadic adjustment rose 6.55 over the course of the study for the experimental group. This upward trend was maintained even though the actual practices of conjoint prayer had declined by survey 3.

Meanwhile, scores in every area for the control group declined over the course of the study. The mean score for dyadic consensus declined 3.55, dyadic satisfaction declined 3.14, affectual expression declined .91, and dyadic cohesion fell 1.15. The mean total DAS score for the control group declined 8.52 over the length of the study.

As such, an increase in not only affectual expression is demonstrated but also in the overall satisfaction of the marriage for those in the experimental group. This increase was maintained despite a decline in the frequency of conjoint prayer at the third survey to levels near those at the beginning of the experiment.

The two charts below provide a graphic description of the trends of each group. Figure 4.1 illustrates the practices of conjoint prayer reported by the experimental and control groups over the length of the study. Figure 4.2 illustrates the changes reported in affectional expression over the course of the study in both the control and the experimental groups. Two points are illustrated by these figures. One, the practice of conjoint prayer significantly increased for those in the experimental group, especially during the six-week period when the group sessions were held. Two, affectional

expression increased for those in the experimental group and remained higher than before the group began.
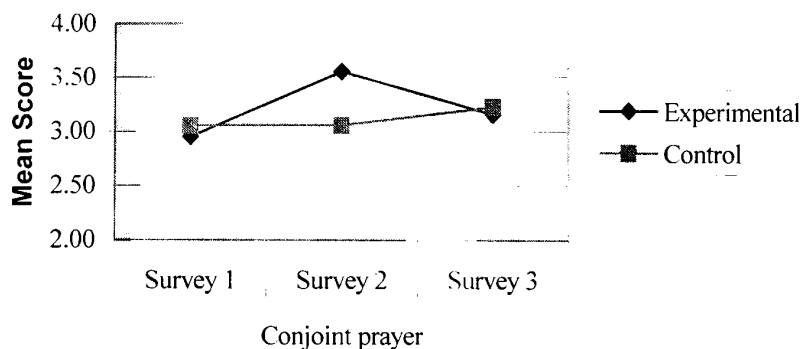
Figure 4.2

Practices of Conjoint Prayer per Week

Responses from questionnaires were also examined to check for correlation with demographic factors and affectional expression. When compared with age of participants, number of children in the home. and number of years married, no significance was found in terms of the correlation of those features to affectional expression.

Open-ended responses also provide insight into the perceived value of conjoint prayer in terms of marital intimacy. The prayer logs seemed to function more like a prayer journal for participants. Only a few comments were made in general, and those that were made most often focused on the topics of prayer. A few wrote about the benefits gained from praying together.

One wife noted early in the prayer log that her husband was struggling with feelings of embarrassment. Just over one week later. she wrote, "He initiated prayer tonight. Praise God." A husband, just fourteen days into the experiment. wrote about the

increasing sense of connection he and his wife were beginning to feel. "Tonight was one of our best nights yet. We covered many topics. My wife is showing me a side of her prayer capabilities that I didn't know exists. I can really feel the spiritual bond of our marriage strengthening."

While qualitative responses are more difficult to measure statistically than quantitative data from the surveys, these comments demonstrate the perceived connection between conjoint prayer and marital intimacy. Taken together, the increase in the mean scores in the DAS and the positive comments in the open-ended responses, a positive connection can be identified between marital intimacy and conjoint prayer.

Attendance and affectional expression. Another way to consider the effectiveness of the project is to correlate attendance with affectional expression. Average attendance by those in the experimental group was 5.05 of the six sessions. Table 4.12 below illustrates the relationship between attendance and affectional expression. Measures of affectional expression were taken at the beginning of the project, at the end of the six-week group experience, and thirty days following the close of the group experience. This table reflects the results of a multivariate test of attendance, as correlated with affectional expression over the course of the study.

Table 4.12

Correlation of Attendance and Affectional Expression

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Affection Expression	.153	2.879	2.000	32.000	.071	5.759	.524
Attendance	.524	2.931	8.000	66.000	.007	23.446	.929

As seen in Table 4.12, when attendance is correlated with affectional expression, a significant relationship is demonstrated (.007). This speaks highly of the effectiveness of the group experience as a whole in raising the level of affectional expression in the experimental group. Determining the precise reason for the correlation of attendance with affectional expression is impossible. Just two possibilities for the positive correlation are the helpfulness of the information presented and the increase in genuine community experienced by the participants in the experimental group. As illustrated in Table 4.13 the highest rated session was the session that dealt with anger. Unfortunately, there is no way to measure the sense of community achieved by participants in the group experience.

When attendance is considered, other factors besides conjoint prayer must be taken into consideration. The sense of community that developed, the information shared from the facilitator and from group participants, and the mutual support are but a few factors that contributed to the group experience. More is said of the importance of community in the following chapter. At this point, simply note the overall experience of participating in the six-week group "Growing Together in Christ" correlates significantly with affectional expression.

Participant Evaluations

Another source of data for the project were the evaluation questionnaires submitted by the experimental group (see Appendix D). These evaluations provided an opportunity for participants to rate the sessions on a Likert scale with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent." In Table 4.13 the sessions are listed in the order in which they were presented. The session on dealing with anger in the relationship was the highest rated session, followed closely by "God's Design for Marriage."

Table 4.13

Rating of Individual Sessions

God's Design for Marriage	4.05
Sin's Effect on Relationships	3.65
The Role of Spiritual Disciplines	3.15
Barriers to Intimacy: Anger	4.15
Barriers to Intimacy: Forgiveness	3.30
Barriers to Intimacy: Trust	3.50

The two open-ended questions on the evaluation questionnaire yielded few comments. A question about the main benefit from participating in "Growing in Christ" resulted in a few comments similar to those above about the perceived benefit of conjoint prayer to the marriage (see Table 4.4 p. 84). One person wrote, "My spouse and I had never realized the importance of praying together. We were blown away by the feeling of fulfilledness [sic] that come over our relationship."

