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ABSTRACT

TRAINING SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE IOWA-
MISSOURI CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTISTS TO MINISTER TO
COHABITING COUPLES

by

Jared S. Miller

Adviser: Jeffrey O. Brown

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: TRAINING SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE IOWA-MISSOURI
CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS TO MINISTER TO
COHABITING COUPLES

Name of researcher: Jared S. Miller

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD

Date completed: May 2018

Problem

The number of cohabiting couples has dramatically risen over the last several decades. Even a significant amount of Seventh-day Adventist Church members, both young and old, have chosen to live together apart from a committed marriage. Living together without the covenant of marriage comes with many risks and many negative effects on both adults and children. With the prevalence of cohabitation increasing, the church is faced with a new ministry challenge and opportunity. Churches need to be educated about the biblical theology of sexual intimacy and the dangers and damage that

come with cohabitation. Furthermore, churches need biblical strategies to minister faithfully to cohabiting couples.

Method

A three-part seminar and accompanying workbook were developed to train churches to minister to cohabiting couples. Two churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists were selected and agreed to individually participate in the seminar on two separate Sabbaths in August of 2017, respectively. In addition to sharing the biblical and scholarly research, three biblical and practical ministry suggestions were given so that ministry could be implemented. The effectiveness of the training seminar to educate and equip churches was measured by a pre-seminar and post-seminar survey. A combined total of 41 pre-seminar and 31 post-seminar surveys were completed. This cross-sectional quantitative quasi experimental research provided valuable data from both churches which was carefully analyzed and evaluated.

Results

The study revealed participants' improvement in three key areas that were measured: (a) knowledge of cohabitation, (b) comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples, and (c) willingness to minister to cohabiting couples. Additionally, 1/3 of participants in Iowa, and nearly 2/3 from Missouri, reported a change in view about cohabitation as a result of the seminar. Furthermore, a large majority of participants indicated the seminar helped them understand more clearly that sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

Conclusions

Based upon the participants' survey data, the training seminar did appear to have success in improving knowledge of cohabitation, as well as improving participants' comfort level and willingness to minister to cohabiting couples. The biblical ideal for sexual intimacy to occur only within a committed marriage, which is supported by much current research regarding the negative effects of cohabitation on adults and children, led many participants to more strongly disapprove of cohabitation. At the same time, the post-seminar survey revealed an increased number of participants believed that the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples. The apparent benefit of this seminar indicates the need for further research and continued training of churches.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

TRAINING SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE IOWA-
MISSOURI CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTISTS TO MINISTER TO
COHABITING COUPLES

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

by
Jared S. Miller
May 2018

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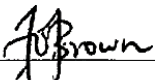
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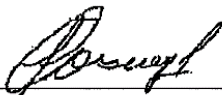
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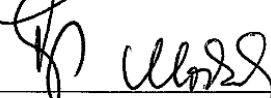
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank several people who have helped me on this journey. My friend Dr. Vic Van Schaik encouraged me to begin this journey, and has mentored and prayed for me through these years. My adviser, Dr. Jeffrey Brown, has been very helpful suggesting improvements to this document, as well as providing advice on how to move ahead with the actual project itself when it was in danger of getting stalled. My second reader, Dr. Claudio Consuegra, has also tremendously helped improve this document. I will not soon forget the sacrifice he made to help me complete this project by spending Christmas day reading and commenting on my document. I am also very appreciative of Dr. Ronald Flowers who provided encouragement and advice along the journey. I would also like to thank the Iowa-Missouri Conference administration who has believed in me and supported me in this time-consuming continuing education process. The Middle East North Africa Union and Lebanon Section have also supported me by giving time to complete this project. I am also very grateful to the St. Louis Central and Des Moines Church, who participated in my training seminar, and to their pastors who graciously welcomed me to their pulpits.

Lastly, I am thankful to my loving wife Katie, and our three amazing daughters, Angela, Andrea, and Eva. They have all supported and encouraged me through this process.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Ministry Context

The setting for this project was two churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In 2014, the conference had 110 churches with 11,358 members. Iowa and Missouri used to be separate conferences, but merged in 1980. The majority of members are Caucasian, however there are some Hispanic and multi-cultural churches in the larger cities.

According to the United States Census Brief (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012), 6.1% of all households in Missouri are unmarried partner households (cohabiting couples), while nearly 48.4% are married households. In other words, there are 144,912 cohabiting households in Missouri compared to 1,149,796 married households. In Iowa, 6.2% are unmarried partner households compared to 51.2% married households. That amounts to 75,738 cohabiting households and 625,447 married households.

In 2010, 74% of members in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists reported being married (58% to their first spouse, and 16% divorced then remarried). Of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), 18% of members reported living together before marriage. This is a slight increase from a 1993-1994 survey that revealed 15% of Adventists cohabited before marriage. Sahlin (2010)

concludes that cohabitation is “an established pattern of behavior among Adventists that does not appear to be changing” (p. 25). Approximately 40% of the Adventists surveyed reported cohabitation as a problem in their local church. Of the 40% that viewed cohabitation as a problem in their church, seven percent viewed it as a “big problem.”

Statement of the Problem

Data from society and the church clearly reveal the prevalence of cohabitation. The number of cohabiting couples in the United States has dramatically risen from 450,000 people in 1960 to more than 7.5 million in 2011 (Balswick & Balswick, 2014), though current research suggests the number is as high as 18 million (Stepler, 2017). As noted above, the prevalence of cohabitation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a significant problem. Nearly one in five (18%) Adventists reported living with their spouse before marriage, and 40% of Adventists reported cohabitation as a problem in their local church (Sahlin, 2010). People are hesitant to commit themselves by marrying, but still want the benefits of living with each other such as regular sex and shared rent (McManus & McManus, 2008). Cohabiting couples have a higher chance of separating than married couples, and their children are prone to worse life outcomes (Balswick & Balswick, 2014).

Cohabitation “threatens society morally and burdens it financially. Eight out of ten cohabiting relationships will fail before or after the wedding, which costs taxpayers a staggering \$185 billion a year” (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 6)

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a seminar that educates church leaders concerning the biblical position on cohabitation, the current research on the negative effects of cohabitation upon adults, children, church involvement, and which also trains them to minister redemptively to cohabiting couples. The one-day, three-part seminar in two selected churches of the Iowa-Missouri Conference, attempted to educate people about the dangers and risks of disregarding God's plan for marriage by cohabiting. It also trained church leaders to minister with grace to members and interests who are cohabiting, with the goal of encouraging couples to change their living arrangements in order to be in harmony with biblical principles.

Delimitations

This project was limited to two selected churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also limited to addressing cohabitation among unmarried heterosexual couples living together and having a sexual relationship.

Definition of Terms

The word *cohabit* comes from two Latin words: *co* "together" and *habitare* "dwell." The dictionary definition is to, "Live together and have a sexual relationship without being married" (*Oxford Dictionaries*, 2016). In addition, an online dictionary defines it as, "To live together as if married, usually without legal or religious sanction" (Dictionary.com, 2016). The etymology of the word dates to the 1530s as a euphemism for those who live together as if married, but who are not legally married (*Online Etymology*, 2016).

Description of the Project Process

The project process involved several components: the theological reflection, a review of current literature, the development of the project and its implementation, and an evaluation of the results of the project.

Theological Reflection

In order to present a theological position on cohabitation and sexual intimacy, the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) teachings were examined. The writings of Ellen G. White on sexual intimacy were also considered.

To begin, I reflected on God's ideal for sexual intimacy in the perfection of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2). After establishing Genesis 2 as the theological foundation for all future sexual relationships, our attention turned to the consequences of diverting from God's ideal, and how God consistently upheld the ideal throughout the OT.

The teachings of Jesus and Paul in the NT were then to be examined. The NT collectively upholds God's ideal established in the OT.

Ellen G. White's writings unflinchingly affirm the biblical ideal of sexual intimacy only within the context of marriage. She dealt firmly and faithfully in addressing couples who were living contrary to biblical principles.

Some Seventh-day Adventists have alternative views concerning cohabitation. One particular view will be addressed and refuted.

Literature Review

Current literature was reviewed on the most common reasons for cohabitation, the negative effects of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage on adults and children, how cohabitation affects couples' involvement in the church, the prevalence of cohabitation

inside and outside the church, and how churches are effectively ministering to cohabiting couples.

Initially, I researched cohabitation with journal articles and sections from various books that dealt with the subject. Additionally, I found several key books dealing with cohabitation which have been most helpful (McManus & McManus, 2008; Stanley, 2005; Stanton, 2011; VanGoethem, 2005).

Development of the Intervention

After establishing a theological position based on Scripture and Ellen G. White's writings, and reviewing current research concerning cohabitation and effective ministry to cohabiting couples, I collaborated with two larger churches (one in Missouri and one in Iowa) to conduct my project. I contacted the pastor of those selected churches to inquire of the church's willingness to participate in this project. After the churches agreed to participate, a date was scheduled to implement the seminar in each respective church. On the two separate Sabbaths when I implemented my project, I used the Sabbath morning Sabbath School time to present the first part of my seminar. The second part was presented during the sermon. Following a fellowship meal, I presented the third part of the seminar.

Structure of the Intervention

Before I made my first presentation, participants signed the informed consent paper, and I distributed an anonymous survey to measure four criteria: (a) level of knowledge about cohabitation in society and the theological foundations undergirding the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of sexual intimacy; (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting

couples; (d) if they have cohabited or knew of other cohabiting couples in the church. At the end of my seminar, I again had attendees complete the same survey, with a few additional questions. The second survey was compared with the first in order to analyze and determine if there was change in any of the first three levels measured. The overall goal of the pre-and post-seminar surveys was to determine if churches were better prepared to minister to cohabiting couples because of the training.

Both the pre- and post-surveys contained 21 identical questions. The questions measured four criteria mentioned above.

The knowledge of cohabitation category contained 14 questions. Of the 14 questions in that category, five related to the prevalence of cohabitation in society, and two questions related to the prevalence of cohabitation in the church. Four questions were of a more general nature concerning knowledge of cohabitation, and three questions related to the morality of cohabitation.

There were two questions related to the participants comfort level in ministering to cohabiting couples, and also two questions concerning their willingness to minister to cohabiting couples. Three questions related to if they had cohabited or known of other cohabiting couples in their church.

The post-survey added three more questions. One open-ended question asked participants for suggestions about how to improve the seminar. The other two questions asked participants to evaluate themselves regarding as to whether their view on cohabitation changed and if they had a clearer understanding of the biblical teaching as a result of the training.

Evaluation of the Survey Results

Chapter 5 presents an interpretive narrative about the project implementation, as well as data analysis and an evaluation of the survey results. Each of the two churches' results were analyzed individually and also compared with each other. Overall conclusions from the survey data, as well as the entire project, are given in Chapter 6. Additionally, recommendations are given for further study and implementation of ministry to cohabiting couples.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF COHABITATION

Introduction

In the perfection of the Garden of Eden, God established the institution of marriage. However, marital bliss did not last long due to Adam and Eve's disobedience of God, which negatively affected the marriage relationship immediately. Sexual perversions followed soon thereafter when Lamech, one of Cain's descendants, married two women (Gen 4:19). Before the book of Genesis ends, God's ideal for marriage has been hijacked by the devil's alternative, sexual immorality, which includes prostitution, rape, alcohol-induced incest, seductive invitations to commit adultery, and homosexual behavior.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to: (a) present the biblical ideal of sexual intimacy and purity found in the OT and NT, (b) reveal the Bible's clear position against sexual immorality, and explain how the increasingly common practice of cohabitation is out of harmony with Scriptural principles, (c) examine Ellen White's support for the biblical ideal and explain how she dealt with sexual immorality and even cohabitation in her day, (d) consider and refute an alternative Adventist view concerning cohabitation, and (e) outline three ministry strategies to minister to cohabiting couples with grace.

The Old Testament and Sexual Intimacy

God's Ideal for Sexual Intimacy

The Old Testament establishes clear principles and laws regarding sexual behavior and marriage. From creation, God established the pattern for all future marriages and sexual relationships (Hasel, 2015, pp. 25-26). Davidson (2007) asserts, "Gen 2:24 makes explicit that God's original design for sexuality and marriage in the relationship between Adam and Eve is set forth as a pattern for all future sexual relationships" (p. 16).

The terminology of Genesis 2:24 seems to establish a biblical theology of sexuality. It begins by stating a man shall leave his parents. According to Davidson (2007), the Hebrew word for leave is *azab*, which means "'to abandon, forsake,' and is employed frequently to describe Israel's forsaking of Yahweh for false gods" (p. 43). Both the man and his wife were to leave their parents, and physically and psychologically establish their own home. Their loyalty shifted from their biological family to the spouse for whom they were forsaking all others. Hasel (2015) adds that while this does not seem to be highly significant in the very independent Western world, for the traditional societies of the Middle East and East, the shifting of priority from biological family to the new wife is significant (p. 31). Leaving the parents also indicates that the man and woman are mature enough to provide for themselves. Furthermore, Brown and Brown (1999) suggest the word *azab* also can mean "to permit," from which they suggest "the man has to get the permission of the parents to unite himself with their daughter as his wife" (p. 37).

According to Hasel (2015), leaving father and mother involves a public action in

front of witnesses, including God and the couple's family members (pp. 31-32). "This public character of marriage derives from the fact that Adam and Eve did not celebrate any private arrangement but that God Himself brought Eve to Adam" (Hasel, p. 33).

Genesis 2:22 describes God bringing the newly created Eve to Adam. In the context of Eden, the marriage of Adam and Eve was public with God as witness and officiant.

Brown and Brown (1999) suggest that for Christians, marriage is a public statement of commitment to one's spouse.

Genesis 2:24 also describes the husband as cleaving unto his wife. Davidson (2007) suggests the Hebrew word *dabaq* is a technical term in the Old Testament used for making a covenant, and in the context of Genesis 2:24, a marriage covenant. Hasel (2015) adds, "The verb *dabaq* also expresses the idea of permanence" (p. 32). The language used in Genesis 2:22-24 is describing wedding vows, a mutual clinging to one another by the man and woman. The Edenic model of marriage involves leaving one's family and clinging to one's spouse in a strong covenant commitment.

Only after the leaving and cleaving takes place, is the first couple described as becoming one flesh. Brown and Brown (1999) emphasize the sequence is vitally important: first leave, then cleave, then become one flesh (p. 39). Thus, the pattern for all future marriage relationships is established: (a) Leaving one's family by placing priority and loyalty upon one's spouse; (b) Cleaving to one's spouse in a strong lifelong covenant commitment; (c) Becoming one flesh through sexual union. Brown and Brown (1999), Davidson (2007), and Hasel (2015) suggest becoming one flesh with one's spouse includes sexual union, but also has a broader meaning of being united physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The command given to the first couple lays the three-step

pattern of leaving biological family to start a new family, establishing the marriage covenant, and then experiencing sexual oneness. The biblical theology for sexuality is established in Genesis 2:24 in that it occurs only in an exclusive and permanently committed relationship (Hasel, p. 35). When exclusivity and a permanent and public commitment are present, only then is sexual intimacy enjoyed with Divine approval and blessing (Davidson, 2007, p. 337).

