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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF A MARRIAGE SEMINAR ON  
MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN TRINIDAD

by

Kern P. Tobias

Adviser: Alanzo Smith

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

### Project

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF A MARRIAGE SEMINAR ON MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN TRINIDAD

Name of researcher: Kern P. Tobias

Name and degree of faculty chair: Alanzo Smith, Ph.D.

Date completed: July 2010

### Purpose

The purpose of the study was to explore the quality of the relationship of certain married couples in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and observe the impact that a marriage seminar would have on those families.

This study should add to the academic field of study by possibly helping counselors and family therapists to consider whether group sessions with married couples will be a reasonable option in helping to enrich their relationships. It will likely provide resource information for counselors and counselees alike.

## Justification for the Project

1. Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad has had a record of strong marriages. This rich legacy needs to be preserved.

2. Seventh-day Adventists are perceived as role models by many non-Seventh-day Adventists in Trinidad in terms of marital success. The current growing tolerance for divorce within the church threatens to undermine this positive perception.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is accepting new members into its membership, some of whom come from broken homes and dysfunctional families, and thus, it has an obligation to equip and enable these new members to establish strong families.

4. The practice of obtaining a divorce outside of biblical grounds among Seventh-day Adventist leaders and members is increasing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad.

## Methodology

Theological reflection was done by examining relevant biblical passages and relevant passages from the writings of Ellen G. White that address the marriage covenant, divorce, and how to strengthen the marriage relationship.

Christian literature dealing with strengthening the marriage relationship and marriage enrichment seminars was reviewed.

A sample of six churches were selected in a combination of two large, two medium, and two small churches.

A questionnaire was developed and sent out to married couples to determine (1) the quality of their relationship, (2) the strength of their communication, (3) management

of conflicts, (4) how issues are resolved, and (5) the impact of in-laws. The questionnaires were collected and the data analyzed. A seminar to strengthen the marital relationship was developed based upon the evaluation of the questionnaires and was administered at a common site where the voluntary group of participants were invited to attend. The seminar consisted of five sessions that were administered for one day to the voluntary group of participants. After three to five months, the same questionnaire was given again to the participants who attended all of the sessions. The results were analyzed to determine the impact, if any, that the seminar had on their marital relationships as well as their appreciation of their marriages as covenantal and a reflection of Christ and His church.

### Results

This study was relevant to my academic advancement since it allowed me to develop my powers of investigation, enhanced the practice of analyzing critical data, improved my ability and capacity to develop appropriate seminars, and enriched my own relationship and increased my counseling skill.

This research was qualitative. The surveys took place in certain churches of the South Caribbean Conference among some of the married couples. Thus, this group were adults between the ages of 25 and 60.

### Conclusion

The application of the intervention strategy provided the participants with the information to experience change, growth, and renewal. The evidence of impact on the

relationships of the participants was clear. Their positive responses to the majority of the statements in the post-seminar survey indicated that fact.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF A MARRIAGE SEMINAR ON  
MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN TRINIDAD

A Project  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Kern P. Tobias

July 2010



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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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Adviser,  
Alanzo Smith

---

Director of D.Min. Program  
Skip Bell

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Elvin Gabriel

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Dean, SDA Theological Seminary  
Denis Fortin

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Date approved

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Linda, who is a believer in my ability to succeed, and has complemented that belief with her unqualified support through her prayers, quality time, love, and understanding. It is also dedicated to our children, Kerly-Ann, Kylon, and Linson, whose patience and assistance have made this dream into a reality.

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Thanks to God, the Giver of the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, for His blessings to me. Without Him, I can do nothing and will surely fail. Thanks Lord for sharing with me Your victory.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose of the Project**

Personal observations indicate that the rate of divorce in Trinidad is increasing on a yearly basis. This problem is increasingly affecting the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad. This is a sobering development because the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this country has traditionally been a conservative organization with strong moral and ethical values, promoting the sanctity of marriage and the destructive nature of divorce.

However, the apparent changing socio-economic and psycho-religious circumstances of the members have caused some of them to lower the high standards in marriage for which they were once known. Instead of seeking counsel and guidance from their elders and pastors, many members are taking marital advice from secular leaders, such as lawyers and social scientists. The secular marital advice they are receiving appears to be predisposing them to a greater tolerance for divorce. The fact that some spiritual leaders are divorcing on non-biblical grounds reinforces this tolerance for divorce.

#### **Justification for the Project**

1. Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad has had a record of strong marriages. This rich legacy needs to be preserved.

2. Seventh-day Adventists are perceived as role models by many non-Seventh-day Adventists in Trinidad in terms of marital success. The current growing tolerance for divorce within the church threatens to undermine this positive perception.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is accepting new members into its membership, some of whom come from broken homes and dysfunctional families, and thus, it has an obligation to equip and enable these new members to establish strong families.

4. The practice of obtaining a divorce outside of biblical grounds among Seventh-day Adventist leaders and members is increasing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad.

### **Limitation of the Project**

The research exercise will be in process between three and five months. This process will involve the time between the first and second questionnaires. The participants will be married couples between the ages of 25 and 60 years. The participants will be of age to give their own informed consent.

The involvement of participants will be based on their willingness to participate in the research process, and the inclusion or exclusion of participants will be as a result of their choices or the delimitation of age.

### **Methodology**

Theological reflection will be done by examining relevant biblical passages and choice passages from the writings of Ellen G. White that address the marriage covenant, divorce, and how to strengthen the marriage relationship.

Christian literature dealing with strengthening the marriage relationship and marriage enrichment seminars will be reviewed.

A sample of six churches will be selected and will be in a combination of two large, two medium, and two small churches.

A questionnaire will be developed and sent out to married couples to determine (1) the quality of their relationship, (2) the strength of their communication, (3) the management of conflicts, (4) how they resolve issues, and (5) the impact of in-laws. The questionnaires will be collected and the data analyzed.

A seminar to strengthen the marital relationship will be developed based upon the evaluation of the questionnaires. The seminar will be administered at a common site where the voluntary group of participants will be invited to attend. The seminar will consist of five sessions that will be administered for one day to the voluntary group of participants.

After three to five months, the same questionnaire will be given again to the participants who attended all of the sessions. The results will be analyzed to determine the impact, if any, that the seminar had on their marital relationships, and their appreciation of their marriages as covenantal and a reflection of Christ and His church.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS: THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE VERSUS THE POWER OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

#### **Selected Views on Divorce in the Bible**

The Holy Bible, the sacred book for biblical foundations for Judeo-Christian communities, has made some profound statements on the problem of divorce and the power of the marriage covenant. The importance of the marriage covenant is seen in reference to it very early in the Genesis account.

In chapter 2 verses 18, and 21 to 25 it states, “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’. . . . And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man’. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

This passage emphasized the bonding of the dyad and the anticipated permanence of this first marital relationship. The one-flesh concept is a beautiful analogy of the endearment and intimacy that God intended that every marriage should enjoy. What a

pity that many families are not being modeled after this wonderful imagery of marital bliss.

A most romantic drama occurred incidentally when king Abimelech saw Isaac sporting with his wife. Genesis 26:6-9 highlights this incident. “So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘She is my wife’, because he thought, ‘lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold’.”

Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, she is my sister?” Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘lest I die on account of her.’” Despite the clear misrepresentation of the facts, Isaac’s example of intimacy and endearment stand out as an example for marriages today, and an indication of the deep theological foundation of marriage.

One cannot help but consider the beautiful romantic story between Jacob and Rachel. Genesis 29:18 states, “Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, ‘I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.’” Laban deceived him and gave him Leah, his older daughter, as his bride instead. Jacob was happy to serve another seven years for the wife of his choice. Despite the fact that polygamy is not an ideal practice, Jacob’s example of self-sacrificial love and commitment to the one he truly loved is worthy of emulation.

In Exod 20:14, 17, God commanded the human family that “you shall not commit adultery” and “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” God’s intention was that His

people should demonstrate fidelity in their marital relationship. Much of the confusion and chaos in marriage relationships today is as a result of the marriage partners' unwillingness to follow these simple yet powerful commands from God.

The story of how Boaz chose Ruth to be his wife has deep theological significance even today. Despite being widowed and in a strange country, Ruth's value as a woman was recognized and respected by Boaz. He followed the custom of his time and gave a closer relative the right to redeem her. When he refused, Boaz did the honorable thing and made her his wife. The story is preserved as an example for successive generations to learn from. Ruth 4:9-14 tells the thrilling episode. The passage states,

“And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day.’”

“And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from the young woman.’”

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be

famous in Israel.”” This story should give every woman the confidence that she has worth, and therefore, should not allow any man to treat her with disrespect. A relationship that is built on mutual respect is more likely to be happy than one that is not.

King David and his son Solomon were known for their practice of having as many wives as they pleased. David became infamous because of his iniquitous acts against Uriah the Hittite. His commitment to his duty did not give David the opportunity to mask his relationship with Bathsheba. This situation created a litany of woes for David and his posterity. It was not surprising, then, when Solomon took up the same promiscuous ways when he became king.

1 Kings 11:3 states, “And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart.” Eventually, in Eccl 2:1, he confessed, “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity.”” Happiness in marriage appears not to be determined by the number of persons one is intimate with, but by the quality of the relationship enjoyed with one’s spouse.

The same Solomon, also known for his wisdom, states, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). He also indicates in chapter 19 verse 14, that “houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” It is heartening to know that God, the Creator, has a direct interest in the marital relationship. This is one of the secrets for fulfillment in marriage.

He makes a significant statement about a virtuous woman. He affirms that “her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land” (Prov 31:23). It is clear that a husband’s prominence and significance among his peers and associates is

directly related to the attention that he receives from his wife. Another profound statement is made in verse 28. It states thus: “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.” There are so many wives who are unhappy and disenchanted because their husbands are not taking the time nor making the effort to express appreciation to their wives. Despite his lack of authenticity as an example of marital fidelity, he has left a legacy for posterity.

The Song of Solomon, a book written by Solomon, is one of the most beautiful romantic stories, and it is fitting that it is written in the most inspiring of books. It should be given more emphasis by preachers, teachers, and counselors. Some theologians refer to this book as an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church. Whether or not this is so, there are many emphases that this book addresses that are helpful in marital relationships. Reference will be made of some of the powerful verses that highlight the essentials of a dynamic and rich marital relationship.

The book begins dramatically with the Shulamite expressing herself confidently, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you” (Cant 1:2, 3).

The beloved, obviously Solomon, responds beautifully, “I have compared you, my love, to my filly among Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold. We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver. While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance, a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi” (Cant 1:9-14). He says passionately, “Behold,



you are fair my love! Behold you are fair! You have dove's eyes." Then she responds, "Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant!" (Cant 1:15, 16).

The beauty of this romantic discourse continues, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I charge you, o daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (Cant 2:4-7).

The Shulamite woman becomes even more erotic. She muses, "By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. I will rise now, I said, and go about the city in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love. I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, have you seen the one I love? Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me" (Cant 3:1-4).

Solomon then expresses his admiration for his beautiful companion, "Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely.

"Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among

the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.

“You are fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!

“Your lips, o my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard” (Cant 4:1-13).

The Shulamite opines, “I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, ‘open for me my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night’. I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.

“I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer. . . . My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. His

head is like the finest gold; his locks are wavy, and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set. His cheeks are like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh.

“His hands are rods of gold set with beryl. His body is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as cedars. His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend” (Cant 5:1-16).

Solomon declares, “O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me. Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them. . . . There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number.

“My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?” (Cant 6:4-10).

Solomon describes his spouse with most beautiful language. He posits, “How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince’s daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman. Your navel is a rounded goblet; it lacks no blended beverage. Your waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, your neck is like an ivory tower, your eyes

like the pools in Hesbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon. . . .”

His spouse responds appropriately, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is towards me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at your gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved” (Cant:1-13).

The beautiful love story concludes with the Shulamite speaking charming words to her beloved. She says, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised” (Cant 8:6, 7).

A happy marriage takes time and thought. One has to consistently look for innovative ways of expressing one’s true feelings. One has to discipline oneself to speak the appropriate affirmative words that will enhance the current relationship, and even use adequate perfumes to enhance the romantic setting. Fulfillment in intimacy will not be an afterthought, but an active and proactive approach to one another.

One of the most intriguing marital illustrations in Scripture is the one involving Hosea. God commanded him, “Go, take a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord” (Hos 1:2). While this

story is a reflection of the relationship between God and His people Israel, it is also very instructive to the marriage relationship.

That Hosea had been instructed to marry into harlotry creates an amazing scenario that is helpful to any individual in a troubled marriage. Chapter 2 verse 19 is quite powerful; it states, “I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice in lovingkindness and mercy.” The role that God expected of Himself, He allowed Hosea to enact. What an honor for a mere mortal to function in such an exemplary manner. Even in marital relationships that are going through serious disruptions, there is hope.

The third chapter makes a startling revelation. “Then the Lord said to me, ‘go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.’ So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. And I said to her, ‘you shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you’” (Hos 3:1-3).

As painful as infidelity is, God is showing that if He can forgive brazen unfaithfulness, so can anyone who understands His love and grace. This amazing story of His dealing with His wandering and adulterous people is a continuous reminder that what is impossible with humanity is possible with God.

In Mal 2:16, there is a very clear and unequivocal pronouncement by God. It confirms, “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence, therefore take heed to your spirit that you do not deal

treacherously.” This is a stirring warning against those who feel comfortable in taking the marriage vow and flippantly breaking it.

In the New Testament, there are many pertinent passages that speak conclusively against divorce and in favor of the marriage relationship. In Matt 5:31-32, Jesus made a significant declaration about divorce. He said, “It has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce’. But I say to you, that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman that is divorced commits adultery.”

In Matt 19:3-11, an interesting discussion developed and Jesus used the situation to speak to this important issue. “The Pharisees also came to Him, testing him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife: and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away’? He said unto them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery’. His disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry’. But He said to them, ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given’.”

Jesus was decisive in His conclusions on marriage and divorce. He saw the deterioration in the quality of marriage as a heart problem. It is also true in marriage that “the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.” Christ wants everyone to experience a permanent solution to any marital problem, and once the principles that He enunciates are adhered to, there will be perpetual enrichment.

The apostle Paul, despite claiming to be single, has given some salient perspectives on the sacredness of marriage. He infers in Rom 7:1-3 that marriage is protected and provided for by God. “Or do you not know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”

Paul also writes, “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor 7:1-5).

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph 5:20-33).

### **Relevant Statements on Divorce Versus the Power of Marital Covenant in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

Ellen G. White has been singled out as one of the significant contributors to the family health and well being in the Seventh-day Adventist church and even to other people who have had the privilege of being exposed to her writings. She has written some important books on Marriage and the Family, the main one being *The Adventist Home*. However, throughout her writings, there are many relevant statements that offer



motivation and encouragement for successful family living. Every effort will be made to share many of these statements for the purpose of the project.