In terms of the weaknesses of the group sessions, the only comments (3) had to do with the need for more group discussion.

As noted above, on average, those in the experimental group attended 5.05 sessions of the six sessions. This may well be another indication of the busyness of life and the time pressures couples feel in our society. Since "lack of time" was listed as the number one perceived barrier to conjoint prayer, a safe assumption is that people are very busy. Missing only one of the six sessions may be taken as a positive indicator of the perceived value of the participants.

Summary of Significant Findings

1. Significant positive change was noted in those in the experimental group in every area of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

2. Although practices of conjoint prayer declined after the six-week group experiences, benefits from participation in the study appeared to be maintained. How long these benefits would be maintained is of course impossible to say.

3. Barriers to conjoint prayer are readily identifiable with the lack of time being the leading hindrance to shared prayer.

4. The primary benefit to conjoint prayer is a perception of greater intimacy in the marriage.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The origin for this project is found in the continuing struggles of couples, even Christian couples, in maintaining marital intimacy. It tests the oft-repeated phrase, "the couple that prays together stays together." This study does not focus on divorce prevention per se, or provide statistical data from longitudinal studies to support the popular belief in the connection between prayer and marital satisfaction. It does however support the fact that couples that pray together increase their level of marital intimacy.

This section summarizes the major findings of the study. Second, I discuss the findings in light of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, particularly in terms of the affectional expression subscale. Third, the section evaluates the group experience as a whole. Fourth, the implications of the study, particularly in terms of practical applications are discussed. Fifth, the section addresses the weakness of the study. This is followed by the contribution of this research to the knowledge of marriage and family. Lastly, areas for future study are suggested.

Major Findings

The results of this study demonstrate that positive, significant change was demonstrated in the affectional expression subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) for those who increased the frequency of conjoint prayer. Results were cumulative in that gain was demonstrated over the course of the three surveys for affectional expression and maintained in spite of the decline in the practice of conjoint prayer at the third measure. In other words, the effects of increased conjoint prayer during the first six weeks of the study were continuing to be experienced even as experiences of conjoint

prayer were declining at the third measure. Furthermore, cumulative positive change in the overall scores of the DAS was reported for those who increased the frequency of conjoint prayer, not just in the affectional expression subscale.

An additional finding in this study is that barriers to conjoint prayer are real and must be addressed effectively. The barrier to conjoint prayer most often cited by participants was the lack of time (30.2 percent). Other barriers listed by participants were lack of discipline (8.4 percent), fear of embarrassment (7.5 percent), anger with spouse (3.3 percent), and lack of trust (2.5 percent).

Intervening variables such as age, length of marriage, or number of children in the home do not account for or explain the changes demonstrated in this study. Simply put, a positive relationship exists between conjoint prayer and marital intimacy. No other variables examined in this study account for the positive change in affectional expression.

This study, therefore, confirms previous studies regarding the positive correlation between religiosity and marital intimacy in general (Hunt and King 400) and conjoint prayer and marital intimacy in particular (Friesen 120; Gruner 52).

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale was chosen for this project because it has a wide base of use and because the affectional expression subscale of this instrument closely resembles marital intimacy ("Measuring" 16). It has also demonstrated good reliability and validity (18). Throughout this study, the major focus has been on marital intimacy as measured by the affectional expression subscale.

Affectual expression subscale. In the last chapter, Figure 4.2 (p. 92) illustrated the change in affectional expression reported by participants in the experimental group.

Positive, significant change occurred, especially during the interval from survey 1 to survey 2. While positive change continued at the third survey, the degree of change during the interval from survey 2 to survey 3 was not considered statistically significant.

Two points are particularly noteworthy. First, positive change in affectional expression was linked to participation in the six-week group experience and the subsequent increase in practice of conjoint prayer. When extraneous variables such as age of participants, length of marriage, or number of children in the home were considered, they were not shown to have an impact upon the results. While other factors may be responsible for the increase in affectional expression, a positive and statistically significant relationship does exist between participation in the "Growing Together in Christ" group and affectional expression.

One of the key thrusts of the literature review in this study was its emphasis upon genuine community. Genuine community reflects a high degree of intimacy. It was modeled by God in the Trinity and experienced by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall. Genuine community, as modeled by both God in his interpenetrating oneness and by Adam and Eve, involves openness, vulnerability, and trust. This project sought to foster these qualities within the marriages of participants. Conjoint prayer was viewed as a means of grace, by which participants would experience healing in their relationships. Barriers, not only to conjoint prayer but also to intimacy, were addressed and conjoint prayer provides the setting for couples to draw closer to God and to one another. Affectional expression was chosen as a quantitative measure of the intimacy of participants for this study. The significant increase in affectional expression demonstrated in this study confirms the continued validity of God's design for marriage as

demonstrated in Adam and Eve. It also confirms the value of conjoint prayer in serving as a means of grace to draw marriage partners closer to God and to one another.

Second, the positive effects from participation in the group experience and the increase in practice of conjoint prayer continued to be demonstrated even after frequency of participation in conjoint prayer declined to levels near the beginning of the study. It is impossible to say how long these increased levels of affectional expression would continue, and the increase in the levels of affectional expression was much less dramatic between survey 2 and survey 3 than between the first two surveys (see Figure 4.2 p. 92). Nonetheless, the increase was maintained.

Consideration of the relation of affectional expression to other scales on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale is also interesting. As Table 4.11 demonstrates (p. 90), a positive gain in every subscale of the DAS for those within the experimental group was reported. Over the course of the study, dyadic consensus increased 3.25, dyadic satisfaction increased .07, affectional expression increased 1.05, and dyadic cohesion increased 1.55. This reflects an increase in total dyadic adjustment of 6.55 over the course of the study for the experimental group.