Two OT passages help us understand the view of marriage as a covenant. The first is found in Proverbs 2:16-17 (NIV), “It [discretion, understanding, wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.” The adulteress has ignored the marriage covenant that she made before God. The second OT example is found in Malachi 2:14 where a man is referred to as dealing treacherously with the wife of his “marriage covenant” (NIV). Bruinsma (2012) suggests the word “covenant” may be the best biblical term to describe marriage, as it includes the ideas of “permanence, the intimacy, the mutuality, and the exclusiveness of marriage” (p. 40).

Understanding the clear emphasis from Genesis 2:24 on the public leaving and the covenant cleaving to one’s spouse, Hasel (2015) emphasizes that the context of these principles is found in the perfection of Eden. Since these principles are already in place “before the entrance of sin, how much more is this protective and stabilizing framework essential after the Fall, when man because of his sinfulness is prone to be unreliable and unfaithful” (p. 35). The Divine pattern established in Eden is not followed in any way by modern cohabiting relationships.

Domanyi (2015) carefully addresses the question of what constitutes a marriage

relationship in the 21st century: the civil marriage, the church wedding, or the first time having sexual intercourse (p. 117). He suggests that confusion on this point may lead some to excuse premarital sexual behavior and that the civil aspect satisfies the general society's need to legitimize and give legal recognition to the newly married couple (p. 118). Likewise, the church wedding seeks the blessing and favor of God and believers. Domanyi concludes, "After the marriage between the spouses has been constituted, legally contracted, and placed under the guidance of God, the requirements have been fulfilled for the newlyweds to enjoy the dearest and most intimate relationship between a man and woman" (p. 119). In other words, couples are encouraged to have proper legal sanction from the state for their marriage, approval from God and the church, and only then may they enjoy sexual intimacy. Domanyi's position accurately harmonizes with the Genesis 2:24 pattern of leave, cleave, and then become one flesh.

The Torah and Sexual Immorality

Sexual oneness which occurs before the marriage covenant does not follow the Divine ideal established by God in Eden. Craigie (1976) shows from Deuteronomy 22 that there were severe consequences for sexual behavior outside the ideal established in Eden. We will only mention three cases, which, according to Merrill (1994), "[follow] an order of ascending or increasing degree of impropriety" (p. 302): (a) a woman who is discovered not to be a virgin on the wedding night (Deut 22:13-21); (b) a man who has sex with a betrothed woman (Deut 22:23-27); (c) a man who forces a single woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, to have sex with him (Deut 22:28-29).

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 explains the consequences of premarital sex in the context of a husband finding out his wife was not a virgin on their wedding night. If the young

woman's father and mother cannot provide evidence of her virginity, specifically a bloody cloth sheet, then the woman was to be stoned to death. Davidson's (2007) research reveals the seriousness of this sin:

First, the penalty is death. Second, she is to be executed by all the men of the city, indicating that this is an offense against the social order of the whole community as well as against her husband and father. Shame has been brought upon the honor of the community. Third, her act is described as *nebala*, a term used for serious disorderly and unruly conduct that violently threatens a breakdown in social order. Fourth, the seriousness of this offense is also underscored by describing the woman's action as "prostituting herself" (*zana*, having illicit sexual relations) while in her father's house (i.e., under his legal protection/jurisdiction). Finally, the gravity of the sexual offense is even further reinforced by the expurgation formula of v. 21: "So you shall purge the evil from your midst." (p. 358)

In this particular case, Craigie (1976) and Davidson (2007) note that the deceitfulness of the woman in claiming to be a virgin when she knows she is not, along with the actual premarital sexual behavior, makes this a sin worthy of the death penalty.

Deuteronomy 22 then moves on to the case of a woman betrothed to a man, which is a stronger commitment than a modern-day engagement, and which included paying the bride's family money for her. If another man had sex with the betrothed woman, the consequences were severe. If the incident took place in the city, and the woman did not cry out for help, then both she and the man were to be stoned to death (Deut 22:23-24). In this case Scripture forcefully declares, "So you shall put away the evil from among you" (Deut 22:24). In this situation, even though the woman has not consummated the marriage and left her father's house, the consequences of premarital sex with another man is the death penalty, which is also the equivalent penalty for committing adultery (Deut 22:22). However, if the incident took place in the country, then only the man would be put to death since the woman might have cried out, but no one could hear her cry for help and come to her aid (Deut 22:25-27).

The third case of premarital sex mentioned in Deuteronomy 22 involves a man who seizes a single woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, and forces her to have sex with him. In other words, he rapes her. Exodus 22:16-17 is similar to Deuteronomy 22:28-29, yet has some “major difference” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 406). In Deuteronomy 22, the premarital sex has several consequences: (a) the man has to pay the full bride price of 50 shekels, (b) the man is required to marry the woman, (c) the man will not be allowed to divorce her throughout his entire life. Davidson (2009) notes, “The force of this legislation was to discourage pre-marital sex, and to transition those who engaged in it into marriage (if advisable), with stipulations to insure the stability and permanence of their married relationship” (p. 3).

Exodus 22:16-17 introduces the aspect of seduction, where the man seduces the woman into premarital sex, in contrast to Deuteronomy 22 where there is seizing and forcing, rather than seducing. The consequences are: (a) he has to pay full bride price and marry the woman, (b) the woman’s father can refuse to give her to the man in marriage, (c) the man would still be required to pay part of the bride price for the woman since it would be more difficult for the family to receive full bride price for her since she was no longer a virgin.

Craigie (1976), Davidson (2007), and Stuart (2006) have found this legislation to be very balanced and protective of the family, the woman, and society in general. First of all, in Deuteronomy 22, the temporary pleasures of the sexual encounter would be weighed by both the man and woman against the knowledge that should they get caught, they would be required to get married to each other, and have no possibility of divorce. This protects the woman from a lustful man who wants sex but does not want

commitment, and it also provides security for her both financially and socially (Craigie, 1976; Davidson, 2015). The fact that in Exodus 22, the father has “veto” power, so to speak, protects the girl from being forced to marry a man who intended to force her into marriage by having sex with her. The father’s decision also protected the family because it prevented the lady from manipulating the choice of the marriage partner by sleeping with the man she would like to marry.

Davidson (2007) concludes:

The provision that the father was not required to have his daughter marry the one who seduced her seems also to provide further evidence within Scripture for the conclusion that sexual intercourse per se does not constitute a marriage. As with God’s ideal in Eden, the “cleaving” (or marriage covenant) was to come before the “becoming one flesh” (sexual intercourse). But even if there is sexual intercourse before the formalizing of the marriage covenant, this does not automatically mean that the sexual partners are married. (p. 361)

God upholds the pattern He created in Eden whereby the marriage covenant is to precede the sexual union. Legislation long after Eden still upheld that ideal, and there were severe consequences for not abiding by God’s pattern for marriage and sexual relationships.

The religious legislation regarding premarital sex in Leviticus involves a man who has sex with a slave woman who is betrothed to another man (Lev 19:20-22). The legislation here is quite different from that in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In this particular situation, the death penalty is not imposed on either the man or the woman. Davidson (2007) and Wenham (1979) find that the death penalty cannot be imposed in this situation due to the slave status of the woman, yet the free man does not face that severe judgment either. Yet one thing is clear about this case: their premarital sexual activity was morally wrong, a sin, and therefore a sacrifice was required to atone for the

sin. Wenham (1979) emphasizes it was “a grave sin demanding the dearest kind of sacrificial atonement” (p. 270).

While in this case, the couple is not put to death, forced to marry, or to pay the bride price, it shows that God views premarital sex as a sin which requires a sacrifice. At the same time, it also shows that God is willing to forgive premarital sexual sin.

The legislation regarding sexual behavior in the Pentateuch is not there to ruin people’s fun. Rather, it is there to protect “the exclusive sacred bonds between husband and wife within the Eden institution of marriage” (Davidson, 2007, p. 364). The legislation ultimately protects the woman’s biological family, the woman herself, and the man, respectively.

Davidson (2009) suggests, “While Pentateuchal legislation does not directly address the practice of [consensual] cohabitation, it does deal with the foundational premise upon which cohabitation is based—the right for men and women to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage” (p. 3).

Samson and Sexual Immorality

Samson’s story includes three different women. The first woman was his Philistine wife whom he lost when his father-in-law gave her away to his friend (Judg 15:2). She and her father end up dead through a series of violent attacks and counterattacks between Samson and the Philistines. The second woman mentioned is a Philistine prostitute whom Samson visits, and has to leave in the middle of the night because he learns that the Gazites were outside the residence waiting to kill him in the morning. The third woman is Delilah, who, according to Davidson (2007), may have actually been an Israelite (p. 318). Christo (2007) suggests Samson visited her at least

four times or more (p. 58). Exactly how long this relationship lasted is not revealed in the text, but it did go on for some time as indicated by the statement that Delilah “pestered him daily with her words and pressed him” (Judg 16:16). Theirs may have been a short-term cohabiting relationship.

Davidson (2007) summarizes Samson’s story well, “Wholesome sexuality degenerates into sensuality and sentimentality; the spiritual dimension is ignored in the self-centered search for what ‘pleases me well’ (14:3 RSV)” (p. 309). In the same way, cohabitation today exchanges wholesome sexuality for the self-centered search for physical and emotional pleasure, while ignoring the spiritual component in God’s pattern for marriage and sexual intimacy.

Absalom and Sexual Immorality

During Absalom’s rebellion against his father, King David, he was advised by Ahithophel to have sex with the 10 concubines his father had left in his Jerusalem palace when he fled (2 Sam 16:20-22). This case involves incest (Lev 18:8) and an utter despising of Pentateuchal law (Deut 22:30), and certainly an abandonment of anything resembling the Edenic model for marriage and sexual behavior.

Absalom committed adultery and incest in rebellion against God’s prescription for marriage and sexual behavior. His life comes to a swift end, and the biblical record includes the detail that 10 of Joab’s men strike him and kill him (2 Sam 18:15). It is interesting to note the men numbered 10, and Absalom slept with 10 of David’s concubines. According to the Jewish Talmud, as quoted by Nichol (1980a), “Absalom gloried in his hair; therefore he was hanged by his hair. And because he cohabited with the ten concubines of his father, therefore he was stabbed with ten lances” (p. 996).

David and Bathsheba's sexual sin also negatively affected Absalom's brother Amnon, who raped his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-18). Absalom was so infuriated by Amnon's lustful act that he ended up having him murdered (2 Sam 13:28-29). Unfortunately, his fury at his brother's sexual sin did not deter his own sexual sin with his father's concubines.

Israel and Sexual Immorality

Ezra 9-10 depicts a situation that may be very similar to today's common practice of cohabitation. Israel had just returned from their Babylonian captivity, and Ezra finds that many of his people have married pagan women.

This case is very unique in Scripture. Ezra calls upon all those who have married pagan women to "do [God's] will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives" (Ezra 10:14). As a result of Ezra's call to reform, "Seventeen priests, ten Levites, and eighty-three or eighty-four lay Israelites" sent away their wives (Breneman, 1993, p. 162; also see Davidson, 2015).

A recent study by Davidson (2009) discovered:

These unions were probably not regular legal marriages, but a kind of "live-in arrangement" or "cohabitation which may eventuate in formal marriage." The swift and severe reactions of Ezra . . . against these sexual unions probably stem from the fact that they not only constituted cohabitation, but also involved divorce of previous wives without due cause, and (especially) that they involved uniting with women who were practicing idolaters (in blatant disregard of Deut 7:1-5). (p. 3)

Breneman (1993) and Davidson (2015) suggest the original Hebrew words used in Ezra 9-10 reveal that Ezra did not use the common language of the day to describe putting away by divorce. The explanation is that "these marriages, once they were recognized to be a direct violation of the command of the Torah, were not considered legitimate, valid marriages" (Davidson, 2015, p. 194). Since these were invalid

marriages, the normal word for divorce is not used. Others have noted it is possible these were illegal and not true marriages (Breneman, 1993, Fensham, 1982).

The Old Testament and Sexual Purity

As noted above, Scripture does not directly address cohabitation, but it does address the foundational premise of cohabitation which is engaging in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage covenant. With this in mind, it is worth noting that the Old Testament places a high value on virginity as noted above in Exodus 22 and Deuteronomy 22 (see also Kovar, 2015). Hasel (2015) emphasizes that the importance of remaining a virgin until marriage is implicit in the foundational principles for marriage established by God as recorded in Genesis 2. “Abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage is the biblical mandate from the beginning. . . Before marriage began through an official and public act, no sexual intercourse was allowed” (p. 40).

Examples of the importance of virginity are plentiful in the OT: (a) Abraham’s servant found the beautiful virgin Rebekah for Isaac (Gen 24:16, 43); (b) the high priest was not permitted to marry anyone except a virgin (Lev 21:13-14); (c) Absalom murdered his brother Amnon because he raped their virgin sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-39); (d) Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi took vengeance on Shechem (and his father and all the males of his city) by murdering him (and them) for his disgraceful rape of their virgin sister in Genesis 34 (Davidson, 2007, pp. 340, 512-518).

The New Testament and Sexual Intimacy

The NT strongly reaffirms the principles and teachings regarding sexual behavior found in the OT. Hasel (2015) writes, “Jesus, Paul, and the New Testament church were unanimous in upholding fidelity in marriage by rejecting any premarital or extramarital

sex” (p. 44). One interesting fact is that Jesus’ first public miracle occurred during a public wedding celebration, which emphasizes Jesus’ approval of the marriage relationship and the continued importance in the NT of witnesses to that marriage covenant. In the NT, marriage continues to have the same public nature and social importance as it had in the OT. In addition, “The companionship of husband and wife was ordained of God as the ideal environment in which to mature a Christian character” (Nichol, 1980a, p. 337). Within the context of a public leaving of the family of origin, a covenant cleaving to one’s new spouse, and the sexual intimacy that follows, is the ideal environment whereby Christians grow. Since sexual relationships outside of a covenant marriage are forbidden by Scripture, cohabiting couples do not have the ideal environment for Christian growth, as they are in direct violation of biblical marriage.

Jesus’ Ideal for Sexual Intimacy

In Matthew 5:32 Jesus teaches that divorcing one’s wife for any reason except *porneia* (sexual immorality), causes the woman to commit adultery if she were to marry again, and the man who marries the divorced woman would also be guilty of adultery. The reason for this is because the woman’s “first marriage was not dissolved on biblical grounds, [and so] it has not come to an end” (Mueller, 2015, p. 213).