White asserts that marriage is a contract for life. She states, “In the youthful mind marriage is clothed with romance, and it is difficult to divest it of this feature, with which imagination covers it, and to impress the mind with a sense of the weighty responsibilities involved in the marriage vow. This vow links the destinies of the two individuals with bonds which naught but the hand of death should sever.”<sup>1</sup>

She sees the preparation for the marriage as vital. Thus she advises, “Every marriage engagement should be carefully considered, for marriage is a step taken for life. Both the man and the woman should carefully consider whether they can cleave to each other through the vicissitudes of life as long as they both shall live.”<sup>2</sup>

White commented that Jesus corrected misconceptions about the marriage relationship. She says, “Among the Jews a man was permitted to put away his wife for the most trivial offenses, and the woman was then at liberty to marry again. This practice led to great wretchedness and sin. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. ‘Every one,’ He said, ‘that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.’”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), 340.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

When the Pharisees afterward questioned Him concerning the lawfulness of divorce, Jesus pointed His hearers back to the marriage institution as ordained at creation. “Because of the hardness of your hearts,” He said, Moses “suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.” He referred them to the blessed days of Eden when God pronounced all things “very good.”<sup>4</sup>

She explained that the Creator joined the hands of Adam and Eve in wedlock, saying, A man shall “leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one.” “He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time. That which the eternal Father Himself had pronounced good was the law of highest blessing and development for man.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus came to our world to rectify mistakes and to restore the moral image of God in man. Wrong sentiments in regard to marriage had found a place in the minds of the teachers of Israel. They were making of none effect the sacred institution of marriage. Man was becoming so hardhearted that he would for the most trivial excuse separate from his wife, or, if he chose, he would separate her from the children and send her away. This was considered a great disgrace and was often accompanied by the most acute suffering on the part of the discarded one.<sup>6</sup>

White observes that “Christ came to correct these evils, and His first miracle was wrought on the occasion of the marriage. Thus He announced to the world that marriage when kept pure and undefiled is a sacred institution.”<sup>7</sup>

White often gave pertinent counsel to individuals who were considering divorce. On one occasion, she said that the ideas about marriage that were being considered were

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<sup>4</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 340, 341.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

erroneous. She indicated that “nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow. We are living in perilous times, when there is no assurance in anything save in firm, unwavering faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Giving counsel to a separated couple, she said,

My brother, my sister, for some time you have not been living together. You should not have pursued this course and would not have done so if both of you had been cultivating the patience, kindness, and forbearance that should ever exist between husband and wife. Neither of you should set up your own will and try to carry out your individual ideas and plans whatever the consequences may be. Neither of you should be determined to do as you please. Let the softening, subduing influence of the Spirit of God work upon your hearts and fit you for the work of training your children. . . . Appeal to your heavenly Father to keep you from yielding to the temptation to speak in an impatient, harsh, willful manner to each other, the husband to the wife, and the wife to the husband. Both of you have imperfect characters. Because you have not been under God's control, your conduct toward each other has been unwise.<sup>9</sup>

She expresses her emotion and concern by saying “I beseech you to bring yourselves under God’s control. When tempted to speak provokingly, refrain from saying anything.”<sup>10</sup>

You will be tempted on this point because you have never overcome this objectionable trait of character. But every wrong habit must be overcome. Make a complete surrender to God. Fall on the Rock, Christ Jesus, and be broken. As husband and wife, discipline yourselves. Go to Christ for help. He will willingly supply you with His divine sympathy, His free grace.<sup>11</sup>

She concludes with the right focus. She encourages,

Repent before God for your past course. Come to an understanding, and reunite as husband and wife. Put away the disagreeable, unhappy experience of your past life. Take courage in the Lord. Close the windows of the soul earthward, and open them

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<sup>8</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 342.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

heavenward. If your voices are uplifted in prayer to heaven for light, the Lord Jesus, who is light and life, peace and joy, will hear your cry. He, the Sun of Righteousness, will shine into the chambers of your mind, lighting up the soul temple. If you welcome the sunshine of His presence into your home, you will not utter words of a nature to cause feelings of unhappiness.<sup>12</sup>

White demonstrates a breath of wisdom that was rare for her time. When she received a letter from a hopelessly mistreated wife, she gave sound counsel by declaring, “I cannot advise you to return to D unless you see decided changes in him. The Lord is not pleased with the ideas he has had in the past of what is due to a wife. . . . If [he] holds to his former views, the future would be not better for you than the past has been. He does not know how to treat a wife.”<sup>13</sup>

She was not afraid to express her feelings. She says with emotion, “I feel very sad about this matter. I feel indeed sorry for D, but I cannot advise you to go to him against your judgment. I speak to you as candidly as I spoke to him; it would be perilous for you to again place yourself under his dictation. I had hoped that he would change. . . .”<sup>14</sup>

White offers some comfort to this hurting wife and assures that “the Lord understands all about your experiences. . . . Be of good courage in the Lord; He will not leave you nor forsake you. My heart goes out in tenderest sympathy for you.”<sup>15</sup>

White deals candidly with a situation that is still relevant to many persons today. Some people are divorced but not according to the conditions set forth in scripture. She warns,

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<sup>12</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 343.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

A woman may be legally divorced from her husband by the laws of the land and yet not divorced in the sight of God and according to the higher law. There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God. Although the laws of the land may grant a divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the laws of God.<sup>16</sup>

However, she affirms that once one is divorced legally, there is the possibility for remarriage. She explains, “but if she, or any other woman, should obtain a divorce legally on the ground that her husband was guilty of adultery, then she is free to be married to whom she chooses.”<sup>17</sup>

White even addresses an issue that is affecting many believers concerning the separation of a believer from an unbelieving companion. She counsels wisely,

If the wife is an unbeliever and an opposer, the husband cannot, in view of the law of God, put her away on this ground alone. In order to be in harmony with the law of Jehovah, he must abide with her unless she chooses of herself to depart. He may suffer opposition and be oppressed and annoyed in many ways; he will find his comfort and his strength and support from God, who is able to give grace for every emergency. He should be a man of pure mind, of truly decided, firm principles, and God will give him wisdom in regard to the course which he should pursue. Impulse will not control his reason, but reason will hold the lines of control in her firm hand, that lust shall be held under bit and bridle.<sup>18</sup>

White addresses the sensitive issue of a negative disposition in a spouse as a contributing factor to a negative relationship but not significant enough as a cause for divorce. She advises, “I have received a letter from your husband. I would say that there is only one thing for which a husband may lawfully separate from his wife or a wife from

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<sup>16</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 344.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 344, 345.

her husband, and that is adultery. If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?”<sup>19</sup>

She then offers timeless words of counsel to that couple and all other dyads: “A husband and wife should cultivate respect and affection for each other. They should guard the spirit, the words, and the actions so that nothing will be said or done to irritate or annoy. Each is to have a care for the other, doing all in their power to strengthen their mutual affection.”<sup>20</sup>

White ties the success in marriage to the couples’ relationship to God. She idealizes, “I tell you both to seek the Lord. In love and kindness do your duty one to the other. The husband should cultivate industrious habits, doing his best to support his family. This will lead his wife to have respect for him.”<sup>21</sup>

White treats this issue as one of great significance since she goes into great detail to provide a permanent solution to this family. Her salient counsel to this wife is pertinent to wives today, who are encouraged by society to be more assertive. She therefore states, “My sister, you cannot please God by maintaining your present attitude. Forgive your husband. He is your husband, and you will be blessed in striving to be a dutiful, affectionate wife. Let the law of kindness be on your lips. You can and must change your attitude.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 345.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

While many couples endure unhappiness and pain in their relationships because of the differences that obviously exist between them, White gives good guidance as to the method to be used in treating with such situations. She indicates, “You must both study how you can assimilate, instead of differing, with one another. . . . The use of mild, gentle methods will make a surprising difference in your lives.”<sup>23</sup>

White focuses on the preparation for marriage as a significant factor in the prevention of divorce and the enhancement of the marital relationship. She sites passion as a weak basis for engaging in a marriage. She opines about some couples: “They are married because passion moved them, and when the novelty of the affair is over, they will begin to realize what they have done. In six months after the vows are spoken, their sentiments toward each other have undergone a change. Each has learned in married life more of the character of the companion chosen. Each discovers imperfections that, during the blindness and folly of their former association, were not apparent. The promises at the altar do not bind them together. In consequence of hasty marriages, even among the professed people of God, there are separations, divorces, and great confusion in the church.”<sup>24</sup>

She links failure in the marriage relationship to Satan’s influence upon married partners. She explains: “This kind of marrying and giving in marriage is one of Satan’s special devices, and he succeeds in his plans almost every time. I have the most painful sense of helplessness when parties come to me for counsel upon this subject. I may speak

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<sup>23</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 345.

<sup>24</sup>Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 457.

to them the words that God would have me; but they frequently question every point, and plead the wisdom of carrying out their own purposes; and eventually they do so.”<sup>25</sup>

White does not merely warn against the dangers of divorce, she writes about the need for marriage to be enriched and enhanced. In giving counsel to a newly married couple, she asserts, “Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward His church is the spirit that the husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. If they love God supremely, they will love each other in the Lord, ever treating each other courteously, drawing in even cords. In their mutual self-denial and self-sacrifice they will be a blessing to each other.”<sup>26</sup>

White cites conversion as one of the main prerequisites for a successful marriage. She indicates that “both of you need to be converted.”<sup>27</sup> She encourages them to become true children of God so that they will have a sound foundation. She states confidently that “you may both be happy, consistent Christians.”<sup>28</sup>

She concludes this discourse by stating profoundly, “By believing in Jesus, you are not only to save your own souls, but by precept and example you are to seek to save other souls. Take Christ as your pattern. Hold Him up as the One who can give you power to overcome. Utterly destroy the root of selfishness. Magnify God, for you are His

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<sup>25</sup>White, *Messages To Young People*, 458.

<sup>26</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 95.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



children. Glorify your Redeemer, and He will give you a place in His kingdom.”<sup>29</sup>

White explains God’s purpose for the husband and wife. She states: “God made from the man a woman, to be a companion and helpmeet for him, to be one with him, to cheer, encourage, and bless him, he in turn to be her strong helper. All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman’s heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband’s character and give it completeness—fulfill God’s purpose for them.”<sup>30</sup>

She continues her discourse by focusing on Christ and what He is able to do in every marriage relationship if He is given the opportunity. She amplifies:

Christ came not to destroy this institution, but to restore it to its original sanctity and elevation. He came to restore the moral image of God in man, and He began His work by sanctioning the marriage relation. He who gave Eve to Adam as a helpmeet performed His first miracle at a marriage festival. In the festal hall where friends and kindred rejoiced together, Christ began His public ministry. Thus He sanctioned marriage, recognizing it as an institution that He Himself had established. He ordained that men and women should be united in holy wedlock, to rear families whose members, crowned with honor, should be recognized as members of the family above.<sup>31</sup>

White assures that Jesus wants happy marriages. This is a refreshing thought for every couple to contemplate. Sometimes, one could feel that the marital relationship is lonely and depressing, however, she affirms, “The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the divine nature and trained to grow heavenward. Jesus wants to see happy marriages,

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<sup>29</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 96.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

happy firesides. . . . The condition of society presents a sad comment upon Heaven's ideal of this sacred relation. Yet even for those who have found it bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the gospel of Christ offers solace."<sup>32</sup>

White says that marriage is a pledge before heavenly witnesses. She wants couples to consider this union as a solemn covenant that God sanctions and protects. She comments,

God has ordained that there should be perfect love and harmony between those who enter into the marriage relation. Let bride and bridegroom, in the presence of the heavenly universe, pledge themselves to love each other as God has ordained they should. . . . The wife is to respect and reverence her husband, and the husband is to love and cherish his wife. Men and women, at the beginning of married life, should reconsecrate themselves to God. Be as true as steel to your marriage vows, refusing, in thought, word, or deed, to spoil your record as a man who fears God and obeys His commandments.<sup>33</sup>

White uses an impressive analogy to impress the permanence of marriage on the minds of her readers. She refers to marriage as entering a school without the possibility of being graduated. She amplifies: "To gain a proper understanding of the marriage relation is the work of a lifetime. Those who marry enter a school from which they are never in this life to be graduated. However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the afteryears."<sup>34</sup>

White says that love must be tested and tried. She explains: "Affection may be as

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<sup>32</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 99.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 103, 104.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 105.

clear as crystal and beautiful in its purity, yet it may be shallow because it has not been tested and tried. Make Christ first and last and best in everything. Constantly behold Him, and your love for Him will daily become deeper and stronger as it is submitted to the test of trial. And as your love for Him increases, your love for each other will grow deeper and stronger.”<sup>35</sup>

White extols the practice of expressing love in words and deeds. She says:

There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. This spirit checks the current of sympathy. As the social and generous impulses are repressed, they wither, and the heart becomes desolate and cold. We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy. . . . The reason there are so many hardhearted men and women in our world is that true affection has been regarded as weakness and has been discouraged and repressed. . . . If we would have tender hearts, such as Jesus had when He was upon the earth, and sanctified sympathy, such as angels have for sinful mortals, we must cultivate the sympathies of childhood, which are simplicity itself. Then we shall be refined, elevated, and directed by heavenly principles.<sup>36</sup>

The marriage relationship is a social institution. However, it is a spiritual one as well. The power of God is needed if a Christian couple is to experience God’s ideal for their marriage. White says:

Men and women can reach God’s ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin. Love will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet more firm, than can be woven by the looms of earth. The result is not a tissue fabric, but a texture that will bear wear and test and trial. Heart will be bound to heart in the golden bonds of a love that is enduring.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 105, 106.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 107, 108.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 112, 113.

White says very much on the topic on mutual obligations.

She states that each partner has individual responsibilities. She expands, “The two who unite their interest in life will have distinct characteristics and individual responsibilities. Each one will have his or her work, but women are not to be valued by the amount of work they can do as are beasts of burden. The wife is to grace the family circle as a wife and companion to a wise husband. At every step she should inquire, ‘Is this the standard of true womanhood?’ and, ‘How shall I make my influence Christlike in my home?’ The husband should let his wife know that he appreciates her work.”<sup>38</sup>

The biblical injunction that wives should submit to their husbands is endorsed by White. She elaborates, “The question is often asked, ‘Shall a wife have no will of her own?’ The Bible plainly states that the husband is the head of the family. ‘Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.’ If this injunction ended here, we might say that the position of the wife is not an enviable one; it is a very hard and trying position in very many cases, and it would be better were there fewer marriages. Many husbands stop at the words, ‘Wives, submit yourselves’, but we will read the conclusion of the same injunction, which is, ‘As it is fit in the Lord.’”<sup>39</sup>

In balancing this view with the counsel that the Bible gives to husband, she states:

“Let every husband and father study to understand the words of Christ, not in a one-sided manner, merely dwelling upon the subjection of the wife to her husband, but in the light of the cross of Calvary, study as to his own position in the family circle. ‘Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it. . . .’ Jesus gave Himself up to die upon the cross in order that He might cleanse and keep us from all sin and pollution by the influence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 114.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 115, 116.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 117, 118.

White comments on the vital issue of the need for mutual forbearance. This is an important point of consideration, especially in the context of the prevalence of abuse within so many families. She warns, “Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control. Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other’s love. Be kind, patient, and forbearing, considerate, and courteous. By the grace of God you can succeed in making each other happy, as in your marriage vow you promised to do.”<sup>41</sup>

She develops the previous point in a more comprehensive manner. She continues by expanding on the need of partners to yield graciously. This understanding is very important to the happiness of the marital relationship, especially as many husbands hold the view that only the wives should submit. White observes, “In the married life men and women sometimes act like undisciplined, perverse children. The husband wants his way, and the wife wants her way, and neither is willing to yield. Such a condition of things can bring only the greatest unhappiness. Both husband and wife should be willing to yield his or her way or opinion. There is no possibility of happiness while they both persist in doing as they please.”<sup>42</sup>

A united family will more likely enjoy greater fulfillment and enjoyment. The secret of unity is in both partners enjoying a close relationship with Christ. White comments on the relevance of Christ dwelling in each heart as a provision of unity. She says:

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<sup>41</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 118.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence. Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. He who manifests the spirit of tenderness, forbearance, and love will find that the same spirit will be reflected upon him. Where the Spirit of God reigns, there will be no talk of unsuitability in the marriage relation. If Christ indeed is formed within, the hope of glory, there will be union and love in the home. Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him.<sup>43</sup>

From the review of the information from the Bible and the work of Ellen White, one could see a clear focus on the importance of the marriage covenant. The many stories, illustrations, and instructions from the Bible and the counsels, comments, and case studies from the writings of Ellen White put the sanctity and permanence of marriage in a positive and beautiful light.

While there were some negative situations that were referenced, they were not prescriptive but descriptive of the realities that were dealt with. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that these sources see marriage enrichment and not divorce as the ideal to be followed.

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<sup>43</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 120.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON ISSUES RELATED TO DIVORCE AND MARITAL ENHANCEMENT

The reality of divorce affects not only the marital partners involved, but also the children who are unfortunate to experience such a dilemma. While the main emphasis will deal with the partners involved, there will be a brief review on the impact that divorce has on children. The purpose for this approach is perceived to be necessary since the emotional and psychological state of children cannot be separated from a similar condition in parents. Also, children are adults waiting to happen, and it is unfortunate that many children grow up with baggage that can have a negative impact on their marital relationships.