Again, this points to the significance of experiencing genuine community within relationships. Barriers to conjoint prayer were identified and steps were taken to remove those barriers. As the couples increased the frequency of conjoint prayer, they increased the affectional expression within the relationship. Though not measured in this study, a reasonable assumption can be drawn that elements that reflect genuine community were also experienced. Theologically, as couples began to increase the experiences of genuine community in their marriages, their level of satisfaction rose.

At the same time, the control group declined in every subscale of the DAS except dyadic consensus, which showed an increase of .04. Dyadic satisfaction decreased .89, affectional expression decreased .04, and dyadic cohesion decreased .12. This amounts to a decline in total dyadic adjustment of .71.

The scores reflect consistency across the relationship. Other factors, besides affectional expression were positively impacted by conjoint prayer for those in the experimental group. Every area measured by the DAS reflects positive change for those within the experimental group.

Evaluation of Group Experience

Several issues regarding the group experience itself are worthy of noting. These include attendance, the perceived value of the session to participants, changes in behavior of the participants observed, and group dynamics.

Attendance. Attendance by participants in the experimental group averaged 5.05 of six sessions. Missing one of the six sessions should not be unexpected, considering that finding the time to pray together was the number one barrier to conjoint prayer reported by participants. Schedules are clearly crowded, and asking couples to make a commitment for one night a week for six weeks is asking a lot.

What is noteworthy, however, is that when attendance is correlated with affectional expression between the experimental and control groups, a significant positive relationship is demonstrated between attendance at the group sessions and affectional expression. Table 4.12 (p. 94) illustrates this relationship. In other words the group was effective in increasing the level of affectional expression reported by the experimental group members.

Another way of understanding the value of attendance is that as the participants went through the six-week group experience they began to experience a sense of genuine community within the group. The group began sharing personal stories, exhibiting vulnerability and openness, and demonstrating mutual support by the third session. Thus, the nature of intimacy discussed in the first session, and described in Chapter 2, carried over not only to the marriage relationships, but also to the relationships between the participants in the experimental group.

This communal support may also account for the decline in the practice of conjoint prayer after the six-week group experience as illustrated in Figure 4.1(p. 92). Whatever else can be said about the relationship of conjoint prayer and marital intimacy, one thing appears certain. Those who participated in the group experience did demonstrate a significant increase in the practice of conjoint prayer (see Figure 4.1 p. 92).

Rating of individual sessions. The individual sessions appear to have been received well in terms of helpfulness. Table 4.13 (p. 95) reported the evaluations of individual sessions and the range from highest rated (Anger) to lowest rated (Spiritual Disciplines) was only 1.0. While this low range and fairly consistent rating is encouraging, it is somewhat disconcerting that the session on spiritual disciplines was the lowest rated session. After all, the purpose of the group experience was to get the couples into the habit of practicing the spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer.

One reason why this may have happened may be a need on the part of the participants for material that is practical in nature. The three sessions that dealt with removing barriers of anger, forgiveness, and trust were fairly high rated, with the session on anger being the highest rated session of all. In other words, the participants may have

been looking for more hands-on help in dealing with everyday problems than theoretical

models about what a marriage could be.

Behavioral changes. An important question about the project as a whole is, "Did

those in the experimental group actually change their prayer patterns?" Table 4.2 (p. 81)

illustrates the beliefs and practices of prayer throughout the study. The experimental

group reported they engaged in conjoint prayer "about once a week" (2.95) at the

beginning of the study. This increased to .6 toward the "almost every day" at the end of

the six-week group experience (3.55). However, thirty days after the group experience

had ended, the experimental group's reported frequency of conjoint prayer had dropped

to 3.15, a number close to the "about once a week" figure. In other words, the

experimental group lost one-third of the gain in frequency of conjoint prayer they had

achieved one month after the end of the group experience.

From this perspective, behavioral change in terms of increased conjoint prayer

was short-lived. I can only speculate about what would happen if data were collected six

months or one year after the end of the study. A realistic assumption is that occurrences

of conjoint prayer would return to levels at or near those of the participants at the

beginning of the study.

On the other hand, another possibility is that as the gain in affectional expression

began to wane, along with the other scores from the DAS, the participants may be

encouraged to once again increase the frequency of conjoint prayer. Further, and again

this is only speculation, such a return would be more possible now as a result of

addressing issues in the group sessions. If, for example, anger once again became a

barrier to conjoint prayer, the couples could utilize material from the session on dealing

with anger, remove the barrier, and resume the practice of conjoint prayer. Or, since

relationships were forged with other couples in the six-week group experience, support

from those couples could be an aid to resolving issues and resuming the practice of

shared prayer.

Overall, behavioral changes were observed in the frequency of conjoint prayer.

However, without further data collection determining whether or not these changes were

lasting is impossible.

Group dynamics. What part did the interaction of the group play in the rise of

affectional expression during the interval from survey 1 to survey 2? This is a broad

question and impossible to answer, except in a general way. The comments above

relating to the sense of community created in the group settings certainly applies here.

As a professional counselor, I am familiar with group dynamics. I know that some

groups tend to "gel" more quickly than others. In those groups that come together quickly

trust, openness, and vulnerability can lead to collegial learning. This group achieved a

high degree of cohesiveness early, probably due in part to the fact that members of the

group came from the same church and had at least some prior knowledge of one another.

Group members were willing to share personal stories and struggles as early as the

second group session. For example, when one couple began talking about benefits of

praying together, suggesting that it was a deeply spiritual experience, others talked about

their experiences both positive and negative.

Encouragement and mutual support demonstrated within the group was, in all

probability, a factor in helping the participants stay engaged in the practice of conjoint

prayer. Unfortunately, this factor was not addressed in any way in the assessment tools

utilized in this study. As a result, saying with confidence that this was, or was not, a factor in the rise of affectional expression is impossible.

Implications of Findings and Practical Application

Three implications of this study are applicable in a practical ministry setting. In this section I will discuss practical ways the findings can be utilized in local ministry settings, the implications of identifying the barriers to prayer, and implications resulting from the discussion of the nature of intimacy.