As has been shown thus far, cohabitation does not follow the divinely established pattern for marriage and sexual intimacy. Therefore, cohabitation would be considered as sexual immorality, as described by the Greek word *porneia* which is a “general term applying to illicit sexual relationship” (Nichol, 1980a, p. 337).

The exception clause, “except for sexual immorality,” demonstrates the significance of God’s disfavor of sexual intimacy outside the bounds of His pattern

established from creation. The context of Matthew 5:32 applies to a marital relationship, but the seriousness of the sin of *porneia* is the only reason Jesus gives whereby the innocent marriage partner is permitted to remarry (Mueller, 2015, p. 214). In other words, sexual unfaithfulness in the context of marriage is so damaging that God permits the innocent party to divorce and remarry someone else because of that transgression. In addressing cohabitation, the OT and Jesus in the NT make it clear that, “As important as virginity before marriage is faithfulness in marriage” (Hasel, 2015, p. 41).

Jesus’ teaching on marriage and sexual immorality later in Matthew 19:1-12 is very similar to what He taught in Matthew 5. The Matthew 19 passage is much longer, and more comprehensive. In it, Jesus quotes from Genesis 1 and 2 in reaffirming God’s ideal for marriage from the beginning of human existence (Hasel, 2015, p. 44). Mueller (2015) suggests that Jesus clarified that the words of Genesis 2:24 were not the words of Moses, the author of Genesis, but actually the words of God the Father (pp. 220-221). Jesus then declares, “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt 19:6b). No other higher authority can be claimed than what God Himself has done in joining a couple together (Mueller, p. 221).

J. V. Brownson (as cited in Mueller, 2015, p. 222), makes an excellent statement regarding the reason for the permanency of the marriage relationship.

The permanence of the one-flesh union is analogous to all other kinship ties. We never cease to be parents, children, brothers, or sisters, and these identities carry with them certain obligations to others. So why should our identity as spouses, and the attendant obligations to our spouses be any different? . . . this text envisions a greater stability in the one-flesh union than in any other kinship tie. Indeed, the Genesis account seems to assume that the one-flesh union is the foundation of every other kinship bond.

To the Pharisees initial question about divorce, Jesus answers that there are no

legitimate reasons for divorce based upon the creation order (Mueller, 2015, p. 220).

“Marriage is indissoluble. Divorce is not an option. With this categorical statement Jesus takes a clear stand against divorce” (p. 223).

The Pharisees’ second question to Jesus concerns why Moses “commanded” them to give a certificate of divorce. Jesus clarifies that Moses did not “command” but rather “permitted” them to get divorced because of the hardness of their hearts (Mueller, 2015, p. 224). Jesus again references the beginning of time as God’s ideal pattern (Gehring, 2013). He then repeats the same exception clause almost identical to Matthew 5:32, but in Matthew 19:9 Jesus says both the spouses would be guilty of committing adultery if they remarried for any reason except sexual immorality. Davidson (2015) emphasizes that Jesus’ teaching about sexual immorality being a valid reason for divorce and remarriage by the innocent party is equivalent to the sexual immorality of the OT that warranted the death penalty. “Matthew has the exception clause to preserve the meaning of Jesus’ words in a setting where the death penalty for *porneia* was no longer in effect (the death penalty for adultery was abolished in about AD 40)” (Davidson, 2015, p. 200).

Jesus’ emphasis on the permanency of marriage and that divorce is not an option leads the disciples to conclude that if that is the case, then it is better not to marry (Matt 19:10). Jesus’ response to His disciples is that not all can accept the option of not marrying, but some can. Those who can accept it are referred to by Jesus as eunuchs. Several types of eunuchs are described, but all have one thing in common: they either do not (because of their choice) or cannot (because they lack proper genitalia) engage in sexual intercourse. In other words, those who are unable to accept the permanent covenant relationship of marriage have one option: celibacy. Cohabiting in a marriage-

like relationship without the permanency of a covenant marriage is not an option. Such an arrangement would be considered sexual immorality which is forbidden by Scripture.

Paul and Sexual Immorality

Paul's teaching on sexual immorality is very clear, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess 4:3). Paul is categorically declaring all forms of sexual immorality (*porneia*) such as adultery, premarital sex, cohabitation, homosexual sex, incest, etc., contrary to the will of God. God's will for our sexuality is holiness (1 Thess 4:7), not passionate lust like the Gentiles (1 Thess 4:5).

Additionally, Paul suggests that to commit sexual immorality is actually to defraud a brother (1 Thess 4:6). Nichol (1980c) suggests Paul is teaching that, "Fornication is a form of robbery, since it takes that which rightfully belongs to another" (p. 244). In other words, by committing sexual immorality a man robs another man of his future wife's virginity and sexual innocence (Hasel, 2015, p. 46). Paul makes it clear that no matter how secret this sinful action may be, God knows, and God is the one who will judge and take vengeance on such sinful behavior (1 Thess 4:6). Therefore, Hasel concludes "that no one has the right to be [sexually] promiscuous before, during, or after marriage. . . Thus virginity and abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage is the ideal maintained in the New Testament" (p. 46).

Paul's emphasis in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 may be considered preventative counsel for individuals who are not yet married, and also counsel for those who are already married. Both singles and those who are married are called to sanctification, holiness, and to abstain from all forms of sexual immorality.

The church in Ephesus is urged that there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality among them (Eph 5:3). In fact, Paul says the sins of sexual immorality should not even be named among God's people, the saints. Nichol (1980b) suggests that what Paul means is, "it should be unnecessary to discuss them [sins of sexual immorality], for they should not exist among the saints" (p. 1032). Unfortunately, the sins of sexual immorality do indeed exist among the saints today, including cohabitation. However, Paul's appeal is that it should not be an issue for God's people if they were faithful to His revealed will.

People who commit sexual sins are listed on Paul's list of unrighteous people who will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven (1 Cor 6:9-10). Fornicators, adulterers, sodomites, and those who practice homosexuality are the people listed whose behavior is classified as sexual immorality. They are classified along with idolaters, thieves, drunkards, etc., who will be lost. Paul could not be clearer: the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom. On the other hand, Jesus suggests the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8). Yet there is hope because Paul says, "Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). The sin of sexual immorality is not the unpardonable sin. Those who have sinned sexually may be washed (forgiven) by God's grace, and sanctified (made holy) through the indwelling Christ.

Since cohabitation is a form of fornication or sexual immorality, Paul would declare that those cohabiting will not inherit the kingdom of God. But there is hope for the cohabiters if they repent, are washed, sanctified, and justified. Paul's referencing of the Corinthians as "such *were* some of you" indicates the Christians in Corinth had

experienced redemption and transformation from their old sinful lives. Paul's emphasis on redemption gives hope for anyone who has sinned sexually, or in any other way.

According to Nichol (1980b, pp. 701-703) Paul makes six arguments in 1 Corinthians 6 against sexual immorality: (a) "the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord" (v. 13b); (b) God will not destroy believers' bodies ultimately, but will resurrect them like He resurrected Christ (v. 14), and therefore proper care ought to be given to the body now; (c) Christians have given all to Christ, including their physical bodies, and therefore should not give their bodies to others through fornication (vv. 15-17); (d) committing sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body (v. 18b); (e) the bodies of believers are temples of the Holy Spirit (v. 19a); (f) Christian's are not their own, but have been bought by Christ, and therefore should glorify God in their bodies (vv. 19b-20).

In the midst of Paul's arguments against sexual immorality, he appeals to "flee sexual immorality" (v. 18a). Joseph is the shining biblical example of such behavior—fleeing from Potiphar's wife when she wanted to have sex with him (Gen 39:1-21). Nichol (1980b) correctly understands Paul's counsel, "The temptation to fornication may often prove so subtle that a person is safe only by fleeing from it" (p. 702).

Paul goes on to declare in 1 Corinthians 7:2, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality [*porneia*], let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." For Paul, one answer to sexual immorality is marriage (Oliver & Oliver, 2015, p. 52), another answer is singleness and celibacy (1 Cor 7:7-9). As it relates to cohabitation, clearly Paul's counsel to a couple is that a committed marriage is the solution to their sexual needs. The sexual immorality that Paul refers to is inclusive of

cohabiting. Therefore, Paul's solution to a couple that desires to be sexually active is that they should publicly commit to each other in marriage before engaging in sexual intimacy. That is why Paul referred back to the original pattern for marriage established in Eden throughout his writings (1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31).

The Temple and Sexual Immorality

In the middle of Paul's teaching above, he writes, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are" (1 Cor 3:16-17). In the OT, engaging in various sexual sin is referred to as defiling oneself (Lev 18:24). Paul affirms that point by teaching that sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body (1 Cor 6:18-19). Clearly, sexual sin is defiling one's own body, which is the temple of God, with the resulting consequences of eternal destruction for those who are not repentant.

Paul teaches the body temple is a "member of Christ," and is intended to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, "whom you have from God" (1 Cor 6:15, 19). Paul reinforces the teaching of the body as a temple by citing the three Persons of the Godhead, who bought humanity at a high price (1 Cor 6:20). Humans, therefore, are called to live a holy life, abstaining from sexual immorality. For those who have accepted Christ, the new reality is that their body is no longer their own, it is God's. They have a responsibility to care for and protect it, not defile or sin against it. For Paul, that means joining one's body to a prostitute is forbidden (1 Cor. 6:15-16). Likewise, cohabiting would be defiling the body temple, sinning against it, and so those who follow Christ will choose not to do so. They who are one with the Lord will not defile their

body temple, but will instead follow God's plan for marriage and enjoy His approval of their union.

Additionally, all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse or rape, would be prohibited, as they are acts by one person which destroy the body temple of another person. All forms of child abuse would also be included. Paul teaches that the bodies of other people should be respected by all.

Hebrews and Sexual Immorality

Hebrews 13:4 declares emphatically, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (NASB). Knight (2003) concludes that marriage is upheld as the biblical pattern and only legitimate relationship wherein sexual intimacy may be enjoyed (p. 243). The fact that the marriage bed can be defiled is indicated by the text. In fact, the second part of the verse clarifies that it is by the actions of fornicators and adulterers that the marriage bed becomes defiled. Paul's teaching is a clear encouragement for sexual purity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage, and a clear warning for those who disregard God's laws.

In reference to Hebrews 13:4, Szalos-Farkas (2015) suggests, "The Scriptures do recognize the divine gift of marital sexual attraction and love approved of...and even kindled by the Trinitarian God" (p. 138). Mazat (as quoted in Chamberlain, 2008) affirmed, "God meant sex to be a transcendently wonderful experience for husbands and wives" (p. 226). Van Pelt (2001) also upholds the marriage relationship as the only legitimate context for sexual intimacy.

On the other hand, the Scriptures do not suggest anywhere that sexual intimacy

can be enjoyed in any other context than marriage, including cohabitation. Brown and Brown (1999) summarize the biblical position well when they write, “The Bible tells us it’s fine to be single and it’s fine to be married. It’s also fine to be engaged, but since marriage is not a game, don’t play pretend marriage” (p. 39).

In Hebrews, God makes a clear distinction between the marriage bed and the bed of adulterers or fornicators. A bed is a bed, and people are people, but the difference between the marriage bed and any other bed is God’s blessing and approval upon it. With God’s approval, the married couple can fully enjoy sexual oneness upon the marriage bed. Marriage makes all the difference in God’s eyes. It was His idea in the beginning.

The New Testament and Sexual Purity

The importance of virginity in the OT carries over to the New Testament and remains consistent (Hasel, 2015). Mary and Joseph are one example of an official betrothal (similar to engagement) where Mary’s status is repeated several times as a virgin or not knowing (sexually) a man (Luke 1:27, 34). She and Joseph, in harmony with the Genesis 2:24 pattern of leaving and cleaving taking place before becoming one flesh, were waiting to be sexually intimate until the marriage covenant was sealed by the public leaving of family and public commitment before God and other witnesses (Kovar, 2015).

Hasel (2015) suggests another demonstration of the expectation of virginity and sexual purity before marriage is found in 2 Corinthians 11:2, “For I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin” (NASB). The betrothal is similar to an engagement, and Paul clarifies that in this context the church is to be like a

pure virgin—one who has not been sexually intimate with anyone else. Likewise, the church is not to be spiritually intimate with any other god, as also indicated in the first commandment of the Decalogue (Exod 20:3; cf. Matt 4:10; 6:33).

Cohabitation does not follow the biblical pattern of Genesis 2:24; nor does it follow the biblical ideal of virginity and sexual abstinence before marriage. In fact, the practice of cohabitation disregards what both the OT and NT present as the pattern and ideal. Wittschiebe (1974) concurs,

The Scriptures label sex between unmarried persons as fornication . . . and consistently condemn it as conduct unbecoming to a Christian. . . We do not regard premarital sex as something culturally determined. The wrongness of fornication, for the Christian, is not a matter for society to decide. (p. 190)

Sexual Intimacy in the Writings of Ellen G. White

The writings of Ellen G. White, one of three founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, have provided highly valued counsel on numerous biblical topics, including sexual behavior.

Letters Concerning Premarital Sexual Activity

In 1879, Ellen White wrote to an Adventist young man named Chapin Harris who was romantically involved with a young lady named Mattie Stratton. According to White (1990), they were clearly engaging in premarital sex:

Conducting [themselves] as only man and wife should conduct themselves towards each other. . . . Your behavior is unbecoming and unchristian. When you should both be in your beds you have been in one another's society and in one another's arms nearly the whole night. (pp. 217-218)

Ellen White wrote strong letters of rebuke to Chapin for this sexually immoral relationship. Ellen White spoke about activity between Chapin and Mattie that would “make angels blush” (p. 223). She stated that Chapin would not have become involved in

sexual immorality except that he was under the bewitching power of Satan (p. 224) and that their behavior had brought the frown of God upon themselves and the church (p. 219), and they were negatively influencing others (Fortin & Moon, 2014). Chapin and Mattie's behavior was referred to as sin, offensive to God, and White even warned Chapin, "You are risking your eternal interest in the company of this girl" (p. 216). In White's view, Chapin was "[trifling] with eternal things" (p. 219). She viewed this as a salvation issue, and appealed to the couple to confess and repent of their sin (pp. 227-228).

Concerning how the church should have handled the situation, White (1879) wrote, "Chapin should have been released from every responsibility in the cause of God when he showed no disposition to heed the light given. The rebuke of the church should have been upon him" (para. 9).

According to Fortin and Moon (2014), Chapin ended up marrying Mattie, and in 1902 he wrote a letter thanking Ellen White for her "kind interest in me and for the way in which you brought to me the message of reproof and warning" (p. 402).