#### **The Effects of Divorce on the Children of Divorcees**

Divorce has a debilitating effect on the well being of the affected children. There is much information on this issue. Whiteman observes that “as a group, they are insecure, unfulfilled, and unable to sustain good relationships. His conclusion is that divorce destroys kids. A lousy marriage is better than a good divorce. Parents should stay together for the sake of their kids.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. Whiteman, *Your Kids and Divorce: Helping Them Grow Beyond the Hurt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2001), 8.

Whiteman asserts that children “struggle with personal insecurities and show some evidence of difficulty with trust.”<sup>2</sup> He concludes that “this can affect their self-image, their friendships, their marriages, and the way they raise their own children.”<sup>3</sup> This is an important observation that is made on the long-term effects that divorce has on affected children.

Wallerstein and Kelly have written extensively on the effects of divorce on children. They indicate that “where the divorce is unplanned, undertaken impulsively, pursued in anger, or guilt over fancied or real misdeeds, or where the divorce coincides with other unrelated family crises, the child’s capacity to cope is severely burdened. He is likely to be confused and bewildered and feel that his parents lack rational direction.”<sup>4</sup>

They observe that “the greatest disruptions in the children’s lives were those that stemmed from pervasive changes in parental mood, attitude, and behavior.”<sup>5</sup> It is very traumatic for a child to see the bitter and explosive interactions between parents. They note that very often “the embittered-chaotic parent never shielded his or her child from divorce, bitterness and chaos. More often, he pulled the child into the middle of the maelstrom in a desperate attempt to marshal psychological support and alliance.”<sup>6</sup>

The decision to divorce is sometimes made without consideration for the welfare of the children. However, despite the trauma that they go through when their parents are

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<sup>2</sup>Whiteman, 49.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>4</sup>Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 28.



divorced, “the decision to divorce was easiest for the children to comprehend when it represented the culmination of years of visible unhappiness and where divorce itself had been considered the legal step reflecting a disengagement which had already been underway.”<sup>7</sup>

Divorces occur in families where marital unhappiness had not been a special source of concern to either partner. “The decision to divorce followed upon some stressful experience outside the marriage which was profoundly upsetting to the person who then initiated the move towards divorce.”<sup>8</sup>

Many young people think that they are the cause of their parents’ divorce. This is the view of Hyde and Forsyth. This is especially true around the time of separation. They associate their own behavior with their parents’ problems even though the children may have had nothing at all to do with them. They explain that “psychiatrists believe that the child’s feeling of guilt about the separation involves a notion of control even though this notion is not realized.”<sup>9</sup> Guilt is a terrible emotion for a child to endure on behalf of his/her parents.

John M. Haynes agrees that “many children feel responsible in some way for the divorce. . . . One of the things we will want to do is to be sure that the children

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<sup>7</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup*, 18.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup>Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth Held Forsyth, *Parents Divided, Parents Multiplied* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

understand that they are not the cause of the divorce and that they cannot do anything to bring you back together again.”<sup>10</sup>

The feeling of helplessness is also very frustrating. Hyde and Forsyth indicate that “a child feels helpless about changing his parents’ minds to go ahead with a divorce, but if the child was the cause of their decision to separate, perhaps he or she can do something to reverse the decision.”<sup>11</sup>

Many counselors and therapists help young people who feel responsible for their parents’ separation by explaining the unconscious desire for control. They help young people to see the dynamics of divorce, looking at it through the eyes of parents rather than through their own eyes. They point out that children are not usually the cause of problems in a husband-wife relationship, and they help the boys and girls understand that parents divorce each other, not their children. Hyde and Forsyth conclude that “when children recognize that it is not within their power to control certain things such as divorce, the feeling of being responsible is lifted.”<sup>12</sup>

One common feeling among children of divorced parents is that of abandonment. Hyde and Forsyth reveal that “feeling abandoned and concerned that the remaining parent will leave is a common experience for many children of divorce. Even when a parent can’t visit a child because he or she lives far away, some children of divorced parents interpret the loss as abandonment.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>John M. Haynes, *Divorce Mediation* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1981), 29.

<sup>11</sup>Hyde and Forsyth, *Parents Divided, Parents Multiplied*, 16.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 17, 18.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 19, 20.

Hyde and Forsyth state that “divorce makes most children sad at first. Many go through a period of mourning that is not as intense as when a parent dies but that follows the same stages. . . . Grief is a process by which one reaches a stage of healthy detachment from the past that makes it possible to reach out for new experiences.”<sup>14</sup> Even though sadness at the loss of the original family may never leave completely, it need not keep one from having a happy life.

They conclude that “boys and girls of all ages are angry about the divorce of their parents, and to some degree feelings of anger at such a time are reasonable. Some condemn both parents for the way they have acted, while others are angry with just one parent.”<sup>15</sup>

Thompson and Amato give strong views on the effect of divorce on children.

They amplify:

Divorce creates a number of stressors for children and families, such as separation from and loss of contact with one parent; potentially troubled relationships with each parent; and involvement in conflict between both parents. It also causes considerable financial hardship for children, families and society, and in fact, the economic consequences of divorce often form the underlying, if unstated, motivation behind various policy reforms or proposals for reform, . . . second, the stressors associated with divorce can lead to adjustment problems among children, as evidence makes it clear that divorce is a risk factor for a number of children’s social, psychological, and educational or occupational difficulties, . . . third, despite the increase in risk, *resilience* is the normative outcome of divorce for children, that is, most children from divorced families function as well as children from married families on various commonly used indices of their adjustment. Fourth, there nevertheless appear to be some more subtle costs of coping with divorce children. Most children are resilient, but they experience and express much subclinical distress or “pain” about their past, present, and future in relation to their parents’ divorce. Fifth, there are important individual differences in the psychological adjustment of children following a parental divorce and many differences are attributable to postdivorce family

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<sup>14</sup>Hyde and Forsyth, 25.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 26, 27.

relationships, especially: a. the quality of children's relationship with their residential parent, b. the degree and manner in which conflict is expressed between parents, c. the family's economic standing, d. the children's contact and relationship with the nonresidential parent.<sup>16</sup>

It is a sad reality that conflict is always present in families that eventually end in divorce. That some children are able to cope in such strenuous situations is almost remarkable. It may not be easy to identify the extent of the damage that may occur in the life of affected children. Thompson and Amato observe that "children from high-conflict married families fared better following a divorce, but children from low-conflict married families were doing worse following the divorce."<sup>17</sup>

They note further that "the majority of children whose parents are divorced do not drop out of high school or experience other obvious psychological problems or academic or social failures."<sup>18</sup> In other words, "most children are psychologically resilient in coping with a parental divorce, a conclusion that seems especially poignant given the number of stressors divorce creates for children, as was outlined in the preceding section."<sup>19</sup>

Despite their resilience, children suffer immense pain and hurt from these stressful experiences, sometimes in silence. Parents do not always consider that their decisions have such far-reaching consequences. Thompson and Amato comment, "To use a familiar metaphor, some children are irreparably wounded by divorce; the wounds of

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<sup>16</sup>Ross A. Thompson and Paul R. Amato, eds., *The Postdivorce Family: Children, Parenting, and Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

most children heal; but even healed wounds usually leave a scar.”<sup>20</sup>

There is general agreement that children end up significantly disadvantaged from divorce. Thompson and Amato conclude that “there is near universal agreement that children do experience stress around the time of divorce and that it may be manifested in poorer grades, depression, anxiety, precocious sexual activity, and behavior problems among other things.”<sup>21</sup>

Lynne Carol Halem concurs with the established view by adding that “fear of losing the custodial parent is not uncommon after a divorce. . . . The child’s insecurity may be intensified by the thought that if one parent can leave him, there is nothing to stop the second from doing the same.”<sup>22</sup>

The challenge that children face is now a basis for much research among social scientists. Since there is the possibility of perpetuating such negative patterns of behavior, there is great interest in exploring this issue especially from a preventative framework. In this context, Baris, Coates, Duvall, Garity, Johnson and La Crosse agree with Johnson and Amato. They indicate that “it is a fact that children in a high-conflict divorce are at risk of serious damage. This damage may never be repaired, and these children, as parents, perpetuate future generations who are adversely impacted.”<sup>23</sup>

Two prominent research teams have studied what happens to children’s

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<sup>20</sup>Thompson and Amato, 18.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>22</sup>Lynne Carol Halem, *Separated and Divorced Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 162.

<sup>23</sup>Mitchell A. Baris, Christine A. Coates, Betsy B. Duvall, Carla B. Garrity, Elaine T. Johnson, and E. Robert La Crosse, *Working with High-Conflict Families of Divorce* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2001), 8.

personality styles after years of exposure to interparental conflict. They refer to Johnson and Campbell (1988) who “define four main personality styles that emerge: maneuvering, equilibrating, merging and diffusing.”<sup>24</sup> It is explained thus: “a. maneuvering means more or less master manipulators; b. equilibrating describes children who are excellent diplomats; c. the merging type is characterized by children who manifest a fair degree of sadness and a degree of vacancy that is perceptible in interactions with them; and the diffusing type are the children who shatter emotionally.”<sup>25</sup>

Grollman notes some important ideas on the effect that divorce has on children.

He says,

You as parent must realize that your divorce does not mean that you have forsaken your child. You know that a youngster is better off in a broken home than an unhappy one. A marriage that is doggedly maintained “for the sake of the children” could create more severe problems, not only for you but, through you, for the youngster. A child living with disturbed parents more often gets into psychiatric difficulty than one whose parents have been strong and mature enough to sever their unfortunate relationship.<sup>26</sup>

The child may believe that he must be responsible for the separation. After all, in his limited experience, unfortunate things happen when he is naughty. So he searches for the terrible act that caused the breakup. To him, divorce must be some punishment for wrongdoing. An unreasonable guilt drives him into self-pity and even self-punishment. Say again and again that you are unhappy with each other but not with him. The reason for the divorce is not because the child was bad. P.63.<sup>27</sup>

Michael and Jessica Jackson give two poignant stories that deal with the reality of divorce in the life of a child. They state,

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<sup>24</sup>Baris, Coates, Duvall, Garrity, Johnson, and La Crosse, 50.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 50, 51.

<sup>26</sup>Earl A. Grollman, *Talking About Divorce and Separation: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 59, 63.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 63.

Sally who was 14 years gave this response to a question that was asked her.

Q. If you had a friend whose parents were getting divorced and your friend asked you for advice on how to handle it, what would you say?

A. That it wasn't their fault. I used to think it was all my fault that they weren't going to live together anymore. I thought it was all because of me they weren't getting along. It would be better if they did get separated rather than have them home fighting all the time.

Barbara was 17 and frustrated because of the bad relationship between her parents, which led to them being divorced. She says, "in my case divorce was the best thing in the world, because now I can do what I want."<sup>28</sup>

Many divorcing families move from one home to another. Such a move means the child will lose his familiar surroundings. Most children lose a special room in which they found safety, security, and refuge. Older, more socialized children lose friends, school, neighboring adults, perhaps youth organizations and leaders. Hardy and Cull cite, "Divorcing families should not move unless it is essential. If it is essential, staying in the same neighborhood reduces loss."<sup>29</sup>

They elaborate, "The child, after family dissolution, is not the same as he was before. So pervasive are the changes in his intimate relationships and environmental supports that his feelings and perceptions of himself and others are profoundly affected."<sup>30</sup>

The security of a child is one consequence that is likely to be affected by divorce. This is one of the main needs of a child and depending on the age of the child there could be greater challenges. Hardy and Cull iterate that "children are less secure after divorce.

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<sup>28</sup>Michael Jackson and Jessica Jackson, *Your Father's Not Coming Home Anymore* (New York: Richard Marek, 1981), 257, 298.

<sup>29</sup>Richard E. Hardy and John G. Cull, *Creative Divorce Through Social and Psychological Approaches* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1974), 102.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

They question, with justification, parental ability to maintain a stable environment. They trust less.<sup>31</sup>

They summarize, “Most children experience an unrealistic sense of guilt and responsibility about the divorce. This contributes to feelings of failure, inadequacy and lowered self-esteem. Before the age of seven, the child’s view of justice is one of retribution. He believes anything bad that happens must be punishment for his wrongdoing. Parental quarrels must be about him; the divorce must be his fault. In addition the child thinks that if his parents loved him, they would reunite, therefore they don’t love him. Perhaps he thinks ‘I am unlovable. What did I do wrong?’”<sup>32</sup>

Carole Sanderson Streeter gives a thrilling tale of an encounter between a divorced mother and her son. She states: “One night when he was sixteen, feeling very much alone, he looked at me with dreadful pain in his eyes and said, ‘Who have I got? I’ve got you and I’ve got Cathy’. And then he sat at the kitchen table and cried. I cried too. And long after he had gone to sleep, I was awake, praying, arguing with God, begging him to be a Father to Will, to meet his needs and to send someone who could help him.”<sup>33</sup>

Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee offer outstanding insights on what parents should do for their children to minimize the damage and hurt that they are likely to experience during a divorce proceeding. They assert, “The first important principle is for

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<sup>31</sup>Hardy and Cull, 102.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>33</sup>Carole Sanderson Streeter, *Finding Your Place after Divorce* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1992), 79.



the parent to take the child's concerns seriously and to acknowledge that his observations are valid. "Yes, we are having trouble and I'm glad that you are bringing it up" is the best response. The temptation is to brush the child's worries aside, to plead being busy, to postpone, or worst of all to deny that anything is amiss. But all those would be serious mistakes. They will do the children a great deal of harm."<sup>34</sup>

They also observe that "from the viewpoint of the children, and counter to what happens to their parents, divorce is a cumulative experience. Its impact increases over time and rises to a crescendo in adulthood. At each development stage divorce is experienced anew in different ways. In adulthood it affects personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships, and ability to cope with change."<sup>35</sup>

### **The Effects of Divorce on Those Involved**

Having considered the impact of divorce on the affected children, and the impact that that reality has on the quality of life of the parents, it is necessary to consider how divorce affects the involved spouses. Much research has been done on this issue and the discovery has been very interesting. Johnston and Campbell observe that "for many, divorce involves a threat to their self-esteem and to core elements of their self-image as a spouse or parent."<sup>36</sup> They suffer primarily from a blow to their low self-esteem or fragile self-image, which they attempt to restore by demanding confirmation of their worthiness

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<sup>34</sup>Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (New York: Hyperion Press, 2000), 44.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>36</sup>Janet R. Johnston and Linda E. G. Campbell, *Impasses of Divorce* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 76.

from others. Johnston and Campbell assert that “they argue and fight to achieve self-validation.”<sup>37</sup>

Jensen speaks insightfully in observing that “the death of a marriage, whether it was a good one or a rotten one, raises feelings of self-doubt, questions about your worth as an individual. Dependent people measure themselves by their relationships.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, divorce is a revelation of a relationship that has gone wrong.

Lawson and Thompson offer pertinent assessment on the gender-related factors that affect marital satisfaction. They observe that “the literature reports that marital dissatisfaction differs on the basis of gender. Men often are dissatisfied with relatives and in-laws, change of jobs, and deaths of relatives, whereas women typically are dissatisfied with money, sexual problems, and spouses’ personalities.” The presence of children decreases marital happiness but increases marital stability. Although children may serve as barriers to marital breakups, they also may reduce spousal interaction, which decreases marital happiness and increases marital instability.”<sup>39</sup>

They observe further that

divorce has been identified as a process in which the family system transforms in a manner that involves a series of stages. The phases of divorce evolve over a period of time in which former spouses regain personal autonomy and develop the capacity to make new attachments. Bohannon (1985) describes the divorce process in six interrelated stages and emphasizes the processes that occur subsequent to legal divorce: emotional divorce, legal divorce, economic divorce, coparental divorce, community divorce, and finally psychic divorce. The psychic divorce includes a

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<sup>37</sup>Johnston and Campbell, 77.

<sup>38</sup>Marilyn Jensen, *Formerly Married* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 19.