Application in Ministry

The findings of this study are applicable in several ministry settings. In Chapter 1 I raised the questions about why conjoint prayer is so rare among married couples.

Pastors and teachers, whether in an academic setting or in a church setting, have a ready and available platform from which to proclaim helpful information about marriage and families. Christians are not exempt from divorce. In fact, as Barna noted, they may be more susceptible to divorce. This study has demonstrated a positive correlation between conjoint prayer and affectional expression. While a direct correlation between affectional expression and a lower divorce rate cannot be stated, a realistic assumption is that those with higher levels of affectional expression and dyadic adjustment are less likely to experience divorce. Preaching and teaching within the church can, and I believe should, find ways to encourage couples to pray together. This study suggests that doing so would result in better adjusted couples.

Pastors, teachers, and counselors also have opportunities to talk about findings, such as those of this study, seminars, and workshops. Marriage retreats are still popular and provide a wonderful atmosphere for couples to address barriers to conjoint prayer

and to begin experiencing shared prayer. I have conducted two groups with couples based on the material developed in this study in recent months. Couples who participated found the information helpful and challenging. I have also delivered two one-hour presentations on the topic of increasing spiritual intimacy in various marriage workshops. In every case, people demonstrated considerable interest in learning about how to pray with their spouse more effectively. This is an area of interest that couples recognize and in which they are seeking direction. Pastors, teachers, counselors, and others have a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in couples' lives through sharing these findings.

Writing is another effective way of disseminating pertinent information. The popularity of marriage devotional books and books encouraging conjoint prayer point to a need. People are evidently searching for answers in this area of their lives. Magazines and journals are also a wonderful means of spreading the news of findings, encouraging couples to experience shared prayer, discussing the nature of genuine intimacy, and sharing helpful hints to removing barriers to conjoint prayer.

Identification of Barriers

One focus of this study was the identification of and removal of barriers to conjoint prayer. Table 4.5 (p. 85) illustrates the barriers reported by participants in this study. Lack of time was the leading barrier, by a wide margin.

Few need to be told of the hectic pace of life in this day and time. Helping couples maintain perspective on something as vital as marriage and the family should be an essential element of the ministry of pastors and churches today. Preaching and teaching about the value of conjoint prayer, its contribution to marital intimacy, as well the importance of spending time with family is needed. Swenson reminds us of the need

for a margin in every area of life, and in the four areas of time, finances, emotional

energy, and physical energy in particular (100). This should include time with spouses.

Pastors, Sunday school teachers, counselors, and others have a great opportunity

to encourage people to find time for things of value. I believe the findings of this study

have demonstrated that conjoint prayer is something of value, as well as something

greatly needed in families today. Pastors, teachers, counselors, and others have a great

opportunity to promote the need to slow down the pace of life within churches and other

settings. Perhaps included in the discussion of spiritual disciplines, more information

needs to be given about the discipline of simplicity.

Another possible avenue to promoting conjoint prayer, as well as removing

barriers to conjoint prayer, is through a group encouraging shared prayer. As noted

above, one way to understand the findings of this study is that the six-week group

experience contributed to the rise of conjoint prayer by providing a setting for mutual

support and encouragement. Such a group need not be a part of an academic study to

have the same benefit. Any church, school, or setting in which two or more couples can

meet regularly can be the setting for a group that encourages shared prayer, talks about

barriers and benefits, and holds one another accountable.

Indeed, as one looks at the list of barriers suggested by participants, any of the

barriers listed can be addressed by pastors, teachers, or groups facilitators to encourage

conjoint prayer.

The Nature of Intimacy

Another major area focus of this study was the nature of genuine intimacy. As

noted above, the Bible declares that humankind is created in the image of a relational

God. Also above, I demonstrated that Adam and Eve experienced genuine intimacy with God, with one another, with the world, and with themselves prior to the Fall. Genuine intimacy, as defined and set forth in this study, is based upon the rediscovery of the intimacy modeled by God and experienced by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall. Although sin has marred this intimacy, the model is still valid, and couples can regain a large measure of this intimacy.

I believe married people in our culture are searching for genuine intimacy. This study addressed the rise of the self, expressed as radical self-interest, and the loss of the self in postmodernism. Calling individuals and couples back to a biblically-based model of intimacy is greatly needed in our culture today. Pastors, authors, counselors, and teachers have a great opportunity to promote a workable, biblically-based model of marriage that is needed.

Conjoint Prayer

This study has also brought attention the lack of academic studies on the role of conjoint prayer in marriages. Numerous devotional books are being written, and they make an important practical contribution (Weiss; Stoop and Stoop, When Couples; Thomas). However, few have moved beyond the more general study of religiosity and marital intimacy to the study of conjoint prayer and marital intimacy (Friesen; Gruner). Only one work, besides this present study, reported anything about barriers to conjoint prayer (Hunt 6).

This study has demonstrated that as a result of the interpenetrating nature of God, he is in constant communication with himself. This constant communication is a form of prayer. If prayer is that essential to the nature and character of God, and humankind are

created in the image of God, then prayer should also be a part of every person's essential character. This applies not only individually in one's relationship with God but also corporately in one's relationships with others. Furthermore, Adam and Eve demonstrated a wonderful sense of intimacy and genuine community in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Sin has entered the picture, and the intimacy Adam and Eve experienced with God and with one another is lost. However, as noted above, the model of marriage God created, demonstrated in Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, is not faulty. Clearly obstacles to genuine community exist. Grace redeems and restores. Prayer is a means of grace and is worthy of our best effort. This is true experientially as well as academically.

Importance of Community

The importance of community is demonstrated powerfully by the fact that the experimental group did not maintain the increase in the practices of conjoint prayer after group meetings ended. Within thirty days after the group sessions ended, reports of practices of conjoint prayer had declined to levels approaching those at the beginning of the study (see Table 4.2).