While White indicates premarital sex makes the angels blush, concerning marital sex she declared (1952), "Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy vigils will hallow the marriage chamber" (p. 94). There is clearly a dividing line between unholy and holy sexual activity. In the context of marriage, sexual activity is looked upon with favor by God and all of His angels. Any sexual activity outside of the committed marriage relationship is a sin against God. Ellen White upheld God's ideal pattern for marriage and sexual intimacy as established in the Garden of Eden. White (1989) writes, "Marriage was from the creation constituted by God a divine ordinance.

The marriage institution was made in Eden” (p. 159).

A Vision Reveals a Cohabiting Couple

Early in the ministry of Ellen White, she and her husband James went to visit the town of Camden, NY. Prior to going there, God showed Ellen a lady who was deceiving His people. On Sabbath they met her, and she claimed to be a sincere and faithful follower of God. The following day, Sunday, James had difficulty preaching with clarity, so he called the group to pray together. During prayer, Ellen received a vision of the deceptive woman again. The woman was “represented to me as being in perfect darkness. Jesus frowned upon her and her husband” (White, 1922, p. 132). After receiving the vision from God, she shared the message with the group with “trembling, yet with faithfulness.” The deceptive woman initially denied what Ellen had seen, and claimed God knew she was righteous.

A short time later, however, the woman confessed that she had been deceiving the people. She had been living with a man for several years, and had deceived everyone into believing he was her husband. She had actually been married to another man and had a child with him, but then abandoned them. She had been cohabiting with this other man for years. White (1922) explained that the woman, “Even went from house to house among her unbelieving neighbors, and confessed that the man she had been living with for years was not her husband... Many other wicked acts she confessed. Her repentance seemed to be genuine, and in some cases she restored what she had taken wrongfully” (p. 133). This is one clear example of where Ellen White refers to an adulterous cohabiting relationship as wicked. Fortunately, it ended with the woman confessing her sin in genuine repentance.

Ellen White on Sexual Immorality

Fornication, or sexual immorality, is condemned as sin throughout the writings of Ellen White. She wrote (1948), “I have seen that Satan is leading the minds of even those who profess the truth to indulge in the terrible sin of fornication” (p. 478). The principle by beholding we become changed is the reason she suggests Seventh-day Adventists have sunken into the sin of fornication. Essentially, it has been a gradual process of beholding the sensual and lustful ways of the world.

Since Adventists have such great light, White (1948) writes, “If they [commandment keepers] commit fornication or adultery, their crime is of tenfold greater magnitude than” those who do not believe obedience to the law is required (p. 451). In other words, Seventh-day Adventists, as believers in the importance of keeping God’s moral law, are held to a higher standard because of the great light God has shown to us.

How should the church respond to the fornication which is taking place among members? According to White (1923), the camp should be cleansed of all fornicators or adulterers. Rank or position does not matter; even those in the highest positions of the church should be removed from leadership if they are found to be committing fornication or adultery (pp. 427-428).

A Different Perspective

Bruinsma (2012) has a much different view, and disagrees with Brown and Brown (1999), Davidson (2007), and Hasel (2015) concerning the Genesis 2:24 theology of sexuality. He does not see in the text any mandate to get public approval, permission, or blessing from parents. His definition of marriage is a “clear commitment of both partners...to love and support each other, [and] to stay together permanently in an

exclusive sexual relationship” (p. 41). With that as his definition of marriage, he suggests that some cohabiting relationships are “quite indistinguishable from biblical marriage” (p. 41).

Concerning whether the Seventh-day Adventist Church should oppose all cohabiting relationships, administer church discipline when necessary (including excluding cohabiters from serving in church leadership positions), and encourage cohabiting couples to either get married or abstain from sexual relations, Bruinsma suggests a “more fruitful approach” (p. 41).

Bruinsma believes the church should uphold the biblical ideal of “monogamous, lifelong, committed, exclusive, heterosexual relationships” (p. 41), but instead of condemning cohabiting couples who fall short of that ideal, he suggests encouraging them towards that ideal. Bruinsma seems to have conceded that cohabiting couples who have those biblical ideals are equivalent to married couples, and that the public commitment, permission, and blessing from parents is not necessary. He is not concerned with the “label human beings” give to a relationship, such as a marriage certificate, but is more concerned that a couple makes a covenant to join their lives together with God as their sole witness (p. 42).

Furthermore, Bruinsma suggests those who cohabit should not be excluded from holding church office simply because they have not formally married. He suggests some married couples’ relationships are less in harmony than some cohabiting couples with his view of biblical ideals, and therefore the cohabiters would be more qualified to serve in church office (pp. 41-42).

A Response to a Different Perspective

The biblical theology of sexuality from Genesis 2:24 is supported throughout the rest of the Old and New Testaments, along with the writings of Ellen G. White. It is evident that the biblical definition of marriage includes the leaving of father and mother, and cleaving to one's spouse. As explained above, this includes a public and permanent commitment, which includes asking permission from the woman's family.

Bruinsma's (2012) alternative view and arguments are unconvincing. His definition of the biblical ideal for marriage is missing a key component of Genesis 2:24, specifically, leaving father and mother, which is the public commitment and which includes getting family permission and blessing upon the union. Bruinsma's view fits more into the secular view that the joining of two lives together in a cohabiting relationship is an individual choice alone, and the familial support and public commitment, is unnecessary and should be discarded.

Furthermore, Bruinsma's assumption is that cohabiting couples make a conscious choice and serious commitment before God prior to becoming sexually intimate and moving in together. However, Stanley (2017) states, "Sociologists Wendy Manning and Pamela Smock conducted a qualitative study of cohabiting couples and found that over one half of couples who are living together didn't talk about it but simply slid into doing so."

Finally, Bruinsma's "more fruitful approach" is more of a concession to the secular view of cohabitation than a biblical approach. A biblical approach to questions related to cohabitation will be explored below.

Ministering to People Involved in Cohabiting Relationships

In this last section, ministering to people involved in cohabiting relationships will be considered. Just as in the OT, NT, and the church in Ellen White's day, the church today still struggles with the sins of fornication and adultery. The 21st century is different from any other time in history in the sense that cohabitation, and thus premarital sex, is becoming more and more acceptable in societies around the world. Since cohabitation is becoming more prevalent in the world, and in the church, the church must seriously consider how to minister to people involved in these sinful relationships. Three strategies are proposed below.

Indirect With Intentionality: Jesus' Ministry to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)

Jesus' dialogue with the woman at the well appears to be a gentle rebuke to a woman involved in a cohabiting relationship. Jesus invited the woman to call her husband, and when she responded that she had no husband, Jesus clarified, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly" (John 4:17-18). Nichol (1980a) suggests that Jesus is trying to help the woman realize her need as a sinner, while at the same time offering her living water (p. 939). White (1898) writes,

Jesus had convinced her that He read the secrets of her life; yet she felt that He was her friend, pitying and loving her. While the very purity of His presence condemned her sin, He had spoken no word of denunciation, but had told her of His grace, that could renew the soul. (pp. 189-190)

After Jesus told the woman that He was the Messiah, she accepted it, and became a missionary to her own town (John 4:28-30; 39-42).

In ministering to cohabiting couples, or those in immoral relationships, following

Jesus' model of dialoguing with them in order to help them feel their need is an important step. Communicating friendship and love, sincere concern, and extending God's grace and forgiveness for the individuals is also of utmost importance.

Direct With Grace: Jesus' Ministry to the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus in order to trap Him. Jesus' response to their question about stoning her to death, as Moses commanded (John 8:5), successfully delivered Him from their trap and saved the woman's physical life. But it is Jesus' response to the woman herself that provides the balanced model for helping individuals caught in sexual sin, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11b).

Similar to the Samaritan woman's story above, the woman caught in adultery does not feel condemned by Jesus either, yet there is also the clear call to go and sin no more. Forgiveness and grace are extended, and at the same time Jesus expects both of the women's lives to change through a turning away from sin.

Direct With Discipline: Paul's Counsel to the Church in Corinth Dealing With Sexual Immorality (1 Cor 5:1-13)

The case of sexual sin Paul faced in 1 Corinthians 5 involves an individual who was engaging in a sexually immoral relationship with his father's wife, which according to Kovar (2015), may have been both incest and cohabitation. This individual apparently completely resisted any appeal by the church to go and sin no more. Miller (2015) finds several lessons from this biblical account.

We can learn several things from Paul's counsel to this church: [a] Church discipline must be done with the right spirit: deep concern for the spiritual condition of the person living in open sin (1 Cor. 5:2). [b] Church discipline is done under the authority of Jesus Christ by church members when gathered together (verses 4, 5). [c]

The goal of disciplinary action is redemptive—leading the person to be saved in the end (verse 5).

One clear teaching of Scripture is that God disciplines those He loves, and that He uses the church to do so at times (Prov 3:12; Matt 18:15-17; Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19; Brown, 2015). The purpose of discipline is redemption, so that the erring one will turn from sin and be saved in the end (Kovar, 2015).

Ellen White (1902) writes,

If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted.

The church has a work to do for people even if they remain outside of the church. The work is to lovingly appeal for people to repent—not condemning them, but calling them, like Jesus did, to go and sin no more.

Again, Ellen White (1911) provides balanced counsel for how the church is to deal with members struggling with sin,

To hate and reprove sin, and at the same time to show pity and tenderness for the sinner, is a difficult attainment. . . We must guard against undue severity toward the wrongdoer, but we must also be careful not to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There is need of showing Christlike patience and love for the erring one, but there is also danger of showing so great toleration for his error that he will look upon himself as undeserving of reproof, and will reject it as uncalled for and unjust. (pp. 503-504)

A Balanced and Biblical Approach

As the church seeks to minister to cohabiting couples, and others who have fallen into sexual sin, may God help us to maintain that proper balance that Ellen White suggests. We must not be too severe or harsh in how we deal with people, but we must

also remember we serve a holy God, and that sin is offensive to Him.

For inactive members and non-members of the church, the indirect-with-intentionality strategy is preferred. This strategy has a softer, yet intentional approach, which is appropriate for the lack of spirituality, involvement, and connectedness which is often a reality for inactive or non-members.

At times, however, the church needs to use the direct-with-grace strategy, as Jesus did when confronted with the woman caught in adultery. As a last resort, the church, at times, needs to implement redemptive discipline.

The Bible and the writings of Ellen White provide examples of how to deal lovingly yet firmly with individuals as the church seeks to minister to cohabiting couples and those involved in sexual immorality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Genesis 2:24 describes God's ideal pattern for marriage as a man leaving his father and mother, cleaving to his wife, and then the two becoming one flesh. The rest of the OT and NT reveal that the entirety of Scripture upholds God's ideal regarding marriage and sexual intimacy. Additionally, the writings of Ellen G. White strongly support the biblical ideal.

Marriage is described in the Bible as the committed, spiritual, emotional, and sexual union of male and female, where the couple becomes one flesh (Gen 2:24; 1:28, NKJV). God protects the value and beauty of sexual intimacy by reserving it exclusively for the committed relationship of marriage (Exod 20:14, 17; 1 Cor 7:2-5). Sexual intimacy which occurs within the context of a committed marital relationship is the only legitimate form of cohabitation that God approves (Kovar, 2015).

Cohabitation outside of marriage is not specifically named in the Bible. However, the biblical principles are clear that any deviation from the purity of sex within marriage is against the will of God (1 Thess 4:3-8). Examples can be found in the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), Herod, who John the Baptist rebuked for living with his brother's wife (Luke 3:19-20), and the Corinthian man who had his father's wife (1 Cor 5:1-13).

Many examples of falling short of God's ideal were examined from both the OT, NT, and the 19th century. Cohabitation is an issue that has seemed to plague God's people even as early as Samson, Absalom, and the Jews in Ezra's day. God dealt with them in various ways, depending on whether they were rebellious or repentant.

Scripture presents a perfect balance of justice and mercy when dealing with sexual immorality. Two of the ministry strategies to cohabiting couples, described above, are based upon the flawless ministry of Jesus. The third ministry strategy is based upon Paul's inspired advice to the church in Corinth. By blending these strategies together, the church can strive to imitate Scripture's healthy balance of loving the sinner but hating the sin.

CHAPTER 3

REASONS FOR AND EFFECTS OF COHABITATION AND STRATEGIES FOR REDEMPTIVE MINISTRY IN CURRENT LITERATURE

Introduction

Current literature reveals various types of cohabiting couples. Sassler (as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013) suggests three types based upon how long the couple has been in a relationship: (a) the accelerated cohabiters who have a strong romantic attraction and begin living together within the first six months of dating, and who represent the majority of cohabiting couples, (b) the tentative cohabiters who have never cohabited before and who date for between seven to 12 months before cautiously moving in together, and (c) the purposeful delayers who were together between one to four years before beginning to cohabit. On the other hand, according to Vespa and Painter (2011) there are three types of cohabiting couples: (a) “spousal cohabiters” who cohabited only once and then married, (b) “one-time cohabiters” who had a cohabiting relationship dissolve and then later married someone else, and (c) “serial cohabiters” who had multiple cohabiting relationships that dissolved before they ended up marrying. Another description of cohabitation is given by McManus and McManus (2008) who suggest four types of cohabiting couples, with only one being similar to Vespa and Painter’s list: (a) prenuptial (similar to “spousal cohabiters” above), (b) testing the relationship to see if they are

compatible for marriage, (c) sequel to a failed marriage, (d) escaping a bad family situation (p. 66).

The literature review will focus on six main areas of cohabitation. First of all, literature concerning the reasons couples choose cohabitation and sex outside of marriage. The second and third sections will focus on the effects of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage on adults, children, and the effect those practices have on adults' involvement in the church. The fourth area will review how the duration of the cohabiting relationship affects the outcome. The fifth area will examine the prevalence of cohabitation in society and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The sixth area will consider redemptive ministry to cohabiting couples.

The Reasons for Cohabitation

What are some of the reasons men and women cohabit prior to or instead of marriage? There are many reasons couples have for cohabiting: (a) fear of marriage failure (McManus & McManus, 2008; Stanton, 2011), (b) financial benefits, (c) individualism and independence (Kelly, 2009), and devaluing the marriage license, (d) amount of education, (e) lack of religious involvement, (f) passion taking precedence over commitment, (g) gradual acceptance as a way of testing the relationship (Brown & Brown, 1999), and (h) an alternative to marriage (Brown & Brown, 1999).

Fear of Marriage Failure and Avoiding Mistakes of Parents

With divorce rates on the rise, it is understandable to be cautious in relationships, and to strive not to make the mistakes of one's divorced parents. According to Wade Horn (cited in McManus & McManus, 2008), "Ours is a divorce-phobic generation" (p.

18). However, elevating divorce to an evil so bad that one avoids marriage and instead cohabits is unwarranted. There are negative effects of divorce, but there are also negative effects of cohabitation.

Current research (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) suggests that individuals, particularly women, who experience major problems or divorce in their parents' marriages, are more likely to cohabit than those whose parents had stable marriages (p. 106).