<sup>39</sup>Erma Jean Lawson and Aaron Thompson, *Black Men and Divorce* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 55, 56.

healing process that individuals must complete before they can enter new intimate relationships.<sup>40</sup>

Divorce is a rather complicated process that takes different lengths of time depending on the personalities that are involved. Lawson and Thompson state that “the reviewed literature emphasizes that divorce is conceptualized as a process rather than as a single life event.”<sup>41</sup> Though a major event like infidelity may initiate catastrophic consequences, the research appears reliable. They note, however, that “the passage of time that occurs as an individual progresses through the phases of the divorce appears to be an important factor in resolving conflicts inherent in separation and divorce.”<sup>42</sup>

Lawrence Stone notes that the age of married couples has a relationship to divorce. He explains that “a decline in the age of marriage . . . as a result of . . . marriages by teenagers rose from 14 percent to 28 percent of all marriages. This has inevitably raised the divorce rate, since, presumably because of emotional immaturity, these marriages are twice as likely to end in divorce as marriages made between ages 20 and 24.”<sup>43</sup>

Divorce is experienced by persons from all levels of society. Stone observes that “what is even more remarkable is that the divorce rate of manual workers is four times greater than that of professional couples. Thus divorce, which for centuries had been the

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<sup>40</sup>Lawson and Thompson, 56.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 411.

privilege exclusively confined to the rich, has now become a legal device most commonly used by the poor.”<sup>44</sup>

Wendy Swallow gives a positive perspective on divorce. She asserts, “For thousands of unhappy people, this has actually worked. Divorce has liberated them, given them a chance for a startling rebirth, a chance to correct debilitating mistakes made early in life and restabilize children shell-shocked from the marriage wars. Divorce can save lives. Divorce can even, ironically, save families. Divorce can be an astonishing blessing.”<sup>45</sup>

She notes, interestingly, that there are other benefits to be derived from this apparent mishap. She cites, “My children were learning the value of a dollar and racking up some good stories to tell their grandchildren.”<sup>46</sup> Beauty is indeed in the eyes of the beholder.

Divorce usually has a negative effect on the economic well being of the wife. It is true that many women, most women, in fact, lose considerable economic ground when they divorce. Swallow opines that “most will end up worse off financially than their ex-husbands, even if they get the kind of child support they are entitled to.”<sup>47</sup> She observes shockingly: “And make no mistake—divorce is a death. It kills the dreams of your youth.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Stone, 412.

<sup>45</sup>Wendy Swallow, *Breaking Apart* (New York: Hyperion Press, 2001), 13, 14.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

Eda LeShan shares a similar perspective on divorce. She says that “a divorce is a kind of death of a marriage and some people are beginning to feel that while the divorce is necessary, they don’t want it to seem as if the marriage wasn’t important.”<sup>49</sup>

Streeter sees divorce as a failure and a loss. She states that:

Divorce is always a failure. Yet in exceptional cases it is necessary. She refers to the ‘THREE LOSSES’: Loss of place. In a real marriage, a husband feels an aloneness in the inner regions of his being and wants a wife to fulfill those places for him. As he makes a place for her, he finds a place in what she is.

You may not have had what you call a real marriage, and yet you had something, more than you thought at times. Now you are displaced. You are without a husband and are experiencing emotional loss (p. 4). . . . The walls are knocked down. The roots are pulled up. All the defenses are taken away. And there you stand, among the breakage of what was, feeling insecure, emotionally bereft, alone, guilty, not knowing where to turn or what to do first.

Loss of purpose. Now you have lost some of those roles. And when you lost them, you also experienced a loss of will. You are in despair. You feel rejected; you wonder whether you have any meaning in society. You may see your life as futile. You feel dysfunctional and guilty.

Loss of people. Now you are losing many of the relatives on your husband’s side. And those on your side may keep their distance for a while.<sup>50</sup>

Numerous attempts have been made to determine why some couples remain married while others get divorced. Two theoretical approaches utilized to explain this dilemma are the social exchange theory and the economic model. These models both propose that individuals compare the advantages and disadvantages of their current marriages with other available alternatives, for example, another marriage or being single. As a result of this comparison, they decide whether or not to divorce.

According to the social exchange theory, if a relationship is rewarding, the result is an accumulation of positive sentiments and the relationship will grow. However, if the

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<sup>49</sup>Eda LeShan, *What’s Going to Happen to Me? When Parents Separate or Divorce?* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1978), 33.

<sup>50</sup>Streeter, 4, 5.

costs of the marriage are greater than the rewards, the relationship will develop more slowly and may eventually terminate.

The economic model, similar to the social exchange theory, deals directly with the costs and benefits of the current marriage versus the costs and benefits of available alternatives. This profit is the standard used to measure the attractiveness of the relationship. If individuals view the rewards of their marriage to be at or above their costs, they will not initiate or be interested in divorce.

Price and McKenry concur with the views referred to, and add that “in spite of apparent inequities in costs and rewards, a marriage may still be acceptable if spouses can draw on other resources. These resources may include education, income, and property, as well as self-esteem, prestige, friends, and autonomy. The greater the number and value of these resources outside the marriage, however, the easier it is to leave an unsatisfactory relationship and secure greater rewards for less costs.”<sup>51</sup>

They refer to the social exchange theory to explain the complexity of the marital relationship. They indicate, “According to the social exchange theory, relationships have sources of attraction (positive forces that keep people in a relationship), barriers (forces that keep people from leaving a relationship), and alternative attractions (forces that compete with the attractiveness of the marriage relationship).”<sup>52</sup>

They give reasons for divorce. They are as follows:

Husband’s nonsupport, excessive authoritarianism, a combination of drinking, gambling, and infidelity; excessive drinking, and personality problems or personal incompatibility. In contrast, a lack of interest in the home, excessive drinking,

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<sup>51</sup>Sharon J. Price and Patrick C. McKenry, *Divorce* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 22.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

infidelity, and the combination of drinking, gambling, and running around with other women were more often mentioned by women who were married for a longer period of time.

Wives had almost twice as many complaints as husbands, and wives' complaints were significantly more frequent in the following area: physical abuse, verbal abuse, financial problems, drinking, neglect of home or children, mental cruelty, and lack of love. Only in two categories, in-law trouble and sexual incompatibility, did husbands have significantly more complaints than wives.<sup>53</sup>

Glenda Riley posits her causes for divorce. She says, "The causes of divorce were individualism and 'people's rising expectation of marriage.'"<sup>54</sup> While it is reasonable for people to have great expectations of the marriage institution, it is problematic when the expectation is impractical and unrealistic.

Kitson and Holmes state that "divorce may be the harbinger of the disintegration not only of the family, but of all our values and institutions—a sign of a "sick" society."<sup>55</sup> They reveal that "numerous factors—such as premarital pregnancy, marrying young, dissimilar social backgrounds for marital partners, mental illness, and a family history of divorce—have been implicated as precipitants of divorce."<sup>56</sup>

They amplify on some of the factors that influence divorce. They say, "Divorce is a complex phenomenon involving a period of estrangement, legal issues, changes in social networks, economic issues, parenting issues, psychological adjustment. Divorce today still carries the baggage of earlier views of divorce as moral, social, and psychological deviance, which can increase distress for those choosing to end their

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<sup>53</sup>Price and McKenry, 32.

<sup>54</sup>Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145.

<sup>55</sup>Gay C. Kitson with William M. Holmes, *Portrait of Divorce* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

marriages. Those who are divorced are seen as somehow flawed.”<sup>57</sup>

The idea of ending a marriage by divorce does not generally occur suddenly, but rather develops as a series of thoughts that grows in fits and starts into a catalogue of slights, wrongs, and needs not met. They establish that “estrangement, or the emotional divorce is seen here as a series of stages during which at least one of the marital partners begins to develop a feeling of alienation from the other and a sense that the marriage is faltering, if not failing.”<sup>58</sup>

Some of the reasons for divorce, despite being many and varied, can be easily observed, while others are imperceptible. Kitson and Holmes explain that “among the factors reported as causes of divorce, age, as expected, was associated to some extent with the complaints related to immaturity and lack of opportunity to explore options before marriage. Demographical characteristics such as gender, social class, length of marriage, income, education, and age, and experiences such as childhood parental loss and premarital pregnancy, did contribute to respondents’ perceptions of the reasons for their marital breakups.”<sup>59</sup>

The effect of divorce on each partner could either be severe or mild. It is noticed that some persons who are divorced, especially women, underwent significant economic troubles. Kitson and Holmes agree and say that “although many of the divorced improve

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<sup>57</sup>Kitson with Holmes, 20.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 145, 146.



their economic circumstances by 2-3 years after divorce, some continued to have problems at that point.”<sup>60</sup>

Diane Medved agrees with Kitson and Holmes that divorced women experience greater disadvantages than men, especially economically. She says, “In reality, women now suffer far more than men do in the aftermath of divorce. Ironically, since we’ve revised divorce laws in order to be more fair, the consequences of divorce are less equitable than ever. Lenore Weitzman reveals in her definitive study of no-fault divorce laws, *The Divorce Revolution*, the hardships women can now expect: income plummets; anxiety prevails; friendships stagnate; lawyers intercede; remuneration vanishes.”<sup>61</sup>

Ganong and Coleman share a similar view with that which is previously cited. They say that the “economic wellbeing of women and children after divorce has become a significant problem.”<sup>62</sup>

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead observes that “two important new features characterized American divorce in the twentieth century. One was that divorce became a mass phenomenon. The second was that secular opinion replaced religious thinking as the source of expertise on marriage and divorce.”<sup>63</sup>

John H. Mariano gives appropriate counsel to couples contemplating divorce. He asserts that “obviously no decision to procure a divorce should be taken until it has been

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<sup>60</sup>Kitson with Holmes, 220.

<sup>61</sup>Diane Medved, *The Case Against Divorce* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1989), 34, 35.

<sup>62</sup>Lawrence H. Ganong and Marilyn Coleman, *Changing Families, Changing Responsibilities: Family Obligations Following Divorce and Remarriage* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999), 26.

<sup>63</sup>Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 18.

made abundantly clear that reconciliation is impossible; that the marriage in question is hopelessly insolvent; that no substitutes more suitable than divorce are available.”<sup>64</sup>

During the time when divorce is being contemplated, there is likely to be much blaming and accusations. Mariano agrees and states that “who is to blame is a question which touches upon a broad human relations area in modern marital relations. And experience shows us that in the vast majority of cases there is some measure of blame on both sides.”<sup>65</sup>

Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee make a powerful point on the reality of conflict in every marital relationship. They say that “a conflict-free marriage is an oxymoron. Every married couple must learn how to deal with differences in ways that suit their style, values, and particular relationship. This is a major challenge of modern marriage.”<sup>66</sup>

Diane Medved provides major arguments in the case against divorce. She says that:

1. Divorce hurts you. Divorce brings out selfishness, hostility, and vindictiveness. It ruins your idealism about marriage. It leaves emotional scars from which you can never be free. It costs a bunch of money—and significantly reduces your standard of living.
2. Divorce hurts those around you. It devastates your children for at least two years and probably for life.
3. The single life is not what it is cracked up to be. The single life is full of frustration, rejection, and disappointment.
4. Staying married is better for you. You don’t have to disrupt your life for two to seven years; instead, solving marital problems provides a sense of teamwork and stands as a concrete accomplishment that enhances problem-solving skills in the larger world.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>John H. Mariano, *Shall I Get a Divorce—And How?* (New York: Council on Marriage Relations, 1946), 16.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>66</sup>Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, 55.

<sup>67</sup>Medved, 13.

There is the view that falling moral and ethical standards coincide with the increase in divorce. Medved supports the view. She says that “the skyrocketing divorce rate happens to coincide with sliding standards of behavior in etiquette, courtesy, and sexual conduct and the relaxation of our view of the marital vows.”<sup>68</sup>

Robert S. Weiss observes that “many of those who had tried for years to make the best of a bad marriage mourned not the marriage itself but rather the years they had given to it.”<sup>69</sup> Marriage is equivalent to taking a risk. The use of time to build the relationship is normal, however, the broken relationship causes reflection and calculation of the loss experienced.

He notes resignedly that “most separations, however, are neither amicable nor unanticipated. Rather they come about only after a long and anguished process of mutual alienation from which both partners emerge bruised, their morale depleted, their self-esteem low, their ability to function damaged by the varied assaults of the failing marriage.”<sup>70</sup>

Wallerstein and Blakeslee cite that “divorce is much more than the coup de grace of a stressful marriage. It is a new beginning that offers people second chances. It is no more and no less than an opportunity to rebuild lives.”<sup>71</sup> This is a reality that many people are not always ready for. However, much research on this topic is providing a

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<sup>68</sup>Medved, 19.

<sup>69</sup>Robert S. Weiss, *Marital Separation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 17.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>71</sup>Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 4.

framework for a better understanding of such transitions.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee observe further, “Divorce can be a profound catalyst for psychological, social, and economic change. It can also be a stumbling block against such change or the beginning of psychological, social, and economic deterioration. Divorce opens up or closes off a multitude of opportunities. As ever, the journey begins with the first step—and the direction of the first step governs each step that follows.”<sup>72</sup>

Marital enhancement is the ideal that every couple is striving to achieve. That is the reason why marriage is initiated in the first place. However, marital fulfillment is as elusive as a fluttering butterfly. To enjoy marital enhancement requires commitment. Van Pelt observes that “surviving all the crises of marriage over the span of 30, 40, and 50+ years takes commitment.”<sup>73</sup>

DeGenova and Rice agree that commitment is critical to the eventual success of the marriage relationship. They posit that “marital success is more attainable if the commitment is mutual.”<sup>74</sup> They explain, “One person can’t build a relationship or save a marriage, no matter how much he or she tries. In their research on 301 married persons, Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) found that partners who were participating equally in the relationship and who experienced maximum interdependence were also the most

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<sup>72</sup>Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 4.

<sup>73</sup>Nancy Van Pelt, *Highly Effective Marriage* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 17.

<sup>74</sup>Mary Kay DeGenova and F. Philip Rice, *Intimate Relationships, Marriages, and Families* (NY: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2002), 212.

committed. People aren't going to put forth the best effort if their partner is not equally involved."<sup>75</sup>

Peggy and Roger Dudley speak positively about commitment. They assert that "people tend to stick with what they have determined to do. This is especially true when the commitment is announced publicly."<sup>76</sup> They refer to an outstanding article written by Stephen Chavez in the *Adventist Review* (Feb. 8, 2001) that is worth special mention. "Marriage is not a life sentence for which you get 'time off for good behavior.' Marriage is a lifetime commitment with someone who shares your affections, values, and life goals. Having a successful marriage is not changing your partner, but reflecting God's unconditional love to him or her as often as you can, in as many ways as you can."<sup>77</sup>

Fernando Zabala, quoting George Sperry, gives a positive view of commitment as well. He says: "There is a secret for happiness in any and every marriage. The formula is still a mystery to me, but I know it involves a total and irreversible commitment, to stand by the choice to love and all it truly means. I can offer one good reason for making this kind of commitment. First Corinthians 13:8—the verse immediately following verse seven—says, 'Love never fails.'"<sup>78</sup>

Another important aspect of marital enhancement is effective communication. Lack of communication is perceived as one of the most serious hindrances to marital

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<sup>75</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 224, 225.

<sup>76</sup>Peggy Dudley and Roger Dudley, *Maximum Marriage* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 156.

<sup>77</sup>Stephen Chavez, "Promises, Promises," *Adventist Review*, February 8, 2001, 6, quoted in Dudley and Dudley, 156.

<sup>78</sup>George Sperry, "I Do Choose," *Signs of the Times* (May 2006): 7, quoted in Fernando Zabala, *I Would Marry You Again* (Miami, FL: Inter-American Division, 2009), 180.

happiness. Noller and Fitzpatrick deal extensively on communication in family relationships. They define family communication as “the process of developing intersubjectivity and impact through the use of codes among a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity, complete with strong ties of loyalty and emotion, and experience a history and a future.”<sup>79</sup>

They define intersubjectivity as “the creation of shared meaning or the process by which we understand others and come to be understood by them.” Impact is defined as “the degree of effectiveness a message has in changing the receiver’s cognitive, emotional or behavioral state.”<sup>80</sup>

Zabala refers to Albert Mehrabian to explain the essentials of impact of the communication process. He observes that “when interpersonal communication is involved, *it is not the words that have the most impact*, as shown in this well-known formula: words, 7 percent; tone of voice, 38 percent; and facial expression, 55 percent.”<sup>81</sup>

Van Pelt notes that “breakdown in communication”<sup>82</sup> was cited as the number one problem among a group of 730 marriage counselors. She observes that “the happiness of a couple can be measured to a large degree by the effectiveness of their communication.