As noted above, community is an essential element in the nature of God. Furthermore, since humankind is created in the image of this communal God, a relational, communal, element is an integral part of each and every person. The communal or relational nature is also an essential element of God's original design for marriage, modeled by Adam and Eve prior to the Fall.

This study demonstrates that community, experienced in the group sessions, aids affectional expression in that it encourages conjoint prayer. Participants were held accountable in the group sessions. Participants had opportunities to share victories, as

well as struggles with conjoint prayer in the group meetings. In short, a support system for conjoint prayer encouraged its continuance. Once the group sessions ended, the support was removed, and practices of conjoint prayer declined.

The shared experiences of the group sessions were more important to the continued practice of conjoint prayer than accountability. Participants knew they were to complete another set of surveys thirty days following the end of the group meetings. In other words, they knew they would be held accountable as to whether or not they maintained the practice of conjoint prayer. Yet, this level of accountability was not sufficient to encourage them to maintain the increased frequency of shared prayer. Clearly, the community experienced in the group sessions was beneficial to the participants' continued practice of conjoint prayer.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

Several issues with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of this study are addressed in this section. Specifically, this section addresses issues dealing with the design of the study as it relates to issues of the strength and weakness of the study.

Design

With regard to the design of the study, several areas are worthy of discussion. This study followed appropriate quasi-experimental design methods; however, attending to some of the following issues would have made it stronger.

Rosenthal effect. The Rosenthal effect has to do with change within a group. It states that just by bringing a group together, some change will result. One weakness of this study was that no alternative treatment was offered to the control group. By doing so, even if it was no more than getting them together for a meal and discussion, that

treatment could have been compared with the six-week group experience. As designed, nothing accounts for the change in the control group. Figure 4.2 (p. 94) illustrates the change in affectional expression in both experimental and control groups. A slight increase in affectional expression at the second survey and a decrease in affectional expression at the third survey for the control group were reported. As designed, I have no way to account for these changes.

More will be said about what might have happened and how these changes might be accounted for below. For now, simply note that statistically I cannot account for the changes in the control group over the course of the study.

Control. In some ways this study reflects good control, while in other ways, it reflects weakness. Looking at Table 4.2 (p. 94) and the beliefs and practices of prayer, both groups appear very similar. So too, the experimental and control groups were very similar with regard to age, educational level, income, and number of children in the home as illustrated in Table 4.1 (p. 93). All this reflects good statistical control.

However, one area that does not reflect strong control was affectional expression. Figure 4.2 (p. 94) illustrates a considerably lower score on the affectional expression subscale for the experimental group at the beginning of the study than for the control group. Ideally, the two would have had similar affectional expression scores at the beginning of the study. As treatment continued for the experimental group, their scores would have increased while the control group's scores would have remained the same. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

I cannot fully account for this variation in scores in affectional expression. Members of the groups were selected randomly. Good control was demonstrated at other

points. Somehow, it was not demonstrated with regard to one of the most central factors of the study. One possible explanation for this variation is marital conventionality.

Marital conventionality. Another weakness of the study was the lack of control for social desirability, or marital conventionality. This is the desire on the part of participants to appear good or to report even better than things actually are. One possible explanation for the differences in affectional expression in the experimental group and the control group at the beginning of the study is the lack of control for marital conventionality. The control group received their surveys by mail and did not hear the introduction given about being completely honest. As a result, one possibility is they were more inclined to allow themselves to be influenced by the desire to appear good.

The experimental group may have allowed themselves to be influenced by the desire to appear good by over-reporting experiences of conjoint prayer or overstating the effects of treatment on surveys 2 and 3. Had the study been designed to account for social desirably, this would have been accounted for.

Subjectivity of the researcher. I believe that one other weakness of the study was my own subjectivity. This comes through most clearly in the selection of barriers addressed in the review of the literature. I was unable to locate any research that identifies barriers to conjoint prayer other than those mentioned by Hunt (6). However, I took many of my cues from popular writers such as Stoop and Stoop, Weiss, and Thomas. I also looked to conversations with friends and colleagues in the early, formative stages of the design of the study. In general, the selection of anger, lack of forgiveness, and the lack of trust, was the most subjective element in the project. Unfortunately, until more research is done on what prevents couples from experiencing

shared prayer, I know of no other way to approach the issue. Clearly this points to a need for further research in this area.

A number of things might have been done to strengthen this study. I believe that given the design of the study, the results do a positive demonstrate, cumulative improvement in affectional expression for those who increased the frequency of conjoint prayer. Those findings are valid. However, had the above issues been addressed in the design of this study, this would have been much stronger.

Contribution to Research

This study contributes to the research on marital intimacy in several ways. In this section I briefly note the lack of research on conjoint prayer. Second, I note that this does confirm the research of those who have done similar studies. Third, I reflect upon the contribution of the discussion of the nature of genuine intimacy. Fourth, I discuss the contribution of the discussion of how sin destroys intimacy. Lastly, I note the importance of the discussion of postmodernism in today's society.

Lack of Research

This study demonstrates that research is lacking in several areas relating to marital intimacy. What prevents couples from praying together appears only as an aside, or minor topic in previous studies. Hunt lists barriers only briefly with little or no discussion (6). Writers such as Thomas and Weiss appear have an understanding of barriers to prayer, but their contributions are apocryphal rather than research based. One essential element in increasing conjoint prayer in marriages is the identification and removal of barriers to shared prayer. Research in this area is lacking and is a worthy area of study for future researchers.

Another indicator of lack of research in the area of conjoint prayer and marital intimacy is the small number of studies isolating conjoint prayer as a distinct variable. As noted above several studies demonstrate a positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Anthony; Bahr and Chadwick; Dudley and Kosinski). On the other hand, only a few researchers who have studied martial satisfaction, marital adjustment, or marital intimacy have identified conjoint prayer as a distinct variable. Those who have, indicate a positive relationship exists between conjoint prayer and marital adjustment (Gruner 52; Friesen 120). This study confirms the work of Gruner and Friesen. As such, it makes a significant contribution to an area that is lacking in research.