Many people earnestly want to avoid a failed marriage. They have a “high view of marriage” (Stanton, 2011, p. 16), and do not want to get married only to have it end in a bitter divorce. Stanton (2011) suggests that these people “very much want to get it right. They feel they *must* get it right. Therefore, cohabiting, they figure, may be the best they can do—and it provides an easy exit if either partner sabotages the relationship” (p. 16). Certainly, some couples are hoping that cohabitation will be a step to a stable marriage that lasts.

In contrast, children who grew up in a stable two-parent home are less likely to have the same fears regarding marriage. They are also less likely to cohabit than those who grew up in the “home of a divorced or never-married parent” (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 19).

Financial Benefits and Avoiding Excessive Materialism

McManus and McManus (2008) cite a cohabiting.org survey which reported 29% of cohabiting couples indicated financial savings was a contributing factor for their living arrangement. Couples reason that one rent payment is cheaper than two. However, if

personal finances are a concern, they could consider saving on rent by sharing an apartment with a person of the same gender (p. 14).

Young couples are not the only ones tempted to cohabit in order to save money. Retired couples are being hindered by unjust financial penalties for marrying, such as losing Social Security benefits (Rodriguez, 2001). By cohabiting, the retired couple can maintain their Social Security benefits as well as have access to each other's income. McManus and McManus (2008) suggest, "This is perverse public policy that ought to be reversed.... Government should create economic conditions that encourage marriage, not cohabitation. It should promote morality, not immorality" (pp. 31-32).

Furthermore, cohabiting couples' avoidance of marriage due to the excessive materialism of modern weddings, also greatly reveals what they perceive to be an adequate wedding.

Individualism, Independence, and Devaluing of Marriage License

Kelly (2009) suggests that individualism and a sense of freedom to choose one's own partner apart from the parent's influence are contributing factors in people's decision to cohabit. For some, if the process of marriage begins with a wedding, the couple feels that the parents and family have taken over an important stage of their relationship.

Kelly (2009) points out that many couples want to demonstrate their self-sufficiency and independence by paying for their own wedding instead of asking their parents to do so (p. 341). Individualism and materialism are two factors in couples avoiding or delaying marriage.

People who choose to cohabit are typically more individualistic than those who choose not to (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007). This individualism does

not necessarily go away even if the cohabiting couple chooses to marry, which can create problems.

Individualism again seems to be related to the devaluing of the marriage license. Cohabiting couples see value in their intimate relationship apart from the approval of the larger society, whether that be their parents, the church, or the state. Stanton (2011) refers to this as the “low view of marriage” (p. 15)—viewing the marriage license as just a piece of paper, nothing more.

On the other hand, Stott (2006) correctly points out that a public leaving of the parents is part of the original pattern described in Genesis 2. It is important for the public to see the couple freely consenting and committing themselves to each other, and the couple is benefited and protected by society’s laws.

Yet some scholars suggest that it would be difficult to support as a biblical mandate either, (a) Parental approval/consent, or (b) Approval by a community of faith, since the Catholic Church only began the practice of requiring “ecclesiastical consent to marry” in the 12th century, or (c) Approval from civil authorities (Balswick & Balswick, 2008, p. 177). The Balswicks do see much value in all three areas, but caution against demanding all three must occur for a couple to be considered married in the sight of God. What then, do they suggest are the requirements to be married in God’s sight? According to Othuis (cited in Balswick & Balswick), the requirements are (a) A covenantal commitment to each other, and (b) Consummating the relationship through sexual intercourse (p. 176). However, if these were the only two requirements in order for a couple to be married in God’s sight, some cohabiting couples would claim to be married, while others would not, because they did or did not make the covenantal commitment,

respectively. This view disregards the Genesis 2 and Matthew 19:4-6 pattern of leaving the parents with their permission, seeking God's blessing, and the approval of the church and society in general.

Amount of Education

Lack of education does affect the likelihood of cohabitation. According to recent studies (McManus & McManus, 2008; NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) people who fail to graduate from high school are nearly twice as likely to cohabit as those who finish college. Stanton (2011) points out, "The National Marriage Project reported in 2010 that among women in the twenty-five to forty-four age range, 75 percent of those who never completed high school have cohabited, compared to 50 percent of college graduates" (p. 11).

The NCCB Marriage and Family Committee (2007) reported that while 40% of college graduates do cohabit during their lifetime, "The higher the level of education, the more likely the cohabiter is to marry the partner" (p. 106). Kuperberg's (2014) research also reveals that women who cohabited before marriage were considerably less likely to have graduated from college than direct marriers (couples that did not cohabit prior to marriage), and furthermore they did not have mothers who had a college degree. Vespa and Painter (2011) note that those with less education and a lower income tend to cohabit, but persons with more educational and financial advantages tend to marry.

Lack of Religious Involvement

Those who consider religion unimportant and do not practice it are more likely to cohabit and less likely to marry their partner than those who value religion and live it (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007; Lee & Ono, 2012; Popenoe, 2009; Scott,

2007). McManus and McManus state, “More than half of cohabitators say they are atheists” (p. 65). The NCCB Marriage and Family Committee reported, “There is significant difference in cohabitation frequency by level of religious participation” (p. 106). Kuperberg (2014) also notes that cohabitation tends to decrease religiosity which can increase the likelihood of divorcing later in one’s life. Stanton (2011) suggests, “Cohabitation is also more common among those who are less religious than their peers, those who have been divorced, and those who have experienced parental divorce, fatherlessness, or high levels of marital discord during childhood” (p. 11).

The lowest cohabitation rates in Europe are found in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries of Spain and Italy (Popenoe, 2009). Religion plays an important role, as well as other factors such as “traditional family structures,” less dependency on government welfare, children living longer with their parents, the “stigma against non-marital births,” and the lowest divorce rates in the industrialized world (p. 432).

Passion Takes Precedence Over Commitment

Many people, especially men, are hesitant to commit themselves to their partner in the context of marriage. Data indicates that 80% of women, but only 12% of men, who engage in premarital sex do so with the hope that they will eventually marry their partner (Kaiser 2009). McManus and McManus (2008) also suggest women cohabit in order to eventually get engaged and married, but “men cohabit for sex and money” (p. 9).

Balswick and Balswick (2008) suggest, “The emergence of cohabitation may be symptomatic of a problem in Western-style mate-selection systems in which commitment is not given a primary place in defining love” (p. 169). Romantic passion (a) and emotional intimacy (b), oftentimes in that order, precede the final step of commitment (c)

for many Western couples. For cohabitating couples, that is generally the order of the three steps in their relationships. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has received some support from Catholic professors. Two Catholic theologians, Salzman and Lawler (2012), go so far as to suggest, “Some pre-wedding sexual activity is morally legitimate. There can be no way forward until the traditional and exclusive connection between sexual activity and marriage, which is, in fact, the exclusive connection between sexual activity and procreation, is severed” (p. 136). Scott (2007), another Catholic scholar, echoes their point when he writes, “Christian morality should not assume that all premarital sex is wrong. It is not” (p. 123). These scholars are contradicting the Catholic Church’s position, which, according to Scott (2007) clearly condemns the practice.

Allowing for sexual activity before the marriage commitment is not biblical. Likewise, equating sexual activity and marriage with sexual activity and procreation is unwarranted and unbiblical. Sexual activity in the Bible is not exclusively for the purpose of procreating, but it is exclusively to happen only within the context of marriage. Evidently, Dormor (as cited in Kelly, 2009) suggests a large proportion of people do not believe the biblical teaching on this anymore, but do agree with the Catholic theologians listed above: “Less than 1 percent of couples getting married today actively adhere to the church’s teaching on the undesirability of sexual intercourse before marriage” (p. 340).

Stanton (2011) points out, “Living together has seen explosive growth as boys fail or refuse to become men—while still getting what they want from their female peers who desire husbands: companionship, regular sex, and someone to cook and clean for them” (p. 13). In addition, McManus and McManus (2008) cite a study that places the blame on

single men aged 20 to 29 which indicated 44% of the men would not marry a lady until they had cohabited (p. 20). Furthermore, they suggest that women should refuse to cohabit and engage in sex outside of marriage, and as a result of their firm position they would earn the respect of men, and thereby encourage the men to decide to fully commit by marrying them (p. 10).

For cohabiting couples, passion takes precedence over commitment. However, McManus and McManus (2008) point out the fact that married men and women report sex to be more extremely emotionally satisfying than cohabiting men and women do (pp. 87-88).

Gradual Acceptance as Valid Way to Test Relationship

Traditional marriages in the 19th and early 20th centuries typically followed a different order: (a) emotional intimacy was followed by (b) commitment, and then (c) romantic passion followed last. Some (Salzman & Lawler, 2012) dispute that point, yet others (Balswick & Balswick, 2008) support it. If we go further back, history reveals that traditionally arranged marriages primarily focused on (a) the commitment to the spouse, who was sometimes not known to them, which was then followed by (b) consummation of the marriage (romantic passion), and then (c) emotional intimacy was developed as the couple got further acquainted with each other. The confusion in our day of whether commitment should precede sexual activity, has contributed to the rise of cohabitation.

Cohabitation has gradually come to be accepted by a fair amount of people throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. According to Mihalec (2014), Judge Ben B. Lindsey is credited with coming up with the term “trial marriage.” However, according to Pearsall (cited in McManus & McManus, 2008, pp. 74-75), trial marriage (or

cohabitation) dates all the way back to the Roman Empire, 2000 years ago. For the Romans, their trial marriage was called *usus* marriage, a temporary marriage of one year, to see if the couple would last. If it did, it could develop into one of the two higher levels of marriage: low monogamy or high monogamy. When Christianity impacted Roman culture in the third century, only high monogamy marriage was accepted as legal, and *usus* marriage (trial marriage/cohabitation) was rejected as something a Christian believer should take part in.

According to Balswick and Balswick (2008), Americans returned to the practice of trial marriage in the 20th century, and as early as 1929 a professor named Bertrand Russell began presenting it as an option to students in the university. Then Margaret Mead, in 1966, suggested a two-step plan before the wider public. The first step was to cohabit, or in other words a “trial marriage.” If all went well during the trial marriage, the couple would legally marry when they wanted to have children.

A recent study (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) reports, “Eleven percent of couples in the United States cohabited in 1965-74,” jumping today to “over half of all first marriages [being] preceded by cohabitation” (p. 104). Priem and Surra (2013) have similar numbers for cohabitation prevalence, 10% from 1965-1974 and 64% from 1997 to 2001. In fact, according to Schoen, Landale, and Daniels (as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013), “Only 12 percent of women marry in their early 20s without a prior cohabitation or nonmarital birth” (p. 49).

Priem and Sura, as well as Forrest (2014), cite several studies indicating that the majority of high-school students, 57% in one study and 66% in another, think it is acceptable to cohabit before marriage. McManus and McManus (2008) cite another

study that reveals 66% of men, aged 18-44, think cohabiting before marriage is a good idea (p. 13). What was once forbidden and strongly disapproved of by society has slowly crept into widespread acceptance and practice (Brown & Brown, 1999). Since some scholars, and society in general, are accepting the practice, people are having fewer inhibitions about cohabiting. Some unwise parents even encourage their children to cohabit, suggesting that doing so will verify that the relationship will last, before the parents pay a large amount of money for the wedding (McManus & McManus, 2008, pp. 28-30).

Cohabiting is a high-cost method of testing a relationship, according to Stanley (2005). This arrangement involves major purchases, sexual intimacy, possibly bearing children, and more. He recommends a low-cost way to test the relationship such as reading books together, attending a seminar, and doing a community service project to help others. He proposes the low-cost tests are true tests which also avoid the detrimental risks associated with the high-cost “false” test of cohabiting (pp. 159-160). Another very effective way to test the relationship is to do a premarital assessment such as Prepare-Enrich (Olson & Olson-Sigg, 2018), which allows the couple to discover and discuss their relationship strengths and weaknesses.

An Alternative to Marriage

The sexual revolution of the 1960s began a major shift in thinking regarding traditional marriage (Mihalec, 2014, p. 25). According to Scott (2007) and Brown and Brown (1999), some cohabiting couples are choosing to cohabit as a trial marriage and others are choosing to cohabit as an alternative to marriage. While not everyone accepts cohabitation as legitimate, it is certainly becoming more common.

The Effects of Cohabitation on Adults and Children

Current literature shows cohabitation has many negative effects on both adults and children. Several areas of life are negatively affected, such as sexual faithfulness, emotional stability, physical health, relational health and success, and financial stability. Research on cohabitation supports Foster's analogy (as quoted in McManus & McManus, 2008):

Sex is like a great river that is rich and deep and good as long as it stays within its proper channel. The moment a river overflows its banks, it becomes destructive, and the moment sex overflows its God-given banks, it too becomes destructive. (p. 1)

Cohabitation and Unfaithfulness in Future Marriage

Cohabitation and sex outside of marriage dramatically increases the likelihood of unfaithfulness after marriage, which oftentimes leads to divorce (Stanton, 2011; Stanley, 2005; VanGoethem, 2005). For example, a woman who cohabited and then married is 3.3 times more likely to have an affair than a woman who had not cohabited (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007).

Instability of Cohabiting Couples

Arguments for Cohabitation

Some scholars (Dormor, 2004; Salzman & Lawler, 2012) suggest pre-marriage cohabitation does not have a destabilizing effect on couples.

Kuperberg (2014) indicates that the age at coresidence is the key factor in measuring the instability or risk of divorce for cohabiting couples. She suggests that cohabiting couples who wait to cohabit until their mid-twenties, and have pursued educational and career goals will have a lower risk of divorcing similar to that of direct

marriers who marry in their mid-twenties. Furthermore, she states that the statistics regarding the high risk of divorce among cohabiting couples compared to married couples is a result of not comparing the age at coresidence. The implication is that when couples cohabit at a younger age, just like couples who marry at a younger age, they are more likely to end up divorced because cohabiting has become a substitute for marrying early, which comes with increased risk of divorce.

Vespa and Painter (2011) suggest that “spousal cohabiters” have similar divorce rates and marital quality as married couples who never cohabited. At the same time, “serial cohabiters” have higher divorce rates and lower level of marital quality.

Some research reveals that since cohabitation has become more common in the United States that its relationship to divorce risk has become smaller or neutralized Kuperberg (2014).

Arguments Against Cohabitation

Many scholars (Balswick & Balswick, 2008; Kaiser, 2009; NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) suggest that research consistently shows pre-marriage cohabitation has a destabilizing effect on couples. According to scholars, “cohabitation is the oxymoron of an ‘ambiguous commitment’” (Stanton, 2011, p. 52).