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<sup>79</sup>Patricia Noller and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, *Communication in Family Relationships* (Old Tappan, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 14.

<sup>80</sup>Noller and Fitzpatrick, 13.

<sup>81</sup>Albert Mehrabian, cited in David Augsburg, *Sustaining Love* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988), 121, quoted in Zabala, 119.

<sup>82</sup>Nancy L. Van Pelt, *How to Talk So Your Mate Will Listen and Listen So Your Mate Will Talk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1989), 19.

How a couple communicates is one of the most powerful factors affecting success or failure of their relationship.”<sup>83</sup>

Wright elucidates on this important issue. He posits that “everyone communicates. It’s impossible to not communicate. Some people say the longer they are married the less they need to talk about certain issues because they know each other so well.”<sup>84</sup> This is an apparent fallacy that many marriage couples operate by. There is the obvious need for education in and exposure to the dynamics of effective communication.

For instance, Smith and Smith refer to 27 skills that enhance effective communication. Among them are to “develop a pleasant tone of voice . . . show no signs of agitation or anger,” “be respectful and tolerant . . . remember patience is a virtue,” and “when in the wrong ask for forgiveness . . . signs of maturity.”<sup>85</sup> Communication is vital to marital enhancement and the sooner it is recognized the better will be the reality.

Managing conflict is a necessary component for marital enhancement. Van Pelt notes, “You may be one of many who believe it is wrong to argue or engage in conflict. Such a notion has all but collapsed under a barrage of information to the contrary.”<sup>86</sup> Zabala posits that “conflict, in itself, is not good or bad. It simply is. Depending on how the couple manages it, then conflict can represent a danger towards marital well-being or

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<sup>83</sup>Van Pelt, *How to Talk*, 19.

<sup>84</sup>H. Norman Wright, *Communication: Key to Your marriage* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 64.

<sup>85</sup>Alanzo H. Smith and June A. Smith, *Why Good Relationships Turn Bad: What To Do About It* (Columbus, GA: Brentwood Christian Press, 2002), 61.

<sup>86</sup>Van Pelt, *How to Talk*, 100.

an opportunity to resolve problems and strengthen matrimonial ties.”<sup>87</sup>

It is noted that “those partners who are closest to each other and have the greatest potential for satisfaction in their relationship also have the greatest potential for conflict.”<sup>88</sup> It is therefore critical that this issue be given adequate attention. For as is explained, “how conflict is managed, rather than how much conflict there is, distinguishes satisfied from dissatisfied couples.”<sup>89</sup>

Olson and DeFrain observe that “the more one knows about another person, the more possibilities there are for disagreement and dislike. If a relationship is to survive and thrive, each of these differences has to be worked through in some way.”<sup>90</sup> They also note that “in every marriage the two dynamic forces are love, which seeks to draw the couple together, and anger, which tends to drive them apart.”<sup>91</sup> They suggest that “in a mature marriage, anger is seen not as an enemy but as a friend. Nevertheless, partners must use it carefully and at appropriate times. Experts suggest that couples make a contract never to attack each other when angry.”<sup>92</sup>

Ed Young observes that “conflict does not have to hurt a solid marriage. In fact, conflict is an important part of every good marriage. Handled wisely, it can lead to

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<sup>87</sup>Zabala, 30.

<sup>88</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 426.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>David H. Olson and John DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family: Diversity and Strengths*, 3rd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2000), 304.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 305.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.



greater intimacy; handled poorly, it can lead to greater isolation.”<sup>93</sup>

There are many techniques and therapies that help marital couples cope with conflict and enhance their relationships. Van Pelt observes that “whereas no relationship can be stress-free all the time, partners particularly need reassurance that they are loved and cared for after a conflict.”<sup>94</sup>

Couples do not necessarily have to run from confrontation. However, they can acquire the skill to cope and manage their anger and aggression in a constructive manner. Van Pelt posits that “when a couple can learn to share feelings, understand each other’s viewpoint, search for a solution, and clear the air, not one but both will win.”<sup>95</sup>

The foundation for marital happiness is love. Everyone says “I love you” as a vital initiation of the marital experience. However, there are so many divorces and devitalized marriages that it is reasonable to assume that many couples are having a problem to manifest love in their relationships.

But what is love? DeGenova and Rice state, “When we talk about love, therefore, we need to know what kind of love we mean. The point of view reflected here is that love is not a single concept but has different dimensions.”<sup>96</sup> They refer to a five-dimensional view of love: namely, “romantic love, erotic love, dependent love, friendship love, and altruistic love.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ed Young, *The 10 Commandments of Marriage* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 86.

<sup>94</sup>Nancy Van Pelt, *Heart to Heart: The Art of Communication* (Miami, FL: Inter-American Division, 1997), 106, 107.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 121.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

They also indicate that “the most complete love has a number of components. . . . The three components of close relationships are intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment to maintain the relationships.”<sup>98</sup>

Gary Chapman refers to the five love languages. He identifies them as quality time, words of affirmation, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch.<sup>99</sup> He admits that “once you identify and learn to speak your spouse’s primary love language, I believe that you will have discovered the key to a long-lasting, loving marriage.”<sup>100</sup>

This is a most profound revelation and will provide outstanding results if understood and practiced. Chapman says, “Love need not evaporate after the wedding, but in order to keep it alive most of us will have to put forth the effort to learn a secondary love language.”<sup>101</sup> This secondary language is vital if marital enhancement will be realized.

He observes further, “We cannot rely on our native tongue if our spouse does not understand it. If we want him/her to feel the love we are trying to communicate, we must express it in his or her primary love language.”<sup>102</sup>

Phillip Reid asserts that “we were created to receive love and to impart love. This input and output of love is very essential for our survival. We must have an input in order

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<sup>98</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 129.

<sup>99</sup>Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1995), 10.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 16, 17.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

to impart. We cannot give what we do not have.”<sup>103</sup> Love is necessary to marital enhancement, and it takes time and thought to effectively show and share it and get the best results.

Sexual intimacy is one of the important components of marital enhancement. Each partner may view sex from different motivations and sensors. Tommy Nelson notes that “a woman doesn’t feel the same pressure or insistent urges for sex that a man feels. She gets ready for sexual intimacy through what she thinks and feels, and to a great extent, she thinks and feels the way a man leads her to think and feel.”<sup>104</sup>

DeGenova and Rice observe that “sexual expression is an important component of the couple relationship.”<sup>105</sup> “God intended sexual intercourse to be much more than just physical release. When total togetherness is missing, trouble usually ensues.”<sup>106</sup>

The Penners indicate that “sexuality is part of God’s plan of creation. Our maleness and femaleness, our sexuality, is not something added on or part of our sinful natures; it is part of the original perfect creation of mankind.”<sup>107</sup>

Eshleman observes that “it is very difficult to separate sex from the complex interaction of variables that constitute married life. Sexual adjustment may be one indicator of general marital adjustment, but it is doubtful that having a good sex life by

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<sup>103</sup>Phillip Reid, *Love Therapy* (Trinidad and Tobago: Daystar Graphics, 2008), 104.

<sup>104</sup>Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 89.

<sup>105</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 160.

<sup>106</sup>Clifford Penner and Joyce Penner, *The Gift of Sex* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003), 118.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

itself will maintain an otherwise poor relationship.”<sup>108</sup>

He says that “dissatisfaction in marriage is likely to be reflected in the frequency and performance of marital coitus, and conflict in sexual coitus may be symptomatic of other tensions within the marital relationship.”<sup>109</sup> However, “if both partners are satisfied with their sex life, it can contribute in a positive way to their overall happiness.”<sup>110</sup>

The Penners summarize that “when a couple is satisfied with the quality and frequency of their sexual experiences, scheduling times to be physical is not necessary. But many couples find that planned times that can be anticipated and prepared for actually enhance the delight they enjoy together sexually.”<sup>111</sup>

John Gottman shares some insightful ideas on marital enhancement and permanence. He says that “the main indicator of whether or not a couple will stay together is what he calls a 5:1 ratio between positive moments and negative moments.” This is an interesting revelation and necessitates further investigation.

He explains that “positive moments are those subjective feelings of love experienced by one spouse that are directly due to the actions of the other spouse. Negative moments are those occasions when one of the partners feels unloved due to the actions (or inactions) of their spouse.”

The idea is that each person needs to experience a larger percentage of positive

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<sup>108</sup>J. Ross Eshleman, *The Family* (New York: Pearson Education, 2003), 309, 310.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>110</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 160.

<sup>111</sup>Clifford Penner and Joyce Penner, *Restoring the Pleasure* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1993), 209.

moments to negative moments in order to feel a sense of satisfaction in the relationship and a desire to maintain it.

Research suggests that “the spouse who receives the type of love that he or she desires has higher levels of marital satisfaction than a spouse who does not.”<sup>112</sup>

A very important indicator of marital enhancement is the similarity of the spirituality of both spouses. Mike Tucker observes that “in the United States, marriages in which husband and wife share the same life-integrated faith and in which they worship together every week and pray together on nearly a daily basis report a 90 to 95 percent success rate. These marriages last, and both partners report a high degree of fulfillment and happiness.”<sup>113</sup>

Marital enhancement occasions hard work and great sacrifices on the part of the spouses involved. There is the likelihood that this is still possible despite the negative experiences of so many couples. The experts are continuously researching and providing the necessary information and inspiration for the happiness, well being, and enhancement of marriages today.

Once there is the willingness to access and apply the principles and techniques to their relationships, the evidence will be much more positive. This researcher is excited to join those who are already contributing to marital enhancement.

From the foregoing data that was examined, it is obvious that marriage enrichment is of great interest to many of the contemporary authors on family issues.

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<sup>112</sup>Jennifer M. Keithley, “Affection,” *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family*, 2nd ed. (2003), 1:42-46.

<sup>113</sup>Mike Tucker, *Ten Keys to a Happy Marriage* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 22.

Though writing to a secular audience, many of the values and principles of the Christian persuasion were viewed as relevant and pertinent to people everywhere.

Despite some authors who appeared to project divorce in a positive light, the prevailing view that was postulated placed it as a contravention to positive family dynamics. The negative effects on the affected children, the detrimental impact on spouses, especially the economic realities of the wives, and the general social stigma put divorce in the destructive light that it truly is.

Nevertheless, situations were cited that may make or may have made divorce necessary. However, this must always be seen as the exception to the rule, and not the preferred norm.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN TRINIDAD

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad is undergoing the kinds of changes that are a reflection of modern times. Change is always constant and the changes that are occurring are not as favorable as one would anticipate. One example of such change is the prevalence of divorce. This problem is not unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, one would have hoped that the church would have been able to withstand such a social dilemma.

The investigator was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family. His spouse has a similar heritage. While growing up in the church, divorce was not a major issue among the members. The families were mostly strong and stable. The investigator and his spouse were privileged to live with the model of their parents sharing more than fifty years of marital bliss and happiness respectively. This was characteristic of many of the families that they knew.

The investigator is a pastor for more than thirty years and admits that over the years, there has been a tolerance for divorce among many members of the church, even among some of the leaders. Not only is divorce becoming more prevalent, remarriage is becoming popular among some of the members who are divorced.

As a marriage officer, the investigator has had to refuse to participate in the

wedding ceremonies of many couples because there were doubts about the reasons for the divorces. Many persons who wanted to be remarried were not divorced according to the biblical guidance. As the years pass, the problem seems to be getting more serious. The investigator is acutely affected by this problem because he is the chief administrator of the South Caribbean Conference, which has its jurisdiction in Trinidad. Very often he has had to listen to many of the sad stories concerning the divorce processes of some of the members.

Not only is divorce a noticeable problem in the church in question, it is also a major challenge in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In the “Population and Vital Statistics Report 2005,” the reality of the exacerbation of the divorce problem in the country is noted. For instance, the total marriages in Trinidad and Tobago and for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the years 2001 to 2005 are as follows:

1. The year 2001 had 7,139 marriages, among them 290 SDA’s.
2. The year 2002 had 7,434 marriages, among them 326 SDA’s.
3. The year 2003 had 7,440 marriages, among them 272 SDA’s.
4. The year 2004 had 7,889 marriages, among them 340 SDA’s.
5. The year 2005 had 8,144 marriages, among them 346 SDA’s.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a steady increase for the two categories with the passing of the relevant years. It is interesting to note the incidence of divorce during the corresponding period. The data for the country is as follows:

1. The year 2001 recorded 1,340 divorces.

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<sup>1</sup>*Population and Vital Statistics Report 2005* (Trinidad and Tobago: The Central Statistical Office Printing Unit, 2005), 82.



2. The year 2002 recorded 1,565 divorces.
3. The year 2003 recorded 1,611 divorces.
4. The year 2004 recorded 1,852 divorces.
5. The year 2005 recorded 2,785 divorces.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no data for the divorce rate according to religious organizations, the constant increase in the incidence in the country and the phenomenal escalation between the years 2004 and 2005 indicate that there is indeed a national crisis and an apparent church crisis. For the year 2004, the percentage of the divorces in relation to the marriages was 23 percent, but for the year 2005 it was 34 percent. If that trend was followed for the ensuing years, it may well be catastrophic.

It is reasonable to assume that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was affected by the divorce dilemma as the country. If one were to use the available data to estimate what the number of marriages was that may have ended in divorce in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the number for 2004 would have been about 85 and for 2005, about 115. The method of ascertaining these estimates is as follows:

1. The percentage of the divorces to the national number of marriages for the year 2004 was 23 percent. If one were to estimate 23 percent of the 340 Seventh-day Adventist marriages for the same year, it would result in 85 divorces.

2. The percentage of the divorces to the marriages nationally for the year 2005 was 34 percent. If one were to estimate 34 percent of the 346 Seventh-day Adventist

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<sup>2</sup>*Population and Vital Statistics Report 2005*, 88.

marriages for the same year, it would result in 115 divorces.

This estimation is an indication that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is facing a serious challenge to its conservative orientation and its strong moral and ethical values. Its mission of promoting the sanctity of marriage and the destructive nature of divorce is being seriously compromised.

There is the need for all concerned to face this problem fearlessly, forthrightly, and faithfully. Since God is interested in marital happiness and hates divorce, it is possible for this situation to be reversed and for the potency of the church and the solemnity of marriage to be restored among the members, which will be admired by the external public.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE IMPACT OF A SEMINAR ON MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS

The purpose of this research project is to explore the quality of relationships of certain married couples in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Trinidad and observe the impact that a marriage seminar might have on them. Six churches were part of the research, of these, two were small, two medium, and two large.

The names of several churches from each category were placed in an appropriate receptacle, and two churches were drawn from each category. The small church category involved a membership of less than one hundred active members, the medium church category involved an active membership of between one and two hundred members, and the large church category involved a membership of more than three hundred active members.

These six churches received letters from the investigator which indicated his intention to conduct this research. A visit was made to each church and the process of the research explained. Those couples who were interested in participating in the process were given consent forms to sign. Seventy-eight persons between the ages of twenty-five and sixty years signed the consent forms and volunteered themselves to be participants in the research project.

An appropriate place was selected and the participants were invited to attend. The protocol for the research project was read and explained to ensure that everyone was

reasonably clear on the process that would ensue. Fifty-six persons attended the orientation and did the Pre-Seminar Marital Survey (see table 1). After completing the questionnaire, each participant submitted the unsigned copy to maintain anonymity. The questionnaires were analyzed to determine the state of their marital relationship (see table 2).