Nature of Intimacy

Another contribution of this study is a model of the marital relationship in general, and marital intimacy in particular, based upon the Trinity. While popular psychology often has valuable things to say about relationships, it lacks the foundational truth presented in Scripture. This study, on the other hand, based its understanding of the nature of intimacy upon God's self-revelation. Humankind is created in the image of a triune God.

The importance of a relationally-based trinitarian model serving as the basis of marriage is seen in even greater light when that model is compared with the radical self-interest of postmodernism. Calling individuals and couples to a life of self-sacrifice rather than individualism is needed in a culture of radical self-interest. How to proclaim that message in a postmodern culture is a challenge to say the least. This study has demonstrated that a marriage based upon mutual sacrifice is not only biblically based: it is also workable. This study also highlights the power of prayer to reconnect individuals

with God, to enhance spiritual connectedness among one another, and to aid in the removal of barriers to intimacy.

Sin as a Destroyer of Intimacy

This study also highlights the impact of sin upon the marital relationship. Selfishness, shame, distorted images, etc. are consequences of sin and need to be addressed as such. Conjoint prayer has the capacity to aid in the removal of barriers to intimacy created by sin. Selfishness is removed through surrender and mutual sacrifice. Shame is healed as individuals rediscover their true identity as children of God created in his image, and forgiven of sin. Distorted images are corrected as relationships become healthy and individuals discover a more accurate concept of God.

Thankfully, grace is given by God to further this process. Grace is given to individuals not only to redeem that person to God, but also to reconcile individuals to one another. This study contributes to the understanding of what a healthy marriage is and provides helpful direction upon how to achieve greater intimacy within the marriage.

Further Studies

Since religiosity is such a broad topic, and marriage such an important relationship, more studies are needed. More studies should be done on the relationship of conjoint prayer and marital intimacy to confirm this and previous studies. Additionally, other variables, often lumped in the broad category of religiosity, are worthy of study. Church attendance, religious beliefs and expressions, shared worship, to name a few, should be studied. Several questions could be asked. Which variables are most effective in terms of marital intimacy? Is a combination of certain variables more effective in establishing and maintaining dyadic adjustment? Which variables do not demonstrate a

significant relationship with marital satisfaction? Are churches and pastors placing too

much emphasis upon variables that are ineffective in ministering to families? These are

just a few of the questions that could be asked and are worthy of research.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

In order to assure anonymity, an Identification Number is assigned to each participant. The number is composed of the first five digits of your social security number and the last four numbers of your home phone number. It is important to include this number on all assessments. This number is "safe" in that no confidential information is being released.

Your ID number _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
(Social Security #)   (Phone #)

Spouses' ID number _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
(Social Security #)   (Phone #)

1) How old are you? _____   Sex (Circle one) M   F

2) How long have you been married to your current spouse? _____

3) Please identify the age of children living in your home.
For example, boy 7, girl 3.

_____   _____   _____   _____   _____

4) What level of education have you completed? (Check one)
HS ___   College ___   Graduate School ___   Post Graduate ___

5) What is your annual household income?   (Circle one)
Under 20,000   20,000 – 40,000   40,000 – 60,000   60,000 – 80,000   Over 80,000

6) Do you work outside the home?   Yes or No _____

7) I believe the Bible instructs people to pray regularly. (Circle one)

| Strongly | Somewhat | Uncer- | Somewhat | Strongly |
| Agree | Agree | tain | Disagree | Disagree |

8) How frequently do you pray? (Circle one)

| | Almost | About Once | A Few Times | Hardly |
| Daily | Daily | a Week | a Month | Ever |

9) How frequently do you and your spouse pray together? (Circle one)

| | Almost | About Once | A Few Times | Hardly |
| Daily | Daily | a Week | a Month | Ever |

10) Please identify what you believe to be the greatest benefit to praying with your spouse.

11) Please identify what you believe to be the greatest barrier to praying with your spouse.

APPENDIX B

Marriage Questionnaire

Your ID number ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
(Social Security #)   (Phone #)

Spouses' ID number ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
(Social Security #)   (Phone #)

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occa-sionally Disagree	Fre-quently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	___	___	___	___		___
2. Matters of recreation	___	___	___	___		___
3. Religious matters	___	___	___	___		___
4. Demonstration of affection	___	___	___	___		___
5. Friends	___	___	___	___		___
6. Sex relations	___	___	___			___
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	___					
8. Philosophy of life	___					
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	___					
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	___	___	___			
11. Amount of time spent together	___	___	___	___	___	___
12. Making major decisions	___	___	___	___	___	___
13. Household tasks	___		___	___	___	___
14. Leisure time, interests, and activities	___	___	___	___	___	___
15. Career decisions	___	___	___	___	___	___

	All the Time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa-sionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	___		___	___	___	___
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	___		___	___	___	___

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa-sionally	Rarely	Never
18. In general, how often do you think that things be-tween you and your partner are going well?	___	___	___	___	___	___
19. Do you confide in your mate?	___	___	___	___	___	___
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)	___	___	___	___	___	___
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	___	___	___	___	___	___
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?	___	___	___	___	___	___

	Every day	Almost every day	Occa-sionally	Rarely	Never
23. Do you kiss your mate?	___	___	___	___	___
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	___	___	___	___	___

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
25. Have a stimulating exchange	___	___	___	___	___	___
26. Laugh together	___	___	___	___	___	___
27. Calmly discuss something	___	___	___	___	___	___
28. Work together on a project	___	___	___	___	___	___

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or no.)

	Yes	No	
29.	___	___	Being too tired for sex.
30.	___	___	Not showing love.

31. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship.

.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

_____ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.

_____ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.

_____ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.

_____ It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I am doing* now to help it succeed.

_____ It would be nice if it succeeded, but *I refuse to do any more than I am doing* now to keep the relationship going.