Stott (2006) found that cohabiting couples are far more unstable than married couples. Within the first five years of marriage, 20% of couples will either divorce or separate, and within 10 years that increases to 33%. In comparison, 49% of cohabiting couples break up within the first five years, increasing to 66% after 10 years (p. 363). With these numbers in mind, we can see that cohabiting couples are twice as likely as married couples to break up within 10 years.

Balswick and Balswick (2008) report that 70% of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year. Scott (2007) notes, “The median duration of cohabitation is 1-3 years. One third of couples cohabit for less than a year. 16% live with their partner for more than 5 years” (p. 118). The numbers are higher according to Lichter and Qian (as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013). They say 50% of cohabiting couples split up within one year, and only 10% continue cohabiting for more than five years.

The evidence reveals the instability of cohabitation (Forrest, 2014). According to Mather and Lavery (as cited in Garland, 2012), cohabiting couples are more unstable than first marriages. Schoen et al. (as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013) find that 52% of cohabiting couples that formed by the age of 24 were temporary and ended in break ups. If couples think cohabiting will prevent them from making the same mistakes as their parents by avoiding a painful divorce, the numbers show their relationship is far more likely to end if they cohabit than if they committed themselves in marriage.

Furthermore, several studies point out that the chances of one of the partners of a cohabiting relationship, especially the man, having multiple sexual partners is much greater than those in a committed marriage (Jabusch, 2009; Stott, 2006). The National Sex Survey found, “live-in boyfriends are nearly four times more likely than husbands to cheat in the past year” and “cohabiting women are eight times more likely than wives to cheat” (Stanton, 2011, p. 47). Yet one of the reasons couples choose to cohabit is for the “convenience and companionship of being in an exclusive sexual relationship with a chosen partner” (Balswick & Balswick, p. 165). According to the research, couples who

really want an exclusive sexual relationship are more likely to experience that in a committed marriage than in a temporary cohabiting relationship.

Recent studies (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) suggest that women are more likely to cohabit just once, and then marry their partner, whereas men are more likely to have consecutive cohabiting relationships. In addition, the chances for divorce increase when individuals cohabit with more than one person prior to marrying.

Furthermore, a large study (cited in McManus & McManus, 2008) of 17,024 people who took the PREPARE premarital inventory reveals their own assessment of the quality of their relationship. “Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of cohabiting couples ranked their relationship in the ‘low satisfaction group.’ By contrast, almost two-thirds (also 64 percent) of those living apart fell into the ‘very satisfied group’” (p. 78). Not only are cohabiting couples more unstable than non-cohabiting couples, their relationships are not as satisfying based upon their own self-assessments.

Cohabitation, Quality of Health, and Involvement in Crime

The decision to cohabit has other negative effects. Stott (2006) cited a study that found, “The lifetime prevalence of alcoholism, depression and general mental illness is much higher for those who cohabit than for those who have an intact marriage” (p. 364). McManus and McManus (2008) cite a National Institute for Mental Health study that found women who cohabit are “three times as likely to suffer depression” than married women (p. 36).

Other recent studies (Jabusch, 2009; McManus & McManus, 2008; NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007) have found that cohabiting couples are nearly twice as likely as married couples to report physical abuse, “and the rate for ‘severe’

violence is nearly five times greater” (Stanton, 2011, p. 46). The prevalence of those four conditions (alcoholism, depression, mental illness, and physical abuse) for those who cohabit is another strong indicator that cohabiting apart from a committed marriage does have serious health implications.

Forrest (2014) cites several conflicting studies that suggest that cohabitation is “associated with reduced crime...and use of marijuana,” yet others suggest cohabiting does not have an effect on crime other than increasing “drug offending” (p. 541). His own research found that the high or low quality of the cohabiting relationship does affect the frequency of committing crime; however, cohabitation does not lead to the cessation of committing crime as marriage does. Comparing marriage with cohabitation, he concludes that there is, “something special about marriage that is absent from most cohabiting relationships, even those characterized by high degrees of attachment and commitment” (p. 551).

Cohabitation and Financial Challenges

While cohabiting couples list sharing of finances as one reason for their living arrangement, it is more accurate to say that they actually have more financial challenges as a result (Priem & Surra, 2013). According to Jabusch (2009), cohabiting couples make less money than married couples. Secondly, short-term cohabiting couples do not typically share their financial resources. In addition to making less money and not pooling it together, they also do not receive the same tax benefits as married couples. Furthermore, cohabiting couples who end up marrying have more conflicts over money than couples who do not cohabit prior to marriage (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007). The financial management pattern that cohabiting couples develop

during that phase often needs to be adapted or changed once married, and when that is not discussed and agreed upon it can lead to conflict.

In contrast, according to Vespa and Painter (2011), 50% of cohabiting couples combine their financial resources whereas 66% of married couples do. The woman partner in a cohabiting relationship is less likely to leave the workforce than a married woman, thus boosting the economic standing of the cohabiting couple. “Spousal cohabiters” accumulate wealth even greater than direct marriers, which was an unexpected and difficult-to-explain finding of their study.

At the same time, cohabiting relationships that dissolve hurt cohabiting couples more financially, partly because there is the absence of legal protections that marriage would provide. Only one in 10 cohabiting couples have signed a legal agreement, such as “Joint Tenants with Rights of Survivorship,” which would give them some legal protection in the event of a break up (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 15).

Cohabitation and Relationship Dissolution

Stanley, Roades, and Markman (2006) as well as McManus and McManus (2008) found that cohabitation makes ending the relationship more difficult due to some of the financial decisions that the couple makes together such as buying a house, a vehicle, a pet, and other major financial purchases. These factors naturally do not affect non-cohabiting couples, but they are reasons cohabiting couples sometimes end up hesitating to break up (Popenoe, 2009). Some have referred to these pressures to stay together as the inertia theory (Stanley, 2005). When couples do break up, “their ‘premarital divorce’ is no less painful than divorce itself” (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 61). Furthermore, when these cohabiting couples decide to marry, their marriages are more unstable since

their relationships would have ended if they did not feel somewhat trapped due to the possessions they share.

Stanton (2011) and Stanley (2005) also point out that many cohabiting couples “slide” into marriage because of their cohabiting status and concurrent difficulty to break up. If they had not cohabited, they most likely would have dissolved the relationship. Therefore, their marriages tend to be less healthy.

According to the Balswicks and others, couples who begin by cohabiting are 50% more likely to get divorced after they marry (p. 163). But estimates are even higher in some Western European countries, reaching as high as an 80% greater chance of divorcing (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, p. 108). Some people try to dismiss this correlation by suggesting that people who cohabit do not typically possess high moral standards in other areas of their lives, therefore the divorce rate would be higher. Kaiser (2009) points out that even when that factor is considered, studies consistently show cohabiting couples that end up marrying have a higher probability of divorce.

Cohabitation’s Effect on Children

In addition to the fact that 50% of cohabiting births are unplanned (Vespa & Painter, 2011), what effects does cohabitation have on children? With the significant increase in cohabitation in the United States, children are being affected in many ways. Approximately 40% of cohabiting couples include households with children either from previous or current relationships (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007).

Heuveline and Timberlake (as cited in Balswick & Balswick, 2008) suggest that “between 25 and 40 percent of all children spend some time with a parent in a cohabiting

relationship” (p. 174). Cohabitation is affecting between one-fourth and nearly one-half of all children.

Partners in a cohabiting relationship generally connect less with their mate’s family and children. The “non-parent partner,” who is usually the man, has no “legal, financial, supervisory, or custodial rights or responsibilities” to the partner’s child or children (Jabusch, 2009, p. 335).

Balswick and Balswick (pp. 174-175) go on to cite four additional studies that reveal what effect cohabitation has on the children: (a) They may experience worse life outcomes compared to children who grow up with married couples (Brown, Sanchez, Nock & Wright, 2006); (b) Mothers and their babies tend to be worse off financially than married mothers (Aronson & Huston, 2004). In addition, the National Marriage Project (as cited in Stanton, 2011, p. 80) found the poverty rate for children living with cohabiting couples (31%) was over five times the rate for children living with married couples (six percent), and was similar to the poverty rate for single parent families (45%); (c) There are higher rates of sexual and physical abuse among children with cohabiting parents (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2002; Popenoe, 2009), including child abuse of all kinds occurring four times more often among children living with their own biological parents who are cohabiting compared to children whose biological parents are married (Stanton, 2011). According to the U.S. government (cited by Stanton, 2011), “a child living with mother and her boyfriend are around eleven times more likely to be emotionally, verbally, physically, and sexually abused compared to children living with their own married parents” (p. 79); (d) Cohabiting parents tend to spend more money on alcohol and tobacco and less on education than married parents do (DeLaire & Kalil, 2005).

According to Balswick and Balswick, all of these potential negative effects of cohabitation on children “should be of especially grave concern to the church” (p. 179).

In addition to the four effects stated previously, Popenoe (2009) states that cohabiting parents tend to break up twice as frequently as married parents, which has a devastating effect on the children. Even those who believe the church should accept cohabitation admit, as Dormor (2004) does, “Children born to cohabiting parents are twice as likely to experience parental separation as those born within marriage” (p. 88).

Popenoe (2009) underlines the potential negative effects cohabitation and lone-parent families have on children when he cites a Swedish study published in 2003 by the British medical journal, *Lancet*, that found:

Swedish children growing up in non-intact families compared to those in intact families, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and psychological health of the parents, were twice as likely to suffer from psychiatric disorders, diseases, suicide attempts, alcoholism, and drug abuse. (p. 434)

Popenoe’s conclusion is that adults need to put the children’s needs ahead of their own, and do what is best for the children. The negative effects of cohabitation upon children will not just affect the children, but the generations to come.

The Effects of Cohabitation on Involvement in the Church

Many churches object to the practice of cohabiting, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Kis, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001), and therefore many cohabiting couples are not actively involved in church (Jabusch, 2009). For many, cohabiting pushes them away from God and the church because “a moral darkening comes with all sexual sin” (VanGoethem, 2005, p. 136).

Garland (2012) suggests that cohabiting couples often pass as dating couples in their congregations, and thus their real relationship is hidden and uncared for by the church. Some cohabiting couples are fearful that the church will not accept their behavior, and know they should not be living together, but move in with each other anyway. “The tragedy is that cohabiting couples who attend church usually stop coming because they feel condemned or unacceptable to the congregation” (Balswick & Balswick, 2008, p. 180).

Unfortunately, at a time when people need moral guidance and accountability, cohabiting couples leave the church. VanGoethem (2005) suggests, “A detachment from moral and religious support, then, is another negative consequence of cohabitation” (p. 73).

Duration of Cohabiting Relationship Effects Outcome

The period of time a couple cohabits does affect a change in their relational status. According to Stott (2006), 58% of women whose first premarital cohabiting relationship lasted three years ended up marrying. The number increased to 70% after five years of cohabitation, though various factors such as employment, education, and ethnicity significantly affect those numbers. For instance, in Britain roughly 60% of cohabiting couples end up marrying.

The average cohabiting relationship lasts a little longer than one year, and concludes with either a break up or marriage (Jabusch, 2009; NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007). These findings, along with Stott’s (2006), make it evident that the length of time a couple cohabits affects their decision to marry.

Prevalence of Cohabitation in Society and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The general population in the United States accepts cohabitation to a great extent, with nearly two-thirds of people cohabiting before they marry (Jabusch, 2009; Kuperberg, 2014; Vespa & Painter, 2011). This was not always the case, as Stanton (2011) points out, “Recent research shows that for people born before 1928 and reaching early adulthood before World War II, the cohabiting rate was just 2 percent” (pp. 14-15). In fact, cohabitation was illegal in every state in 1970, and was still illegal in eight states in 2002 (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 75).

Cohabitation has increased dramatically in the United States over the last half-century. In 1960, there were approximately 450,000 people cohabiting. In 2011, the number had skyrocketed up to 7.5 million people cohabiting (Balswick & Balswick, 2014), though more recent research suggests the number is as high as 18 million (Stepler, 2017). Additionally, according to Brown and Brown (1999), in Britain the cohabitation rate rose from five percent in the 1960s up to about 70% in the 1990s. Furthermore, “Of women marrying a second time in the 1990s, about 90 percent will cohabit before their second marriage” (p. 38).

Among Seventh-day Adventists in North America who reported being married at one time in their life (94%), 18% of members reported living together before marriage (Sahlin, 2010). This is a slight increase from a 1993-1994 survey that revealed 15% of Adventists cohabitated before marriage. Sahlin concludes that cohabitation is “an established pattern of behavior among Adventists that does not appear to be changing” (p. 25). Approximately 40% of the Adventists surveyed reported cohabitation as a problem

in their local church. Of the 40% that view cohabitation as a problem in their church, seven percent view it as a “big problem.”

Redemptive Ministry to Cohabiting Couples

Guidelines for Churches

According to VanGoethem (2005), “Cohabiting couples are part of the mission field” for the church (p. 150). But how is the church practically addressing this relatively new but exploding relationship experience? Scott (2008) suggests, “Churches seem perplexed, if not paralyzed in their response to the phenomenon” (p. 115), yet observes that nearly all Christendom teaches that cohabitation is morally wrong. Nevertheless, cohabitation is one of the most difficult issues pastors face with couples in premarital counseling.

Balswick and Balswick (2008) propose five guidelines for how the church should respond to cohabiting couples: (a) Uphold the biblical standard that sexual intercourse is to be part of the marriage covenant, and communicate that to the couple in a convincing way. (b) Encourage couples who are already engaging in sexual intercourse to make the covenant commitment of marriage and that by doing so their relationship will become deeper and more stable. Popenoe (2009) also suggests encouraging cohabiting couples to marry and commit for the long-term. (c) Compassionately welcome a cohabiting couple that is pregnant into the church. This demonstration of love and grace may encourage the pregnant couple to move towards making the commitment of marriage for their and their child’s benefit. (d) The church should be willing to conduct weddings for cohabiting couples even if they are pregnant or already have children. By so doing, they are encouraging couples to make a full commitment to each other. (e) When cohabiting

couples have a “mutual covenant commitment” but choose to cohabit instead of marrying, the church should “continue to show love and grace” (pp. 179-180).

The five guidelines above are an attempt to blend truth and grace. However, one aspect Balswick and Balswick (2008) failed to mention is the proper place of redemptive discipline when dealing with cohabiting couples. Redemptive discipline is not condemning the couple and ousting them from church, but is rather a formal disapproval of behavior by the church with the desire that the couple change behavior and be fully reunited with the church and God through aligning their relationship with God’s moral standards. Perhaps this could be added as a sixth guideline since Balswick and Balswick correctly state:

The church can err in two ways: either by compromising the truth of Scripture and failing to uphold the sacred purpose of marriage, or by condemning and shutting the doors to those who cohabit. In upholding marriage as God’s way with one hand, we should extend God’s grace with the other. (pp. 180-181)

The church compromises the truth when they fail to implement redemptive discipline. This must be done extremely carefully, lest the couple feel unwelcomed and unloved. The couple needs the loving support of the church throughout the redemptive discipline process just as a child needs the loving support of a parent when he or she is being disciplined.