Table 1. Pre-Seminar Marital Survey

NO.	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	Possible Responses				
		S.D.	D.	N.S.	A.	S.A.
1.	I am very satisfied with how we handle our responsibilities in our household.					
2.	I am satisfied with our communication and feel that my partner understands me.					
3.	I am very satisfied with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.					
4.	I am very satisfied with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.					
5.	I am very satisfied with how we express affection and relate sexually.					
6.	I can express my true feelings to my partner.					
7.	At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want.					
8.	My partner is a very good listener.					
9.	I go out of my way to avoid conflicts with my partner.					
10.	At times I feel some of our differences never get resolved.					
11.	I think my partner is too involved with or influenced by his/her family.					
12.	I am worried that accepting financial assistance or advice from our families will cause problems for us.					

Response Keys: Strongly Disagree: S.D.; Disagree: D.; Not Sure: N.S.; Agree: A.; Strongly Agree: S.A.

Table 2. Results of Pre-Seminar Marital Survey: Fifty-six (56) Participants

Observed Responses  
Negative/Neutral/Positive

NO.	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	S.D.	D.	N.S.	A.	S.A.
1.	I am very satisfied with how we handle our responsibilities in our household.	4 7%	12 21%	6 11%	24 43%	10 18%
2.	I am satisfied with our communication and feel that my partner understands me.	6 11%	15 27%	8 14%	18 32%	9 16%
3.	I am very satisfied with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.	6 11%	15 27%	12 21%	17 30%	5 9%
4.	I am very satisfied with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.	4 7%	21 38%	11 20%	17 30%	3 5%
5.	I am very satisfied with how we express affection and relate sexually.	4 7%	15 27%	10 18%	15 27%	12 21%
6.	I can express my true feelings to my partner.	6 11%	10 18%	6 11%	19 34%	14 25%
7.	At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want.	12 21.5%	12 21.5%	5 9%	22 39%	4 7%
8.	My partner is a very good listener.	6 11%	15 27%	7 12%	17 30%	11 20%
9.	I go out of my way to avoid conflicts with my partner.	4 7%	5 9%	13 23%	26 46%	7 12%
10.	At times I feel some of our differences never get resolved.	5 9%	11 20%	4 7%	20 36%	15 27%
11.	I think my partner is too involved with or influenced by his/her family.	16 29%	14 25%	5 9%	7 12%	12 21.5%
12.	I am worried that accepting financial assistance or advice from our families will cause problems for us.	18 32%	12 21.5%	9 16%	6 11%	8 14%

Response Keys: Strongly Disagree: S.D.; Disagree: D.; Not Sure: N.S.; Agree: A.; Strongly Agree: S.A.

Some of the issues that were observed from the survey are as follows:

1. The importance of roles and responsibilities in marital satisfaction.
2. The value of communication in marital fulfillment.
3. Conflict management.
4. Sexual intimacy and marital happiness.
5. Dealing effectively with in-laws.

The importance of roles and responsibilities in marital satisfaction cannot be ignored. DeGenova and Rice observe that “in general, if spouses agree on gender-role expectations and performance, couples report higher marital quality than if there is disagreement. If a man does not fulfill the roles his spouse expects him to, she will not be completely satisfied with the relationship. Men, too, have certain preconceived expectations about the roles their spouses should fulfill; if the women do not live up to their expectations, their marital satisfaction is less.”<sup>1</sup>

It is assumed that the wife is the main participant in fulfilling the roles of the family. However, that scenario is changing, and more men are assuming greater responsibilities. J. Ross Eshleman in his book *The Family*, says, “Although there is no question that wives continue to hold the primary responsibility for housework and child care and that the pace of change may seem both slow and minimal, in fact, men’s behavior appears to be changing. There is currently no major trend toward full-time male homemakers, but there is increased participation of men in household and child-care tasks, as revealed in studies of dual-employed and dual-career marriages.”<sup>2</sup>

Communication is one of the critical factors in marital satisfaction. Van Pelt notes that “breakdown in communication”<sup>3</sup> was cited as the number one problem among a group of 730 marriage counselors. She observes that “the happiness of a couple can be measured to a large degree by the effectiveness of their communication. How a couple

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<sup>1</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 152.

<sup>2</sup>Eshleman, 98.

<sup>3</sup>Van Pelt, *How to Talk*, 19.

communicates is one of the most powerful factors affecting success or failure of their relationship.”<sup>4</sup>

Wright elucidates on this important issue. He posits that “everyone communicates. It’s impossible to not communicate. Some people say the longer they are married the less they need to talk about certain issues because they know each other so well.”<sup>5</sup> This is an apparent fallacy that many marriage couples operate by. There is the obvious need for education in and exposure to the dynamics of effective communication.

Conflict management is an issue that is vital to marital stability. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee make a powerful point on the reality of conflict in every marital relationship. They say that “a conflict-free marriage is an oxymoron. Every married couple must learn how to deal with differences in ways that suit their style, values, and particular relationship.”<sup>6</sup> This is a major challenge of modern marriages.

Ed Young observes that “conflict does not have to hurt a solid marriage. In fact, conflict is an important part of every good marriage. Handled wisely, it can lead to greater intimacy; handled poorly, it can lead to greater isolation.”<sup>7</sup>

There are many techniques and therapies that help marital couples cope with conflict and enhance their relationships. Van Pelt observes that “whereas no relationship

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<sup>4</sup>Van Pelt, *How to Talk*, 19.

<sup>5</sup>Wright, *Communication*, 64.

<sup>6</sup>Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, 55.

<sup>7</sup>Young, 86.

can be stress-free all the time, partners particularly need reassurance that they are loved and cared for after a conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

Sexual fulfillment is another important issue that couples have to handle well to enrich their marital happiness. Eshleman says that “dissatisfaction in marriage is likely to be reflected in the frequency and performance of marital coitus, and conflict in sexual coitus may be symptomatic of other tensions within the marital relationship.”<sup>9</sup> However, “if both partners are satisfied with their sex life, it can contribute in a positive way to their overall happiness.”<sup>10</sup>

The Penners summarize that “when a couple is satisfied with the quality and frequency of their sexual experiences, scheduling times to be physical is not necessary. However, many couples find that planned times that can be anticipated and prepared for actually enhance the delight they enjoy together sexually.”<sup>11</sup>

Dealing with in-laws is a sensitive issue that needs careful attention. Worthington observes that “parents usually identify most closely with their own child, which is important when the child has a disagreement with his or her spouse. Meaning well and sincerely trying to help the child, parents can become involved in a coalition against the child’s spouse that can make it difficult for the child to solve his or her marital difficulties.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Nancy Van Pelt, *Heart to Heart*, 106, 107.

<sup>9</sup>Eshleman, 310.

<sup>10</sup>DeGenova and Rice, 160.

<sup>11</sup>Penner and Penner, *Restoring the Pleasure*, 209.

<sup>12</sup>Everett L. Worthington, *Marriage Counseling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.



There is a most disheartening reality for many couples when their parents prove that they lack objectivity and open-mindedness. This situation could instill in the in-law some measure of distrust, and can be inimical to the permanence of the relationship.

“Scripture advises newlyweds to leave their parents and to cleave to each other. It does not provide an exception clause, such as leave their parents until they become dissatisfied with their spouse. Conflicts between spouses are inevitable. Parents, while loving and supporting their child, must gently refuse to become embroiled in their children’s marriages.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Worthington, *Marriage Counseling*, 82.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE AWARENESS MARRIAGE SEMINAR

The date, time, and place for the Awareness Marriage Seminar was set and the participants notified. Of the fifty-six participants who did the pre-awareness questionnaire, forty-three participated in the awareness seminar. The Awareness Seminar consisted of five presentations with the following topics: “How to Enrich Your Marriage to Guarantee Greater Happiness”; “Avoiding Conflicts and Resolving Issues, A More Effective Approach”; “Is Marriage a Contract or a Covenant?”; “How to Make your In-laws your Greatest Supporters”; and “How to Improve your Communication Skills and Become a Better Lover?”

The approximate length of each presentation was one hour. At the end of each presentation, adequate time was given for the participants to ask questions and sometimes, during or after the seminar, for role-playing of some of the techniques and principles.

At the conclusion of the awareness seminar, a date was agreed upon to complete the Post-Seminar Marital Survey. Sufficient time was given between the pre- and the post-awareness questionnaire in order for the participants to incorporate the techniques and principles in their daily marital living. The participants were contacted prior to the date of the post-awareness questionnaire to remind them of the event.

## Awareness Marital Seminar One

How to Enrich Your Marriage to Guarantee Greater Happiness?

*Psalm 127:1 says "Except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it."*

*"If God is not acknowledged in our homes, we have no reason to expect His blessings; and without His blessings, all is nothing. The enriching of a family is a work of time and thought, but it cannot be effected without the favor of providence." (Selected quotation reference not found).*

The house is used as a metaphor for the home. As one looks at a house, there are three main parts that are identifiable. They are as follows: (1) The foundation which provides support, (2) The walls that provide seclusion, and (3) The roof which provides security.

A. The critical components of a solid foundation that supports an enriched relationship are as follows:

1. Complete dependence on God.

Q: How would you describe your relationship with God?

2. A healthy self-concept.

Q: What is the truth or reality about yourself?

3. A hearty respect for and appreciation of the rights of others.

Q. Are you fair in the value that you put on others' worth? What is that value?

4. An adequate understanding and practice of the principle of love.

Q. Is love the main motivation for your actions? To what extent?

5. An eagerness to grow.

Q. Are you a creature of deliberate and comprehensive growth?

B. The philosophical walls that provide seclusion are as follows:

1. You should seclude your relationship from the coldness of selfishness.

Q. Where is your main focus, on yourself or your partner?

2. You should seclude your relationship from the boisterous winds of strife and commotion.

Q. How do you settle your conflicts? Rationally or violently?

3. You should seclude your relationship from the heat of lust and infidelity.

Q. Is there anyone, other than your mate, that is giving you romantic thoughts or memories?

C. The providential roof that provides security.

1. The security of a husband's estimate of his spouse, and a wife's value of her mate. Gen 2:18.

Q. What are your "gut" feelings about your spouse?

2. The security of mutuality (Gen 2:21-23; Matt 7:12).

Q. Are you prepared to allow your spouse to enjoy the same privileges and opportunities that you want to enjoy?

3. The security of bonding (Gen 2:24).

Q. Is your spouse your best friend?

NB. Leave the domain and dominion of your parents.

NB. Cleave spiritually, emotionally, socially, psychologically/mentally, and physically.

4. The security of intimacy and self-disclosure. Gen 2:25.

Q. Are you open to your spouse with your body and your views?

5. The security of God. Ps 127:1.

Q. Is God in control of your home?

“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the light of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Awareness Marital Seminar Two**

**Avoiding Conflicts and Resolving Issues; A More Effective Approach!**

“When a couple come to me and want to get married,” writes Walter Trobisch, “I always ask them if they have had a real quarrel—not just a causal difference of opinion, but a real fight. Many times they will say: ‘Oh, no! Pastor, we love each other.’ Then I tell them: ‘Quarrel first—and then I will marry you.’”<sup>2</sup>

The intention of the counselor, of course, is not to make a couple fight; it is, rather, to determine if they are capable of reconciling and dealing with what many experts rightly consider the acid test of married life: managing conflict.

Is conflict in married life good or bad? Is it unavoidable? Well, which one of us

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<sup>1</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 36.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Trobisch, *I Married You* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 76.

could boast of never having had a quarrel or fight? In fact, if you could make such a boast, you “run the risk of facing conflicts that, by their nature, are considered “explosive.” The reality is that “all the accumulated tensions can suddenly escape in the same way that volcanoes erupt.”<sup>3</sup>

The tendency, almost instinctively, is to see conflict as a factor of threatening the happiness of the couple because that is the basic meaning that many people associate with it. Other words that are used instead of conflict are struggle, fight, and combat. However, when one looks closely at the word conflict, it provides material for discussion.

Zabala notes, “Seen from this angle, conflict fulfills the function of uncovering problems in married life that merit discussion.”<sup>4</sup> This is a beautiful insight that more couples need to give serious consideration to. “In fact, curiously, the characters that are used in Chinese to represent the word conflict are the same that are used for danger and opportunity.”<sup>5</sup>

Zabala explains,

Conflict, in itself is not good or bad. It simply is. Depending on how the couple manages it, then conflict can represent a danger towards marital well-being or an opportunity to resolve problems and strengthen marital ties. One of the discoveries of a lot of research in the field of marital life is that happily married couples are more skillful than those who are unhappy in the management of their differences, disagreements, and conflicts. This reality is so marked that one of the most reliable indicators for diagnosing the “health” of a marriage is how that couple “fights.” If we add to this whole mix that there is no way to avoid conflicts, then we should pay much attention to how to manage this aspect that is so sensitive to the marriage relationship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Zabala, 31.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 30, 31.

“Conflicts in the marriage are inevitable,” as David Mace says in the illustration of the three suitcases.<sup>7</sup> When a man and a woman get married, each one brings his own baggage (culture, principles, habits, attitudes, expectations, preferences, etc.) to the marriage. By joining together, they have three suitcases.

The first suitcase contains the baggage that John and Mary can share without difficulty: they both like books, etc. These are the patterns of a congruent life. The second suitcase contains the differences: character traits, habits, and the like. These are the patterns of a complementary life. Even though there are differences, they are such that, if the couple manages them well, they can help the couple to grow as individuals and as a couple.

The third suitcase also contains differences, but the type that generates tensions: for example, John is thrifty, but Mary is a spendthrift. These are the patterns of a conflictive life. These differences will very surely confront them, and unless they make drastic changes in their way of being, there will be a clash of their wills and also much frustration.

Conclusion? Be careful with the third suitcase. If the illustration above teaches us anything, it is that each individual brings raw material to the marriage union that makes him or her what he or she is. At the time of marriage, each partner accepts the other with all the baggage that each one brings. This is the reality that each partner should try to manage appropriately.

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<sup>7</sup>David Mace, *Love and Anger in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 58-60.

Zabala speaks about the possible advantages of conflict in marriage.<sup>8</sup> He numerates them as follows:

1. Conflict shows that the couple is still concerned about their marriage. Even though it seems absurd, disagreements and conflicts of any kind indicate that a marriage is alive and that the couple is concerned about their relationship to the point that they sometimes fight so it does not die. . . . The problem could be in the way that each one wants to reach his or her objectives. It could also be that there are other problems that should be resolved first.

2. Conflicts warn of danger. Just like traffic signals or the symptoms in the case of illnesses, marital conflicts indicate the presence of problematic areas, important zones of the territory that demand attention. Many marital problems are like icebergs: we only see the tip of them. The real problems are below the surface.

3. Conflicts allow us to know our spouse better.

4. Conflicts are the door to intimacy. Gary Smalley correctly indicates this function when he writes that adequate management of the conflicts distinguishes the superficial relationships from those that are deep.<sup>9</sup> To check this, it is sufficient for you to remember your own experience with the one who is now your spouse. Serious disagreements between you were produced after the relationship moved from the superficial plane to deeper levels, not before.

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<sup>8</sup>Zabala, 35-35.

<sup>9</sup>Gary Smalley, *Secrets of Lasting Love* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 97.



5. Conflicts can provide for necessary changes. Although it is certain that many marital confrontations leave bitterness and resentment in their wake, it is also thanks to them that many couples have managed to mature in their relationship.

Is conflict a wall or a door? It can be a wall that we crash into, or a door that gives us access to a deep intimacy. Danger or opportunity: that is marital conflict. The result, in great measure, will depend on the couple and their attitude in managing their differences.

In his book, *Engaged, Are You Fit to Be Tied*, David Brown says that there are basically five styles in resolving marital differences.<sup>10</sup>

1. Evade: get away from the problem to avoid the discomfort that confrontation sometimes produces.

2. Compete: one spouse prevails over the other.

3. Lose: one spouse gives into the other for peace.

4. Tie: negotiator; not willing to give unless he/she receives something.

5. Cooperate: this is the ideal attitude since the parties involved in the conflict try to understand the position of the other, and together, they seek the best way out as individuals and as a couple.

Happily married couples act like good friends, and if there is a problem, they will be willing to forgive and possibly forget. They also handle their conflicts in a cordial and positive way. If a problem does not have a solution, then:

1. Recognize those essential differences and learn to live with them while honoring and respecting each other.

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<sup>10</sup>David Brown, *Engaged: Are You Fit to Be Tied?* (Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1992).