_____ My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more I can do* to keep the relationship going.

APPENDIX C

Growing Together in Christ

A six-week marriage experience to recover God's design for your marriage.

PRAYER LOG

Timothy L. Barber
2001

This group experience is a part of doctoral research done in connection with Asbury Theological Seminary. As such, we will need to keep accurate records. Your help is greatly appreciated. In order to ensure your anonymity, please identify your Prayer Log by use of an identification number. Please make sure you have clearly marked your ID number on all surveys, assessments, and this log.

Your identification number is composed of the first five digits of your social security number plus the last four digits of your home phone number.

Your ID number   __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __ __
                      (Social Security #)   (Phone #)

Spouse's ID number   __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __ __
                      (Social Security #)   (Phone #)

Day One

Time spent together in prayer: _____

Topics covered in prayer:

_____   _____

Observations/Comments: _____ _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A page for each day similar to this is provided for each day of the six-week program.

The Prayer Log is a 56-page document bound by spiral binders. Prayer Logs are 5 ½ inches wide by 8 ½ inches tall. Each participant will have a Prayer Log.

_____

_____

_____

Week One: God's Design for Marriage

Genesis 1:26-3; 2:15-25 describe the creation of the first man and the first woman. (Take a few moments and read those verses before you continue.)

These verses reveal a great deal about what God planned for men and women and for marriage.

Notice that we are created in the image of God. Part of this family resemblance means that we are made for relationship. God is relational in nature. "Let *us* make man in *our* image." Also, we think of God as triune, being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is continually in relationship and seeking relationship.

Actually, four areas of relationship are outlined for us. You are made to be united with God (Gen 3:8), with others (Gen. 2:18), with the world around you (Gen. 1:26), and implied in all this is wholeness within yourself. You are made for relationship.

Notice the closeness with God. Adam and Eve walked in the garden in the cool of the evening. What a joy for two whom God had joined to be together with Him.

Notice too the closeness with one another. Adam and Eve are pictured as being "naked and they felt no shame" (Gen. 1:25). This incredible vulnerability and honesty implies much more than just being comfortable with one another's physical nakedness. An openness, a sincerity, and a connection with one another marked two people becoming one flesh. They were one, not just physically but spiritually and emotionally.

As we launch into this experience, take a few moments and honestly assess the level of connectedness with your mate. What would you like to see accomplished in the next six weeks? What would being open, honest, and vulnerable with your spouse mean for you?

Week Two: Sin's Effect on Relationships

If you were honest with yourself this past week, you probably saw some areas in your marriage that need improvement. Welcome to the club! You know from the story of Adam and Eve that things weren't perfect for long. Unfortunately, we have inherited the effects of their sin.

The effect of this fallenness on relationships is devastating. The intimacy, vulnerability, and honesty that Adam and Eve shared with God and with one another was replaced by a tendency to think of ourselves first.

People get hurt in such an atmosphere. The natural thing to do when we feel threatened is to defend ourselves by walling off our hearts. A closed spirit feels safe because we've told ourselves, "I'll never let another person hurt me that way again." Sadly, when we build defensive walls around our hearts, we lose the ability to experience the intimacy for which we were created.

We have a dilemma. We are created for close, intimate relationships with God and with others, but something within seems to drive us away from the very thing for which our hearts long.

The answer to this dilemma is not to dig our heels in and demand our way. This is a return to the selfishness that got Adam and Eve into trouble in the first place. The answer is to learn to trust once again.

You will have to decide what level of healing takes place in your life and in your relationships. You will have to decide how open you will be to the healing grace of God.

Remember, just because sin appeared and marred God's perfect creation does not mean the original design is faulty. He wants to have a relationship with you, and He wants you to have a meaningful relationship with your mate.

Week Three: The Role of Spiritual Disciplines

By now, you have had enough time to think about what God wants for you and your marriage, and you've probably had some struggles following through on the commitment to pray daily with one another. That's to be expected.

Down throughout the centuries, Christians have found that spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible reading, fasting, etc., open new possibilities for God's grace to work. It isn't so much that these deeds are magic. Rather, God uses these tools as instruments of healing.

Prayer is a powerful spiritual discipline. It is both a source of strength and an expression of our desire for connection.

Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about the spiritual life as reservoirs as opposed to canals. Canals allow the water to flow out just as quickly as it flows in. Reservoirs, on the other hand, maintain a reserve. Prayer enables us to build the reserves of spiritual strength in order that we do not find ourselves depleted by the pace of every day life.

Genuine prayer also has an openness to it that encourages us to be honest with God and with ourselves. This is especially powerful, if I am honest with God in the presence of my mate. It opens avenues to sharing that takes us to new depths of intimacy.

Week Four: Barriers to Intimacy, Anger

We now shift our focus to barriers to intimacy. Let's face it. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, things just don't seem to go well. The truth is, when I'm angry with my mate, intimacy is the last thing on my mind.

How do we get past the desire for revenge, past the temptation to wall our hearts off, and push on to genuine connectedness? That is the challenge. Here are some things to consider.

Even if you did not create the problem (few people are 100% innocent in any given situation, but let's assume in this case you are), you are still responsible for your reaction.

It has been said, "Christians are more likely to sin by their reaction than by their action." Maybe your spouse has been making small withdrawals from the emotional bank account for so long that your account is overdrawn. Right now, you don't have a lot of warm, fuzzy feelings for your spouse, and coming together seems impossible. That makes it nearly impossible to come together in genuine spiritual connectedness.

Dealing with these issues becomes all the more important. Sometimes anger comes as a result of hurts that have been experienced. We need to understand that working toward forgiving the anger does not mean becoming a doormat for inappropriate behavior. Healthy boundaries are essential.