Scott (2007), like Balswick and Balswick (2008), notes two similar extremes to avoid, “(1) immediately confronting the couple and condemning their behavior and (2) ignoring the cohabitation aspect of their relationship” (p. 119). Scott (2007) and VanGoethem (2005) suggest the balanced path of correcting the error in a kind and understanding way. VanGoethem (2005) believes graciously correcting the couple should ultimately be done for the glory of God, since God cannot be pleased when

couples reject His will for sexual intimacy to occur only within the covenant of marriage (p. 132).

Several additional ministry suggestions are given by McManus and McManus (2008): (a) pastors educating their congregations by preaching about cohabitation (p. 91), to which VanGoetham (2005) strongly agrees, (b) require a rigorous premarital inventory to objectively assess the relationship, (c) train mentor couples with strong marriages who can encourage cohabiting couples to make moral choices over five to six sessions, (d) teach couples how to communicate and resolve conflicts, (e) establish church policy for cohabiting couples, (f) educate the cohabiting couple regarding the dangers and myths of cohabitation (pp. 101-104), (g) encourage couples to attend an engaged couples seminar (p. 170).

The church policy “should be welcoming, offering a proven array of proven and effective marital preparation steps, while outlining the church’s biblically based standards” (McManus & McManus, 2008, p. 102). It would include several key points: (a) All engaged couples, cohabiting or not, including all couples who are remarrying, must participate in the church’s premarital preparation program in order to be married in the church, (b) Encourage the cohabiting couple to move apart, and state clearly, “No cohabiting couple will be married by the church if they do not live separately for a minimum number of months before the wedding,” (c) If the cohabiting couples refuses to move apart, they would still be encouraged to participate in the premarital preparation program, including meeting with a mentor couple. “The hope is that mentors will persuade them to move apart during the mentoring,” (d) Encourage couples to refrain from sexual activity until marriage, and ask them to consider signing an “Optional

Premarital Sexual Covenant” pledging to be pure, (e) Seriously dating couples could and should participate in the premarital program, even before they are engaged, which may prevent them from getting engaged in the first place, and also prevent them from cohabiting, (f) Cohabiting couples who already have children or who are pregnant should be encouraged to participate in the premarital process, and refrain from sexual activity until after they are married (pp. 102-103, 110-116; VanGoethem, 2005, pp.189-192). Due to the complexity of relationships, the church, informed by biblical teaching and church policy, should advise couples on a case-by-case basis (VanGoethem, 2005).

Churches Working Together to Reduce Cohabitation Rates

Beyond individual churches ministering redemptively to cohabiting couples as described above, McManus and McManus (2008) have successfully reduced cohabitation and divorce rates in more than one hundred cities through the collaborative efforts of churches from many denominations signing a Community Marriage Policy. Such a policy involves six comprehensive goals: (a) have a strong premarital preparation program to help couples avoid unwise marriages, (b) have an effective marriage mentoring program to mentor engaged couples which usually leads to strong marriages being established or preventing weak marriages with potential for divorce, (c) strengthen all marriages through enrichment programs, (d) save troubled marriages through properly trained mentor couples whose marriage had been in trouble previously, (e) reconcile separated couples, and (f) support and strengthen stepfamilies (pp. 185-190).

Guidelines for Parents

How should parents relate to their adult children who are considering or are already cohabiting? McManus and McManus (2008) urge parents to be responsible by voicing their concern regarding cohabitation, and by articulating to their adult child a better way to evaluate compatibility. They list three reasons why parents should be concerned about a child cohabiting: (a) Their child may decide to never marry, (b) If their child does marry, their chances for divorce are much higher due to cohabiting, (c) Since the cohabiting relationship is more unstable, even if the couple marries, the adult child has an increased chance of ending up as a single-parent who may move back home with their parents for assistance (p. XVII). Parents can lovingly appeal and advise their children to move out of a cohabiting relationship by educating them about the risks and myths of cohabitation.

Additionally, parents can proactively encourage the churches they belong to, and the pastors they know, to offer a better way to “test” a relationship than cohabitation such as having strong premarital counseling and mentoring programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are numerous ways to classify a cohabiting relationship. Eight reasons why couples choose cohabitation were examined. In addition, many studies pointed to the negative effects of cohabitation on adults and children.

Several initial conclusions have been reached based upon the current literature: (a) cohabitation has a negative effect on church involvement, (b) the duration of the cohabiting relationship affects the outcome, (c) generally speaking Christian churches teach that cohabitation is morally wrong, (d) some churches have developed a thorough,

biblical, and redemptive ministry for cohabiting couples with verifiable results, (e) parents can play an active role in advising their adult children against cohabitation.

This review has certainly been helpful in understanding the relationship dynamics of cohabiting couples. Cohabitation negatively affects society in many tangible ways. There are many arguments against cohabitation based upon current research apart from biblical teachings. I believe this reinforces the church's case against cohabitation by providing additional reasons the church can give to discourage members from cohabiting in the first place, as well as to encourage cohabiting couples to change their living situation.

Educating and training church leaders to understand the negative effects of cohabitation, along with Scriptural reasons against it, will empower them to educate congregations about the dangers of cohabitation. The hope is that when people understand that cohabitation has many negative effects which are not present in a committed marriage, it will not seem as desirable.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN OF INTERVENTION

Introduction

In order to more effectively minister to cohabiting couples, the context of the Des Moines and St. Louis Central Seventh-day Adventist Churches, two churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference, will be considered in the first section of this chapter.

The second section, the development of the intervention, is founded upon the theological framework established in chapter two, which includes careful biblical study regarding principles related to the beauty of God's plan for intimacy. The process of training churches to minister to cohabiting couples is rooted in biblical principles regarding marriage, sexual activity, and redemptive ministry. Selected writings of Ellen G. White have also been studied in relation to this subject. With the dramatic rise in cohabiting relationships over the last 50-60 years, more and more research is being done on this rather new arrangement. Current research reveals many dangers and risks related to cohabiting couples.

The third section will describe the plan of intervention. The intervention includes a three-part seminar to educate and train church members for ministry to cohabiting couples. The question the project seeks to answer is: Are the churches better prepared to minister to cohabiting couples as a result of this training? The success of the training will be determined if the churches are better equipped to minister to cohabiting couples. This will be assessed through a pre-seminar survey and a post-seminar survey which will

measure three things: (a) level of knowledge about cohabitation in society and the theological foundations undergirding the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of sexual intimacy; (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples.

Profile of the Ministry Context

The implementation will take place in two churches located in two different states in order to get a variety of participants from various backgrounds. I served as an associate pastor at the St. Louis Central Church briefly in the past, and so I became familiar with it as a beautiful multicultural church. In recent years, I also pastored near the Des Moines Adventist Church, and worked closely with their church school, and became familiar with their church, which is predominantly composed of Caucasians. The reason I chose these two churches for my project is because I am addressing my project from the standpoint of the Family Ministry Departmental Director, and wanted to implement my project in two of the bigger churches in the Conference so there could be more participants and more opportunities to learn.

Des Moines Seventh-day Adventist Church

Approximately 16% of the people in the Des Moines metro area are from the ages of 25-34 years old (the largest segment of the population). Since my project deals with cohabiting couples, and it is assumed by many that younger people are the majority of cohabiters, it seems like a relevant project for this community, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church membership is aging, but cohabitation is also affecting older people who may lose some financial benefits, such as social security if they marry a new partner. Thus, some older couples are choosing to cohabit, thus maintaining their

financial benefits while enjoying their relationship benefits while participating in a relationship devoid of marital commitment and Divine approval.

According to personal communication with the pastor in 2014, there were 589 members on the membership list, but on average, only about 109 attending. Since there are many inactive and non-attending members, it is possible that some of them are inactive because they are living in a cohabiting relationship and are ashamed to come to church. As has been shown in chapter 3, the research shows that sex outside of marriage and cohabitation affect church involvement.

St. Louis Central Seventh-day Adventist Church

The St. Louis Central Church is more multicultural than the Des Moines Church. They also have a larger young adult population that attends regularly, some of whom attend public universities in the area. The multicultural context of this church will provide a wider scope to the project, and therefore an opportunity to train members from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds in ministering to cohabiting couples.

Development of the Intervention

The training seminar was developed using the biblical principles regarding sexual behavior and marriage as its foundation. The seminar, training churches to minister to cohabiting couples, has the following four objectives: (a) To help them understand the biblical principles regarding sexual behavior; (b) To help them understand biblical principles related to marriage; (c) To help them understand the dangers and risks of cohabitation based upon current research; (d) To help them understand and implement biblical strategies for ministering to cohabiting couples in redemptive ways.

Theological Foundation

The training seminar intervention was developed through thorough biblical study regarding sexual behavior and marriage within the Old and New Testaments. The biblical ideal of a committed marriage is clearly upheld throughout Scripture as the foundation upon which all future sexual relationships were to be built. The training seminar is designed to clearly present the biblical theology regarding sexual immorality and cohabitation. In addition, selected writings of Ellen G. White were examined and used which support the biblical ideal and provide further insight.

Before sin ever marred human relationships, God blessed humanity with the institution of marriage (Gen 2:24). Only within the context of public, permanent, and committed marriage were a husband and wife to experience the beauty and oneness of sexual intimacy. Cohabitation lacks the biblical prerequisites that must be met before sexual intimacy consummates the marriage.

Among the Israelites, engaging in sexual behavior before marriage brought severe consequences on themselves. For instance, if a woman was discovered not to be a virgin on her wedding night, the entire community was to stone her to death (Deut 22:13-21). Purging the evil of sexual immorality, namely sexual behavior before marriage, is clearly indicated (Deut 22:21, 24). Additionally, if a man had sexual intercourse with a slave woman betrothed to another man, he had to bring a trespass offering to the temple to atone for his sin (Lev 19:20-22).

Evidence in the original Hebrew suggests that in Ezra's day the Israelites who "married" pagan wives may have been in relationships resembling modern cohabitation.

The common word for divorce is not used when Ezra commands them to put away their wives, which is evidence that God did not view these as legitimate marriages.

In the NT, Jesus reaffirms the OT biblical ideal (Matt 19:1-12). Sexual immorality (*porneia*) is the only legitimate reason for divorce (Matt 5:32), which shows the seriousness of the sin of sexual immorality. Since cohabitation does not meet biblical principles for marriage, it would be included in the term *porneia*, and condemned as sexually immoral behavior. The apostle Paul also uses *porneia* to denounce sexual immorality as contrary to the will of God (1 Thess 4:3).

It is also clear that virginity until marriage is highly valued in both the OT and NT (Gen 24:16, 43; Lev 21:13-14; 2 Sam 13:1-39; Luke 1:27, 34; 2 Cor 11:2). There is an abundance of biblical evidence which concludes that cohabitation falls under the same condemnation as all fornication (sexual sin). The biblical principles regarding sexual behavior and marriage rule out any allowance for deviant behavior such as cohabitation.

The Bible provides counsel on how to deal with individuals who are not following God's ideal for marriage and sexual purity. Three specific situations provide us the various approaches to be taken in ministry to cohabiting couples: (a) Jesus' dialogue with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). This approach is called indirect with intentionality. (b) Jesus' ministry to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). This approach is called direct with grace. (c) Paul's counsel to the church in Corinth that had a situation involving sexual sin (1 Cor 5:1-13). This approach is called direct with discipline.

Current Literature

The current research on cohabitation also contributed to developing the intervention to train churches to minister to cohabiting couples. Six broad areas were

researched to understand the bigger picture of cohabitation: (a) Reasons for cohabitation and sex outside of marriage; (b) Effects of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage on adults and children; (c) Effects of cohabitation on adults' involvement in the church; (d) What motivates cohabiting couples to change their living arrangements; (e) The prevalence of cohabitation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (f) How other ministry professionals are effectively ministering to cohabiting couples in a redemptive way.

Description of the Intervention

There are three major sections for my project implementation: (a) Communicating with the local pastor; (b) Pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys. (c) Sabbath training seminar. For a concise detailed outline of those three sections, please see Appendix A. My project implementation would be nearly identical in both churches. As there were two weeks between the respective training Sabbaths, only minor changes could be made after the first weekend training in St. Louis.

Communicating With the Local Pastor

The purpose of communicating with the local pastor is to coordinate details, insure church elders and leadership buy-in, and also to get an initial investment of time from the local church leadership to prioritize this training initiative. Another reason for communicating with the local pastor, is to discover if there are cohabiting couples that are connected to the church in any way. Being connected to the church would include church members, non-members who are attending, relatives or adult-children of members or non-members, missing members, and former members.

As the spiritual leaders of the church, elders and other spiritually mature individuals will be encouraged to participate in this process and will be asked to commit to attending the training seminar.

Pre-Seminar Survey

The pre-seminar survey would be given out after a brief introduction. Participants would turn in their anonymous survey. They would be instructed to write a six-digit number, the birth date of one of their parents (i.e., 121545), on their survey so that their pre-survey can be matched with their post-seminar survey. The survey measures participants' knowledge of cohabitation, level of comfort and willingness to minister to cohabiting couples. Please see Appendix B to see the pre-seminar survey.

Training Seminar Sessions, Part 1: Living Together: What the Bible Says and Why It Matters to All of Us

The first session would take place during the Sabbath School time. After a brief introduction and having participants sign the informed consent form, I will distribute the pre-seminar survey. After giving people five to 10 minutes to complete it, the surveys will be collected. The rest of the session would be dedicated to presenting the OT biblical theology regarding marriage and sexuality (God's ideal), and then showing how Scripture prohibits sexual immorality of all kinds, which would include cohabitation. Current research would also be shared on the prevalence of cohabiting in society, the most common reasons for it, and its negative effects on individuals and children.

Training Seminar Sessions, Part 2: Cohabiting Within the Church: We Can't Ignore It

The second part will be the Sabbath morning sermon. During this time, I will share with the congregation how cohabitation is also a significant problem in the Adventist church. Statistics regarding how cohabiting is perceived in the church will also be shared. I will present the biblical ideal as taught by Jesus in the Gospels and other NT authors. God's grace and forgiveness will also be highlighted considering how God washed, sanctified, and justified people in Corinth who had been engaged in sexually immoral behavior (perhaps including cohabiting). The sermon would conclude with two stories of ministering to cohabiting couples with grace. The first one is a little-known story from early in the ministry of Ellen White when God revealed to her a woman who was cohabiting. The second story will be the testimony of a cohabiting couple to whom I provided pre-marital preparation and who decided to get married in the Seventh-day Adventist Church even though they were not members.