2. Accept the undeniable fact that some problems, plainly and simply, do not have a solution.

3. Paraphrasing Reinhold Heibhur, ask for the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Accept each other unconditionally, and there is a greater likelihood that your partner will change.

To effectively handle your marital conflicts,

1. Recognize that a problem exists.
2. Grant each other the right to speak. Use “I” statements and avoid mind reading. Use “You” statements when offering commendation and affirmation.
3. Listen respectfully.
4. Try to focus on one topic at a time.
5. Emphasize what unites you as a couple, not what divides you.
6. Do not see the cause of the wrong in your spouse.
7. Admit when you are wrong. Watch your vocabulary.
8. Avoid falling into mental traps.
9. Do not lose sight of the need for divine help.

Only as you practice these principles will you become effective in conflict management. The Apostle Paul commented correctly, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph 4:26, 27, NKJV).

### Awareness Marital Seminar Three

Is Marriage a Contract or a Covenant?

In order to understand the meaning of the term covenant, we must begin by distinguishing it from the word contract. What is the difference? The meaning of contract is “an agreement between two or more parties, especially one written and enforceable by law.”<sup>11</sup> “It takes place between equal parties and establishes what each one must do for the other. In other words, the essence of the contract is that each one of those involved promises to fulfill his commitment if the other one does as well.”<sup>12</sup>

Fernando Zabala offers a sound explanation of the term covenant. He explains:

The term covenant, on the other hand, is applied to the relationship that God wants to establish with us, His children, and is characterized by being a commitment of love that does not depend on us to be fulfilled. That is, even though you and I do not love God, and even though our behavior is sometimes not right, He will always love us for the sole fact that we are His children. This is unconditional love.<sup>13</sup>

If you were to analyze your relationship, what type would it be, a contractual or covenantal? If it is a covenant, you will not wait to receive love from your partner in order to reciprocate. Neither will you expect your partner to provide a code of behavior in order for you to love him/her. You will love your spouse unconditionally just as God loves us. By loving unconditionally, you will be loved in the same way.

The apostle Paul wrote about the covenantal nature of marriage in Rom 7:1-3. “Or do you not know ye not, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is

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<sup>11</sup>*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1997), s.v. “Contract.”

<sup>12</sup>Zabala, 176.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”

Paul writes about the longevity of the marital relationship. It is expected to last as long as the partner lives. While a contract can be broken, the truth about a covenant is that it is not characterized by being temporary. The marriage is protected by the law of God and the law of the state. However, legality cannot protect the relationship, but love can.

For instance, a wife may want a new dress, but the husband does not agree because he feels that the family’s budget cannot afford another expense. If the wife tries to put pressure on him by telling him that she got married to him and he is obligated to provide the item for her, will her attitude help or hurt the relationship? If she infers that her previous fiancé would have indulged her, this will only aggravate the situation.

If the husband uses the same argument to make his claim for sexual fulfillment, does that attitude contribute to fulfillment or failure? Legalism does not assist a covenantal relationship. It is more self-centered and self-seeking.

Covenantal love is challenged by “if love,” which is influenced by what is called proactive inhibition. Some people will give a favor if they are sure to get one in return. So there is a trade-off between what one wants and what the other wants as well. It could be the dress for sexual pleasure. Retroactive inhibition is a situation where one returns a favor for an act that was provided earlier. It could be referred to as “because-of love.” This is a scenario that many married couples have to deal with as they work at trying to

cope with the brokenness that relationships experience.

The “in-spite-of” love is similar to the unconditional love that a covenant is based on. It implies that one will be loved in spite of the circumstances. This is the kind of commitment that will benefit a long-term marital relationship.

Zabala uses these beautiful references to marital commitment in his book *I Would Marry You Again*.<sup>14</sup>

“One that we propose to keep whatever happens” (Lewis Smedes).

“A way of thinking that motivates us to perceive in our spouse only his or her positive characteristics, and to express appreciation for those characteristics” (Gary Chapman).

“Keeping our marriage vows when the ecstasy of the feelings no longer exist” (Les and Leslie Parrot).

“A covenant similar to what God made with His people. We are called to imitate in our sphere what the heavenly Bridegroom [Christ] does for His bride [the church]; ‘That you love one another as I have loved you’” (John 15:12) (Ron and Karen Flowers).

Christ said in Matt 19:5, 6, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife: and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

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<sup>14</sup>Zabala, 183.

This is the essence of the covenant. God is able to help every couple who want to cooperate with Him.

“The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

#### **Awareness Marital Seminar Four**

##### **How to Make Your In-Laws Your Greatest Supporters.**

Your in-laws are the blood relatives of your spouse. It is said that blood is thicker than water. Therefore, be careful what you say about your in-laws. If your partner is offended because of what you say about his/her blood relative, that relative is likely to be offended as well, and the offending partner could be isolated from the partner’s family.

Everett L. Worthington Jr., in his book *Marriage Counseling*, notes, “The effect on the marriage of having a child marry depends on the proximity of the newlyweds to the parents and on the amount of contact between the two families. It also depends on the response of the parents to the struggles of the new couple.”<sup>16</sup>

There is a fallacy that many partners in marriage relationships believe. It is the feeling that the marriage is between just the two of them. There is little consideration that the marriage is also between two families and that great care should be taken in nurturing a healthy and happy environment among all concerned.

Worthington observes that “parents usually identify most closely with their own

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<sup>15</sup>White, *The Adventist Home*, 28.

<sup>16</sup>Worthington, *Marriage Counseling*, 82.

child, which is important when the child has a disagreement with his or her spouse. Meaning well and sincerely trying to help the child, parents can become involved in a coalition against the child's spouse that can make it difficult for the child to solve his or her marital difficulties."<sup>17</sup>

There is a most disheartening reality for many couples when their parents prove that they lack objectivity and open-mindedness. This situation could instill in the in-law some measure of distrust, and can be inimical to the permanence of the relationship.

“Scripture advises newlyweds to leave their parents and to cleave to each other. It does not provide an exception clause, such as leave their parents until they become dissatisfied with their spouse. Conflicts between spouses are inevitable. Parents, while loving and supporting their child, must gently refuse to become embroiled in their children's marriages.”<sup>18</sup>

How do you treat your in-laws when they visit your home? Is the treatment similar to the way you treat your relatives? Are you polite, generous, and objective? If the in-laws observe that their relative is uncomfortable when they are there, they can become suspicious and may discover that it is because of how they were treated by the offending spouse.

Always be gracious and magnanimous in your dealings with your in-laws so they will always feel that they are special and appreciated. This is a significant variable in the long-term stability and security of the relationship of the young couple.

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<sup>17</sup>Worthington, *Marriage Counseling*, 82.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

If an in-law infringes on your family space and gives reasons for concern, then you should allow the blood relative to take the initiative in resolving the situation. When you and your partner are alone, you can discuss the situation and develop a plan of action to deal with the situation. It will be much easier for the blood relative to handle the issue and there will be a greater likelihood of avoiding a negative reaction and result.

When you visit the home of your in-law, how should you relate? You should be very appreciative of any favors that are offered to you. You should lavish them with commendations and affirmations. Avoid speaking about anything that may be embarrassing to them. Listen more, rather than trying to take over the conversation or discussion that may occur.

Never enter the home of your in-law if you are not invited to do so. Do not take for granted the fact that you are now a family member. Respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

Use the appropriate time and seasons to share gifts and recognition. It is not so important how expensive the tokens are, but the fact that you are thoughtful will go a long way to build the trust that will enhance the relationship with your in-laws and make them your greatest supporters.

Remember that your in-law owes you nothing, so do not have unreasonable expectations of them because they may be wealthy or unusually generous. Your in-law, instead of being an outlaw, can be your best friend and supporter. This will be an asset to your marriage and your future happiness.



## **Awareness Marital Seminar Five**

How to Improve Your Communication Skills and Become A Better Lover.

Introduction: This story of Patricia and John is told by Nancy Van Pelt.

Patricia pulled nervously at a tissue as she spoke, “Our first date was very romantic and unforgettable. We went to dinner but never tasted the food. We were so enraptured with each other, we talked for hours and lost all track of time. I felt I had known him all my life. I had had numerous relationships with men, but this one was different.

“When John finally asked me to marry him it was inevitable. In the beginning, our marriage was much like our courtship. We shared everything and considered ourselves best friends; we shared things we would never tell anyone else. Sometimes we’d lie in bed holding each other, talking until the wee hours of the morning.

“Gradually, over the years, each of us has pulled back and closed down. There is little to say to each other. Sometimes I have little feeling for this man I once adored. I think he feels much the same way.

“What happened? Nothing dramatic. We got so busy with our separate worlds we hardly noticed that we weren’t friends anymore. The signals were all there, but we refused to recognize them. He’d bury himself in the antique car he was rebuilding. I became very resentful and shut him out just for spite. The couple that didn’t have enough hours in the day to discuss life didn’t exist anymore.

“Our friends used to tease us because we would get so wrapped up in talking with each other, they didn’t want to interrupt us. That seems like a long time ago. Now we stay together because of the children. We have lived this way for so long now, it would be

very difficult to open up to each other again.”

“People marry dreaming of a lifelong intimate friendship with their mate. Instead, most marriages end up purely ‘functional,’ where partners perform the duties of provider, nurturer, parent, sex partner, and cook. The functional marriage is incomplete and unsatisfying.

“The great news is that a functional marriage can be transformed into a highly effective marriage by establishing an intimate communication system. Communication is what sparks the caring, giving, sharing, and affirming that are present in an intimate friendship.”<sup>19</sup>

Communication is to an intimate relationship as blood is to the body. In other words, without it there is death. What is the definition for communication? It is the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, touch or signs.

Thus, communication involves sending a message, receiving that specific message, and understanding or interpreting that message accurately and correctly. For communication to be effective, there must be the correct understanding of the message that was originally intended.

Communication specialists have suggested that the impact of communication could be projected in percentages. The words of the communication process are estimated to be 7 percent, the tone of voice 38 percent, and the body language 55 percent.

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<sup>19</sup>Van Pelt, *Highly Effective Marriage*, 79, 80.

**Exercise: Have couples demonstrate the importance of tone of voice and body language.**

Why don't couples communicate effectively?

1. We have not been taught well.
2. We are afraid to share our real thoughts and feelings.
3. Conversations are usually influenced by the misunderstandings and unresolved problems of the past.
4. Learned patterns from the past.
5. Social conditioning: Girls communicate more regularly and naturally in pairs while boys communicate in groups.
6. Temperaments: sanguine is talkative; choleric is deliberately talkative and demanding; melancholy is introverted and an exceptional analytical thinker; and phlegmatic is quiet, slow, and non-combative.

**Exercise: Have couples demonstrate their different temperaments.**

Rules of Listening:

1. Maintain good eye contact.
2. Sit attentively.
3. Act interested in what you hear. Raise your eyebrows, nod your head in agreement, smile or laugh when appropriate.
4. Sprinkle your attentive listening with appropriate phrases to show interest and understanding. "I agree," "great."
5. Ask well-phrased questions. Avoid "Why" questions since they put the other partner on the defensive.

6. Listen a little longer.

**Exercise: Have couples role-play good listening skills.**

Negative communication styles to avoid: Quarreling; unannounced silence; sarcasm; and satire.

Levels of communication:

1. Small talk and shop talk: light conversation. If you cannot recall, use a notepad.

2. Planning: short term; medium term; and long term.

3. Problem solving: Positive complaining: “When you shout at me I feel nervous and resented; because I do not appreciate anybody shouting at me, will you speak to me with a milder tone?”

4. Emotional time: interpersonal analysis: turning against; turning away; and turning towards. Share fondness, affection and praise.

5. Spiritual and sublime time: share the experiences of faith and hope, especially at the worship service at home. After the worship service at church the couple could spend quality time reflecting on and reviewing the salient points of the message and apply the message to the life.

When you communicate effectively, your love life will be more intimate and fulfilling. You will develop more beautiful ways of expressing your affection and the warmth of love life. Practice at home and become an expert practitioner and teacher.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE POST-SEMINAR SURVEY

Eighteen couples and one spouse returned for the Post-Seminar Marital Survey (N-37). After some introductory remarks and greetings the same questionnaires given were distributed. Adequate time was given for its completion. The questionnaires were collected and placed in a box. No one had access to the box except the researcher. Names were not required on the questionnaire to maintain anonymity. The purpose of the post-seminar survey was to observe the impact on relationships, if any, between the Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar Surveys after the awareness seminar was given.

The use of the term “impact” is important to the study. According to *The New Grolier Webster International Dictionary of the English Language*, the word impact means “effect or influence.” It will become necessary, therefore, to examine the “effect or influence” of the twelve questions in the questionnaires before and after the awareness seminar. See table 3 for post-seminar questionnaire results.

Table 3. Results of Post-Seminar Marital Survey: Thirty-one (31) Participants  
Observed Responses  
Negative/Neutral/Positive

NO.	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	S.D.	D.	N.S.	A.	S.A.
1.	I am very satisfied with how we handle our responsibilities in our household.	2 5%	8 22%	3 8%	16 43%	8 22%
2.	I am satisfied with our communication and feel that my partner understands me.	5 14%	4 11%	9 24%	13 35%	6 16%
3.	I am very satisfied with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.	5 14%	8 22%	9 24%	10 27%	5 14%
4.	I am very satisfied with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.	7 19%	7 19%	6 16%	12 32%	5 14%
5.	I am very satisfied with how we express affection and relate sexually.	2 5%	7 19%	7 19%	11 30%	9 22%
6.	I can express my true feelings to my partner.	4 11%	3 8%	8 22%	10 27%	12 32%
7.	At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want.	7 19%	8 22%	4 11%	14 38%	4 11%
8.	My partner is a very good listener.	7 19%	5 14%	3 8%	10 27%	12 32%
9.	I go out of my way to avoid conflicts with my partner.	3 8%	4 11%	7 19%	13 35%	10 27%
10.	At times I feel some of our differences never get resolved.	4 11%	7 19%	6 16%	14 38%	6 16%
11.	I think my partner is too involved with or influenced by his/her family.	16 43%	9 24%	4 11%	0	8 22%
12.	I am worried that accepting financial assistance or advice from our families will cause problems for us.	14 38%	5 14%	4 11%	8 22%	6 16%

Response Keys: Strongly Disagree: S.D.; Disagree: D.; Not Sure: N.S.; Agree: A.; Strongly Agree: S.A.

### Methodology

In order to make a comparative study of the pre- and post-questionnaire to determine whether or not the Awareness Seminar had an impact on the participants, the following procedure was followed. The responses for (SD) strongly disagree and (D) disagree were grouped together in the category “Negative.” The responses for (A) agree and (SA) strongly agree were grouped together in the category “Positive.” Both the negative and positive scores were analyzed to determine impact, if any, on the

participants. Table 4 reflects both the “Negative” and “Positive” scores of the pre and post questionnaires. With N-37 the two scores of the “Negative” category (SD) and (D) were added, and positive category (SA) and (A) were added and a percentage obtained in both pre- and post-questionnaire (see table 4).

Table 4. Results of Pre- and Post-Seminar Marital Survey (N-37)

NO.	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	Responses					
		Negative Scores			Positive Scores		
		Pre-	Post		Pre	Post	
1.	I am very satisfied with how we handle our responsibilities in our household.	28%	27%		61%	65%	
2.	I am satisfied with our communication and feel that my partner understands me.	38%	25%		48%	51%	
3.	I am very satisfied with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.	38%	36%		39%	41%	
4.	I am very satisfied with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.	45%	38%		35%	46%	
5.	I am very satisfied with how we express affection and relate sexually.	34%	24%		48%	52%	
6.	I can express my true feelings to my partner.	29%	19%		59%	59%	
7.	At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want.	43%	41%		46%	49%	
8.	My partner is a very good listener.	38%	33%		50%	59%	
9.	I go out of my way to avoid conflicts with my partner.	16%	19%		58%	62%	
10.	At times I feel some of our differences never get resolved.	29%	30%		63%	54%	
11.	I think my partner is too involved with or influenced by his/her family.	54%	67%		34%	22%	
12.	I am worried that accepting financial assistance or advice from our families will cause problems for us.	54%	52%		25%	38%	

Response Keys: Strongly Disagree: S.D.; Disagree: D.; Not Sure: N.S.; Agree: A.; Strongly Agree: S.A.