Anger sometimes comes from neglect. One of the greatest dangers to Christians living in our society, including healthy families, is the pace of living. People get busy with work, carrying the children to extracurricular activities, church, etc., and important

relationships are neglected. Having a close, healthy marriage demands that we confront these barriers as they arise; otherwise, we find ourselves stewing in our anger over what might have been.

Week Five: Barriers to Intimacy, Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a "hot" topic these days but not a new one. Jesus spoke of the importance of forgiveness, both in terms of our relationship with God and in terms of our relationships with others (Matt. 5: 23-24; 6:14-15; Mark 11: 24-25; Luke 17:3-4).

As we saw last week, things will inevitably happen within a marriage that stirs up anger. If those issues are not settled, that is, if they are not forgiven, they continue to keep us separated. Here are some things to keep in mind as we think about forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not excusing. As we noted last week with anger, healthy boundaries are essential as is confronting inappropriate behavior. To continue to excuse inappropriate actions without confronting them almost guarantees the behavior will continue. We may say, "I forgive you," and we may be sincere however, if the behavior continues, we will be stuck in a pattern that continues to divide us, and genuine intimacy is impossible.

Forgiveness is grounded in Christ and His work on the cross. Part of what makes forgiving so difficult is our sense of justice. When someone does something to hurt us, part of us says, "Someone needs to pay for this." That is the beauty of what Christ has done for us on the cross. He has paid for the wrongs, not only our own, but also those wrongs perpetuated toward us.

Forgiveness is not easy. However, it brings huge benefits in terms of removing the barriers that prevent genuine emotional connectedness. If you have not done so, identify the things that need to be forgiven. Ask God in your prayer time to show you what forgiveness would look like in that particular circumstance. Trust Him, and trust the process.

Week Six: Barriers to Intimacy,
Learning to Trust

So far, we've talked about two of the most difficult issues in terms of developing genuine intimacy (anger and forgiveness). This week's topic may be the toughest yet.

If you have been neglected, hurt, emotionally abused, or taken advantage of, one of the riskiest things you may do is to trust that person again. You might say to yourself, "If I open my heart to that person again, after what was done to me, I'll just be hurt again." The temptation is to remain closed—living with our hearts walled off by some kind of a protective shield.

While such a cocoon feels safe, you pay a high price. The price of staying safe inside our cocoon is that we will miss the intimacy for which God has created us. Defensive walls keep others out. They work by keeping people at a distance, and being emotionally intimate with a person who is distant is impossible.

When we choose to trust, we run the risk of being hurt. When I become vulnerable and share my heart with another, I don't know what that person will do.

Because of the risk involved, safety is a priority. In a perfect world, both partners in a marriage desire intimacy and are willing to be open, vulnerable, and supportive of one another. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. The desire for intimacy and the willingness to risk being hurt once again must be weighed against the risk.

One of the most important decisions you will make has to do with your willingness to run the risk of trusting. Are you and your partner willing to take that risk? How safe do you feel? How much do you and your partner really want genuine emotional intimacy?

Concluding Thoughts

Where do you go from here? Hopefully, after these few weeks of journeying together, you have made significant progress. Hopefully, as the title of this program suggests, you have grown together with Christ. Seeing couples walking together in the cool of the evening with their Lord as Adam and Eve did in the garden is such a joy. I hope this experience has brought you closer to such an experience.

Where you go from here really depends upon your willingness to continue the journey. If you choose to do so, the discipline of couples prayer that you have been practicing the last few weeks can become foundation of a very healthy marriage. This discipline, like any other discipline, takes work. It takes patience.

Intimacy, whether you are talking about physical, emotional, or spiritual intimacy, is similar to trying to hit a moving target. Just when we think we have "got it," the rules change. Be patient with the process. Keep up the good work, and remember, "He who began a good work in you will bring it on to completion" (Phil. 1:6).

APPENDIX D

Evaluation Questionnaire

Your I D # __ __ __   __ __   __ __ __ __

       Please take a few moments and complete this evaluation of the group experience. Your honest feedback is appreciated.

       Please rate the individual sessions. 1 reflects "poor." 5 reflects "excellent." Circle one answer, or "Did not attend" if you were unable to be present.

Session One   *God's Design for Marriage*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

Session Two   *Sin's Effect on Relationships*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

Session Three   *The Role of Spiritual Disciplines*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

Session Four   *Barriers to Intimacy: Anger*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

Session Five   *Barriers to Intimacy: Forgiveness*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

Session Six   *Barriers to Intimacy: Trust*

1   2   3   4   5   Did not attend

(over)

Please list the main benefit you received from participating in "Growing Together in Christ."

What was the most significant weakness of the group as you viewed it?

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for your interest in "Growing Together in Christ." This group is part of a research project conducted by Tim Barber in connection with the Doctor of Ministry Program at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY. A few words of explanation are necessary.

Confidentiality. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality throughout the entire process. An identification number will be assigned to each participant, and all assessments are to be identified by that number rather than your name. You will be asked to disclose your ID number and your name to a research assistant. This is done to allow the assistant to know who has and has not returned assessment instruments. At no time will the researcher have access to the names, and at no time will the research assistant have access to the surveys. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential.

Rights. You have the right to refuse or terminate your participation in this project at any time. We hope you will see the project through because of the importance of the topic and the possible benefits for you. However, you may withdraw at any time. There is no charge for participating in this group.

Risks. The purpose of this group is to encourage couples to spend time together in prayer, thus increasing marital intimacy. This is not a therapy group; however, this group deals with issues that are sometimes emotionally charged. You may experience disagreements as you work through these issues. However, the goal of the group is to enhance marital intimacy, not destroy it.

Expectations. This group will meet once weekly for six weeks. Meetings will last approximately one and one-half hours. Participants will complete an information sheet and will maintain a prayer log throughout the group experience. Surveys, which provide some information about your marriage, will be completed at the beginning and the end of the group and thirty days following the completion of the group.

I understand the rights, risks, and responsibilities involved in this group, and I agree to participate.

_____   _____
Name   Date

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