## **Assessment, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

### Assessment

It is important to note that all twelve areas on the questionnaire that were evaluated showed impact of marital growth in the lives of the participants (see table 4). Of the twelve areas, eight showed significant impact of marital growth as a result of the Awareness Marital Seminar. Any question that showed movement growth of more than ten percent in the marital lives of the participants was assessed as showing significant impact. The movement growth in the negative category showed a decrease and the movement growth in the positive category showed an increase. A decrease in negative behavior or an increase in positive behavior is all one and the same, hence movement in any direction is considered positive growth in the marital relationship. A summary of these eight questions are discussed, in part, below.

Question 2. "I am satisfied with our communication and feel that my partner understands me." In the Pre-Seminar Survey of this question, twenty-one persons (38 percent) responded negatively on communication and understanding in their relationship. As the same question in the Post-Seminar Survey, nine persons (25 percent) responded negatively. This reflects a 13 percent decrease.

On the other hand, twenty-seven persons (48 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and nineteen persons (51 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue showed a 16 percent growth movement among the participants. This was an increase of 3 percent. Another way to interpret this growth movement is to say that the negative relationships get positive by 13 percent and the positive relationships improve by 3 percent. This indicates that the impact after the



seminar was significant—13 percent plus 3 percent equals 16 percent.

Question 4. “I am very satisfied with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.” In this question, twenty-five persons (45 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey responded negatively on how satisfied they are with how they manage their leisure activities and the time they spend with each other, while fourteen persons (38 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 7 percent decrease.

The positive scores were (35 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and (46 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey, an increase of 11 percent. Therefore the survey result on this issue has shown a movement of 7 percent in the negative and an 11 percent positive growth. This 18 percent growth increase in participant’s relationships demonstrates that the impact after the seminar was significant.

Question 5. “I am very satisfied with how we express affection and relate sexually.” In question 5 of the Pre-Seminar Survey, nineteen persons (34 percent) responded negatively on how satisfied they are with how they express affection and relate sexually, but in the Post-Seminar Survey, only nine persons (24 percent) responded negatively, a decrease of 10 percent.

However, twenty-seven persons (48 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and twenty persons (52 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue has shown a movement of 14 percent among the participants. The negative was decreased by 10 percent and the positive was increased by 4 percent. This result demonstrates that more couples were satisfied with how affection and sexuality were expressed in the relationship.

Question 6. “I can express my true feelings to my partner.” In question 6 of the Pre-Seminar Survey, sixteen persons (29 percent) responded negatively on how satisfied they are with how they express their true feelings to their partners, but in the Post-Seminar Survey, seven persons (19 percent) responded negatively, a decrease of 10 percent.

Thirty-three persons (59 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey, and twenty-two persons (59 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. There was no growth movement in the positive category. However, the survey result has shown a 10 percent growth movement among the participants, since 10 percent fewer participants in the Post-Seminar disagreed with the assertion that they can express their true feelings to their partners.

Question 8. “My partner is a very good listener.” In this question, twenty-one persons (38 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey responded negatively on how good a listener his/her partner is. However, twelve persons (33 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 5 percent decrease. This indicates reasonable impact growth occurs when it comes to good listening patterns in the marital relationship of the participants.

The positive result of the Pre-Seminar Survey showed stronger growth—twenty-eight persons (50 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and twenty-two persons (59 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue has shown a 14 percent movement among the participants. The movement in the negative category is 5 percent and the movement in the positive category is 9 percent. This result demonstrates that the impact after the seminar was

significant in bringing about marital change for the participants.

Question 10. “At times I feel some of our differences never get resolved.” Sixteen persons (29 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey responded negatively on how satisfied they are with some of their differences never being resolved while eleven persons (30 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 1 percent increase.

On the other side of the spectrum, thirty-five persons (63 percent) Pre-Seminar Survey and twenty persons (54 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue has shown a 10 percent movement among the participants in the right direction. The 1 percent movement in the negative category and the 9 percent movement in the positive category demonstrate that the impact after the seminar was significant.

Question 11. “I think my partner is too involved with or influenced by his/her family.” This question of the Pre-Seminar Survey shows that thirty persons (54 percent) responded negatively with the thought that their partners are too involved with their families; however, twenty-five persons (67 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 13 percent increase. Since a greater percentage responded negatively to a negative statement, it implies that the impact was significant. In other words, a greater percentage disagreed that their partners are too involved with their families. The movement from 54 percent to 67 percent shows that more families in the study realize that it is not a healthy thing to become too involved with or be influenced by his/her family.

It is interesting to note that nineteen persons (34 percent) in the Pre-Seminar

Survey and eight persons (22 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue has shown a 25 percent movement among the participants in the right direction. The movement in the negative category was 13 percent and the movement in the positive category was 12 percent. This result demonstrates that the impact after the seminar was outstanding. The findings show that a significant percentage of the participants understood that it is not healthy for dyads to be too involved with or influenced by their family of origin.

Question 12. “I am worried that accepting financial assistance or advice from our families will cause problems for us.” On this issue, thirty persons (54 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey responded negatively to the philosophy that accepting financial assistance or advice from their families will cause problems. Subsequently, nineteen persons (52 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 2 percent decrease after the seminar was administered. The evidence indicates that there is minimal impact as it relates to couples feeling worried that receiving assistance from their families will cause problems for them.

On the other hand, fourteen persons (25 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and fourteen persons (38 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue showed a 15 percent movement in the right direction among the participants. The movement in the negative category was 2 percent and the movement in the positive category was 13 percent. This result demonstrates that the impact after the seminar awakened an awareness among the participants.

As was discussed previously, all twelve questions showed some form of growth impact. This indicates that the Awareness Seminar was effective in the marital lives of

the participants, and if given the opportunity and the time, it can help to improve marital conditions among couples. The percentage of growth in the other four questions, even though smaller, helps to strengthen this point. For example:

Question 1. "I am very satisfied with how we handle our responsibilities in our household." Sixteen persons (28 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey of this question and ten persons (27 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects only a 1 percent decrease.

Thirty-four persons (61 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and twenty-four persons (65 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey answered positively, a 5 percent marginal movement among the participants. This minimal impact showed that with the appropriate time, the impact can even be greater.

Question 3. "I am very satisfied with how we make decisions and resolve conflicts." Twenty-one persons (38 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and thirteen persons (36 percent) in the post-seminar survey responded negatively on how satisfied they are with how they make decisions and resolve conflicts in the marital love of the participants. This reflects a 2 percent decrease.

Twenty-two persons (39 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and fifteen persons (41 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue demonstrates a 4 percent growth movement among the participants. Minimal growth impact is noted; however, hope for future progress is anticipated.

Question 7. "At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want." Twenty-four persons (43 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and fifteen persons (41

percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively. This reflects a 2 percent decrease after the seminar was administered.

Likewise, twenty-six persons (46 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and eighteen persons (49 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue has shown a 5 percent growth movement among the participants. This is a minimal growth impact, but it is a positive sign of the relevance of such an intervention.

Question 9. “I go out of my way to avoid conflicts with my partner.” Nine persons (16 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and seven persons (19 percent) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded negatively on the habit of going out of the way to avoid conflicts. This reflects a 3 percent increase after the seminar was administered.

Thirty-three persons (58 percent) in the Pre-Seminar Survey and twenty-three persons (62%) in the Post-Seminar Survey responded positively to the same issue. The survey result on this issue showed a 1 percent movement among the participants. Although it is only 1 percent, it is still worthy of note, and reflects growth in the right direction.

The impact of a marriage seminar on marital happiness is marginal in some instances and significant in others. One could conclude that it is feasible to expect a positive impact on marital happiness after hosting a marriage seminar as an intervention for troubled marital relationships. That is true, and that is why one of the recommendations of this research is that administrators, pastors, leaders, and churches conduct frequent Marriage Enrichment Workshops to help strengthen families.

## Conclusion

The problem of divorce and the deteriorating condition in many marriages in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad was the basis for this study. It was observed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad has had a history of strong marriages. This rich legacy needs to be preserved. The Church is perceived as a role model for families by many Christians in Trinidad. However, the current growing tolerance for divorce within the church threatens to undermine this positive perception.

Part of the problem the church is facing is that it is accepting into its membership new members, some of whom come from broken homes and dysfunctional families. The church, therefore, has an obligation to equip and enable these new members to establish strong families, and at the same time empower existing members. The Awareness Marital Seminar is one such tool that can be utilized by the Church to help in this area. There is still another problem that confronts the Church in Trinidad, and this might even be a larger one than the first. The practice of obtaining a divorce outside of biblical grounds among Seventh-day Adventist leaders and members has become prevalent, hence the justification for the project. Because of the magnitude of this problem, an entire chapter, chapter two, provides biblical foundations and guidelines for building stronger spiritual marriages

Married couples from six randomly selected Seventh-day Adventist churches in Trinidad between the ages of twenty-five and sixty years were selected to participate in this project. The sample size of the churches selected was a combination of two large (300 members), two medium (200 members), and two small (100 members) churches.

The duration of time for the involvement of the human subjects in this project was approximately four months.

The project involved a theological reflection of relevant biblical passages and relevant passages from the writings of Ellen G. White that addressed the predicament of divorce, the importance of the marriage covenant, and how to strengthen the marriage relationship. The literature review specialized in strengthening the marriage relationship and the vagaries of divorce were examined.

A questionnaire was developed and administered to the married couples to determine: (1) the quality of their relationship, (2) the strength of their communication, (3) the management of conflicts, (4) how they resolve issues, and (5) the impact of in-laws. The questionnaires were collected and the data analyzed.

A seminar to strengthen the marital relationship was developed based on the evaluation of the questionnaires. The seminar was administered at a site that the voluntary participants were informed of. The seminar consisted of five sessions that were administered to the participants.

After about four months, the same questionnaire was administered again to the participants who attended all of the sessions. The results were analyzed to determine the impact, if any, that the seminar had on their marital relationships. It was observed that the awareness seminar did have a significant impact on the marital happiness of many of the participants that if given a longer time for a longitudinal study, would have a greater impact.

The problem among Seventh-day Adventists was examined. From the data that was received from the statistical office of Trinidad and Tobago, it was observed that the



problem of divorce was growing dramatically. The problem in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, though not revealed from the data collected, was deduced from an analysis of the relevant information.

The application of the intervention strategy provided the participants with the information to experience change, growth, and renewal. The evidence of impact on the relationships of the participants was clear. Their positive responses to the majority of the statements in the post-seminar survey indicated that fact.

After the assessment and conclusion, some pertinent recommendations are provided as a contribution to the academic and professional discourse on this significant subject. The researcher is left to wonder what the positive results of marital relationships might be on the Island of Trinidad if the treatment of the Marital Awareness Seminar had been given years ago to a wider cross-section in Trinidad.

### Recommendations

The conclusions of the study have implications in two main areas: practice and future research. The research holds implications for counselors, family therapists, pastors, church members, and divorced and separated persons. Therefore, the recommendations are the following:

1. That clergy persons, counselors, and therapists be more supportive of marriage itself by taking seriously the responsibility for ongoing enrichment for the already married. The maxim that “prevention is better than cure” is very applicable in this particular instance. Especially in religious communities should this approach be encouraged, since the credibility of the larger family is dependent on the credibility of the smaller families.

2. That in dealing with those who are divorced or separated, one might recognize certain defensiveness on their part. Rather than criticizing them for it or being less accepting, one should move beyond their defense and try to understand their feelings of rejection. The counselor or therapist should always see himself/herself as an enabler or even a healer of broken relationships. In the hand of God, such facilitators are a blessing to hurting and broken relationships.

3. That those in the helping profession should understand that the failure of a marriage they have worked with does not mean that they have failed as professionals. The decision to divorce should not be the end of their involvement with the family; in fact, it should signal the beginning. It is important to realize that some relationships that end in divorce may mean the survival of the individuals involved.

4. That a replication of the study could be done using parishioners in other places. It would be helpful to compare the findings of these studies to determine if they can be made general.

5. That a correlation study could be conducted on the attitude of non-parishioners towards divorced/separated church members. It is assumed that while some issues may be common to both groups, both groups would have quite a different focus. Such a study could be helpful to counselors, parishioners, non-parishioners, and clergy persons.

6. That pastors may seek to conduct a "Needs Assessment" geared towards the divorced and separated, and then construct a program to meet those identified needs. It is assumed that from this assessment, important needs will emerge, such as (a) the need for a divorce/separation support group system; (b) the need for divorce/separation seminars; (c) the need for more sermons on the family, marriage, divorce, and separation; (d) the

need for divorced and separated persons to be visited and prayed with.

7. That pastors may provide for their parishioners exegetical teaching on the divorce passages. It is believed (based upon the seminars conducted) that if this subject is brought out in the open and given sound biblical teaching and practical application, parishioners will not only feel at ease with the subject of divorce and separation, but also will know how to relate to those who are divorced/separated.

8. That counselors, therapists, and pastors could utilize the “Awareness Seminar” that this study provided when working with other congregations addressing similar concerns.

9. That since the local church is usually viewed as a strong support of the family, it should access the services of professional counselors to help them develop the skills that would enable them to help families counter the forces that tend to destroy family life.

10. That parishioners should be aware of the concerns of divorced and separated church members as well as their own feelings towards them, and should seek in every possible way to accept those of their congregation who are divorced or separated.

## APPENDIX

### LETTER TO THE CHURCHES WHICH PARTICIPATED IN THE PROJECT

21 Miller's Drive

Mausica Road

D'Abadie

June 30, 2009

The Members of the Good News, Chin Chin, Tunapuna, Longdenville, Cleveland Temple, and Mt Dor Seventh-day Adventist Churches

Dear Members,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ. I write to you in the capacity as a doctoral student of Andrews University in the area of Family Ministry. To complete my course of study I must do a project that involves working with married couples between the ages 25 to 60. The project is intended to benefit those who will be worked with and eventually many others who may need such assistance.

Your church has been selected after a random process, and I will like to receive the support of the participants who are within the age category mentioned above. Your pastor will assist in this activity, thus we will be in contact with each other to help the process.

I desire to have a meeting with as many couples as possible at a time that will be worked out with the pastor. It will most likely be a Sabbath evening after AY, or a Sunday or Wednesday evening before the night service. After that initial meeting there will be continuous dialogue to facilitate the process.

This project will benefit my professional development, however, it will benefit the SDA families and others in this country and beyond. I am sure that you will like to be a part of a project that will enhance the quality of family relationships of members and non-members alike.

I thank you for your time and eventual cooperation.

Yours truly,

Kern Tobias,  
Project Coordinator of Family Ministry.

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## VITA

### **Contact Information:**

Name: Kern Tobias  
Address: 21 Miller's Drive, Mausica Road, D'Abadie, Trinidad, West Indies  
Telephone: Home: 868-646-0914; Work: 868-645-0278; Cell: 868-795-0006  
Email: tobbey\_ka@yahoo.com

### **Personal Information:**

Date of Birth: July 31, 1955  
Place of Birth: Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies  
Citizenship: Trinidad and Tobago  
Spouse: Linda Hislop Tobias (Married December 5, 1982)  
Children: Kerly-Ann, Kylon, and Linson

### **Employment History:**

Elementary Teacher: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1975
Ministerial Intern: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1979-1982
District Pastor: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1982-1993
Publishing Director: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1993-1995
District Pastor: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1995-1999
Conference President: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	1999-2003
District Pastor: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	2003-2006
Conference President: South Caribbean Conference of S.D.A.	2006- Present

### **Education:**

Caribbean Union College: 1975-1979, B.A. in Theology  
Andrews University: 1993-1997, M.A. in Religion  
Andrews University: 2003-2010, D.Min. in Family Ministry

### **Personal Qualification:**

Marriage Officer for the State of Trinidad and Tobago: 1985-2010  
Training in the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis: 2010

### **Interests:**

Pre-marital and marital counseling  
Lecturer at the university level