Training Seminar Sessions, Part 3: Ministering to Cohabiting Couples With Grace

The third part will present some key guidelines for how churches should relate to cohabiting couples, including two errors to avoid. Then the focus will move to developing the strategy for ministering to cohabiting couples. Three strategies based upon NT examples will be covered: (a) Indirect with Intentionality: Jesus' ministry to the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42); (b) Direct with Grace: Jesus' ministry to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11); (c) Direct with Discipline: Paul's counsel to the church in Corinth dealing with sexual sin (1 Cor 5:1-13).

Another key component of this session would be dealing with practical suggestions for ministering to different types of cohabiting couples. Ministering to couples when at least one of them is a member is different than when ministering to a couple when neither of them is a member. Therefore, I have suggested two practical strategies addressing each one respectively.

When at Least One is a Member

The first suggestion is to visit the couple to get acquainted with them and pray with them. The indirect with intentionality strategy is preferred so that (a) A relationship of trust and friendship is established (i.e. the couple knows they are loved). (b) The couple has an opportunity to begin Bible studies, join a small group at church, and/or be adopted by a mentoring couple with whom they can experience fellowship, friendship, and discipleship. The hope is that as the couple gets closer to Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict them that cohabiting is wrong, and they will want to make a change because they love God and want to do what pleases Him.

Since every couple and situation is unique, the direct with grace strategy may also be appropriate in this case. Those involved in ministering to the couple need to let the Holy Spirit lead as the ministry unfolds, and to rely upon God to know if or when to be direct with grace. For example, if the couple brings it up on the first or second visit or small group meeting, this may be an open door to be direct with grace. Those visiting should prayerfully consider the timing as to when to discuss with the couple about their cohabiting relationship. The first visit may not be the best time to discuss this, but they should be sensitive to how God will lead during the visit.

During the second visit, within one month of the first, their cohabiting relationship may be discussed. Those visiting the couple should listen for understanding and gently deal with their cohabiting situation. They should encourage them to follow God's Word, change their cohabiting living arrangement, and agree to a premarital sexual covenant to abstain from sex until marriage (Jesus' "go and sin no more" directive). The church may assist persons to immediately move out of the cohabiting situation. Finding a temporary residence would enable the person to come up with a new plan for their life.

During the discussion about their relationship, if the couple has biblical grounds to remarry, those who are visiting would be encouraged to ask the couple if they are willing to consider getting married.

The Complications of Divorce and Remarriage

If one or both have been married before, the church members involved in this ministry should learn more about those marriages and divorces to determine if they have biblical grounds to remarry. Teams would be encouraged to become familiar with the church's policy regarding divorce and remarriage found in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (General Conference, 2016, pp.157-160).

If one or both individuals have been married previously, the pastor and elders should be consulted regarding the relationship to carefully determine if the couple has biblical grounds to remarry. The IA-MO Conference Divorce and Remarriage Committee can also be consulted as needed.

If the pastor/elders and/or Conference determine there are no biblical grounds for remarriage, this message should be lovingly communicated to the couple. If they do not have biblical grounds to get remarried, the church should encourage them to be faithful to

God and His revealed will concerning marriage and remarriage, and wait for God's timing if He would release them to remarry in the future (through death, adultery, or fornication of previous spouse). In some cases, the Conference committee may approve of remarriage if they see evidence of true conversion, repentance, and the fruit of repentance (Matt 3:8), which is usually demonstrated through re-baptism.

Three to six months after the initial communication concerning their lack of biblical grounds to remarry if the individuals are unwilling to accept the church's counsel, the church pastor may proceed with the redemptive discipline process as outlined in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (General Conference, 2016, pp. 57-68). The goal of the redemptive discipline process is for the couple to repent and commit their lives to following Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Marriage Preparation Process

However, if the couple has biblical grounds to get remarried, and are interested in exploring that option, encourage the next steps below.

The couple should go through a marriage preparation program such as PREPARE—CC (for Cohabiting Couples), and if the couple cannot afford the assessment fee, the church may choose to subsidize it or sponsor them. If the pastor is not trained in that specific marriage preparation program, use an alternative program. Marriage Savers also have an inventory specifically tailored to cohabiting couples. The pre-marriage counseling program may take place over the course of a minimum of 6-8 weeks, which may take anywhere from 2-4 months, depending on the frequency of meeting.

The church would also assign a Mentoring Couple to mentor the cohabiting couple. The mentoring couple would be encouraged to invite the couple to their home for

a meal, and try to develop a meaningful relationship with them in order to show them what a godly and God-honoring marriage looks like. Excellent training resources for mentoring couples can be found at www.marriagementoring.com. Additionally, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrot's book *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring: Connecting Couples to Build Better Marriages* can also prepare couples for effective mentoring.

Additionally, the church will locate an "Engaged Couples" weekend seminar, and propose to sponsor the couple to attend it, including staying in separate rooms. The Mentoring Couple could attend with the couple for support and to room with them in their respective rooms.

Another gift the church could offer to encourage this couple is to waive any rental fees for the wedding and reception. These three gifts of the church to the couple provides them with an inexpensive option to encourage them to take the next step toward marriage.

If the couple is unwilling to participate in this ministry process, the church may decide to specifically pray for them for the next three to four months. During the first two months, other visits or calls could be made to pray with the couple, bring them literature, invite them to church activities, or invite them for a meal at one's home or a restaurant in order to build up the relationship and trust. During the third or fourth month, the church should offer the marriage preparation process again. If the couple remains unwilling to participate in the ministry process, the pastor may proceed with the redemptive discipline process as outlined in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (General Conference, 2016, pp. 57-68). Again, the goal of the redemptive discipline

process is for the couple to repent and commit their lives to following Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

When Neither Are Members of the Church

Ministering to a non-member cohabiting couple is very similar to that outlined above, but has some major differences. The ministry begins with a visit to get acquainted and pray with the couple. Just like ministering to members, the indirect with intentionality strategy is preferred so that (a) A relationship of trust and friendship is established (i.e. the couple knows they are loved). (b) The couple has an opportunity to begin Bible studies, join a small group at church, and/or be adopted by a mentoring couple where they can experience fellowship, friendship, and discipleship. As the couple gets closer to Christ, the Holy Spirit may convict them that cohabiting is wrong, and they will want to make a change because they love God and want to do what pleases Him.

Since every couple and situation is unique, the direct with grace may also be appropriate in this case. Those involved in ministering to the couple need to let the Holy Spirit lead as the ministry unfolds, and to rely upon God to know if or when to be direct with grace. For example, if the couple brings up the fact they are cohabiting on the first or second visit or small group meeting, this may be an open door to be direct with grace. Those visiting should prayerfully consider the timing as to when to discuss with the couple about their cohabiting relationship. The first visit may not be the best time to discuss this, but they should be sensitive to how God will lead during the visit.

If the couple is willing to begin Bible studies, that could begin during the next visit. Through the course of the lessons, God's plan for marriage would come up. As the Holy Spirit leads, and as the team senses the couple feeling convicted and open to

counsel, they should gently deal with their cohabiting situation, encourage them to follow God's Word, and move out of the cohabiting living arrangement or agree to the premarital sexual covenant to abstain from sex until marriage (go and sin no more).

The Bible studies would continue until completion. At the same time as the studies are progressing, the process could move to the next step below, which is like the process described above regarding when at least one person from the cohabiting couple is a church member. The couple should go through a marriage preparation program such as Prepare/Enrich, and if the couple cannot afford the assessment fee, the church may choose to subsidize it or sponsor them. If the pastor is not trained in that pre-marriage program, use an alternative program. Marriage Savers also have an inventory specifically tailored to cohabiting couples. The pre-marriage counseling program may take place over the course of a minimum of 6-8 times, which may take anywhere from 2-4 months, depending on the frequency of meeting.

The church would also assign a Mentoring Couple to mentor the cohabiting couple. The mentoring couple would be encouraged to invite the couple to their home for a meal, and try to develop a meaningful relationship with them as a couple in order to show them what a godly and God-honoring marriage looks like. (See appendix I for marriage mentoring training resources.)

Additionally, the team will locate an "Engaged Couples" weekend seminar, and ask the church to sponsor the couple to attend it including separate rooms. The Mentoring Couple could attend with the couple for support and to room with them in their respective rooms.

Another gift the church could offer to encourage this couple is to waive any rental fees for the wedding and reception.

In total, three gifts would be offered: (a) free pre-marriage counseling; (b) free attendance at an “Engaged Couples” weekend; and (c) free use of the church for a wedding and reception. These gifts of love can demonstrate the sincerity the church has to help couples prepare for and get married. These three gifts of the church to the couple provides them with an inexpensive option to encourage them to take the next step toward marriage.

This training seminar would be very intentional about encouraging churches to not just focus on getting cohabiting couples to get married, as sometimes that is not advisable due to numerous reasons. Sometimes breaking up is the best option for the cohabiting couple. Therefore, churches need not to rush cohabiting couples to get married, but rather should carefully and systematically assist the couple in preparing for marriage (through Prepare-Enrich, Engaged Couples’ weekend, and marriage mentoring). That way, if the couple decides to marry, with God’s help, and the strong foundation that has been laid through pre-marriage preparation, they will have a strong marriage that will last.

Post-Seminar Survey

The post-seminar survey would be almost identical to the pre-seminar survey as far as questions relating to cohabitation prevalence and risks. There would be a few feedback questions at the end of the survey to gather more feedback about change of view, more clarity of understanding, and how the seminar could be improved. The complete survey is found in Appendix C.

Conclusion

After the training seminar, the churches should be much more prepared to minister effectively to cohabiting couples. The ultimate goal of the project is to train and equip churches to minister to cohabiting couples, specifically to increase knowledge about cohabitation, and increase the level of comfort and willingness to minister to cohabiting couples. This will be assessed through the pre- and post-seminar surveys, which will measure: (a) level of knowledge about cohabitation in society and the theological foundations for the Seventh-day Adventist position on it; (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples.

As the churches implement this ministry process, some difficult decisions will likely have to be made by both the cohabiting couple and the church. Much prayer needs to precede this process as it is not an easy one. If done correctly, churches will lead couples to make one of two choices: (a) get married (if they have biblical grounds); (b) separate from each other and end their immoral sexual relationship. Either of these options would be deemed a successful ministry outcome.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF THE INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Two churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference were selected as sites to train members how to minister to cohabiting couples. The churches were chosen based upon their membership numbers, which are higher than most other churches within the Conference. The reason for selecting two churches was to increase the number of seminar participants, resulting in a bigger sample size to evaluate the extent to which learning and equipping took place.

The three sessions for the training seminar followed the same schedule in both churches: Part One took place during the Sabbath School time, beginning at 9:30am. Part Two occurred during the sermon time of the worship service. Part Three followed in the afternoon following the fellowship meal.

The effectiveness of the three-part training seminar was measured by comparing participants' answers from a pre-seminar survey with a post-seminar survey. The surveys intended to measure three key areas: (a) level of knowledge and personal view about cohabitation; (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples. A fourth area measured whether they had cohabited or knew of other cohabiting couples in the church, but unlike the three areas above, this area would not change as a result of the seminar.

Preparing to Implement

In preparation for project implementation, it was realized that the original plan of training teams to minister to cohabiting couples, and measuring the effectiveness of their ministry was not feasible. Whether churches have cohabiting couples as members or even attendees, is a variable no one has control over. At the time of implementation, the Des Moines church did not have any cohabiting couples to minister to because the three couples they were aware of had recently married.

Similarly, the St. Louis church leadership felt they had so many other pressing responsibilities and issues in their church, that to add a new ministry to cohabiting couples would be too much for them at that time. Therefore, the project had to be modified, and the focus shifted away from the teams ministering to cohabiting couples.

The focus shifted to the effectiveness of the training seminar. The overall question for the training seminar to answer became: Are the churches better prepared to minister to cohabiting couples as a result of the training? The success of the training would be determined by the extent to which the churches were better equipped to minister to cohabiting couples. This would be assessed through the pre-seminar and post-seminar surveys. These surveys became a key component of the project, and because of that the number of survey questions increased significantly.

The surveys were anonymous, but participants were instructed to write the six-digit date of birth of one of their parents (for example, 121453 for someone born December 14, 1953). The reason for the six-digit number was so analysis could be done on the pre- and post-seminar surveys to see if there was an increase in the three key measurable categories: (a) level of knowledge and personal view about cohabitation (14

questions); (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples (2 questions); (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples (2 questions).

Additionally, three questions were asked to determine whether participants had cohabited, knew of other cohabiting couples in the church, or viewed cohabitation as a problem in their local church.

As the project changed to the focus on the effectiveness of the training seminar itself, both the Des Moines and St. Louis churches were able and willing to participate.

In preparation for the training seminar, a workbook with the key points of the three presentations was developed and printed for each participant. The workbook also included a selected bibliography, as well as supporting articles and documentation in the additional resources section at the back of the workbook (see Appendix A to see the entire seminar workbook). PowerPoint presentations were also developed for each part of the presentation.

Implementing in St. Louis—August 5, 2017

In St. Louis, there were 30 individuals who filled out the informed consent document, 29 who completed the pre-seminar survey which was given at the start of Sabbath School, and 24 who completed the post-seminar survey which was given at the conclusion of the third presentation after the fellowship lunch. There were 10 individuals who completed both the pre- and post-seminar surveys, as identified by their six-digit number.

Pre-Seminar Survey

The pre-seminar survey provided some very valuable information. While the complete results may be found in Appendix B, I will provide some highlights here. Out

of 23 people who completed a question regarding whether they had personally cohabited before, eight (35%) said they had. That is almost twice as high as a large 2010 North American Division survey of 1,397 participants, conducted by Monte Sahlin, which found 18% reporting they had lived together before marriage.

To the question, “Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?” 29% said yes. The majority of participants (57%) said they did not know if cohabitation was a problem in their local church, but 36% said it was either “somewhat” of a problem (25%) or a “big problem” (11%).

The majority of the questions (14) in the survey focused on participants’ knowledge and view of cohabitation. Concerning participants’ knowledge of cohabitation, nearly half (48%) said they had a “medium” level, 28% said they had “high” level, and 24% said they had a “low” level.

To the question, “What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?” 55% either “strongly disapprove” (31%) or “disapprove” (24%), but 38% were “neutral,” and 6% either “approve” (3%) or “strongly approve” (3%).

When asked, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?” 75% of participants said they did, 8% said they did not, and 17% were not sure.

A very high percentage of participants (92%) said they believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples, but some did not believe that (8%).

In answer to a question regarding the increased likelihood of couples who cohabit before marriage getting divorced after marriage, 41% of participants answered correctly.

Nearly 60% of participants thought the percentage was much less than the correct answer of 50%. Similarly, when asked the percentage of cohabiting couples who do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year, 41% gave the correct answer of 70%. Nearly 60% of participants thought the percentage was much lower.

Only 8% of participants knew the percentage of people who cohabited in the state of Missouri, and 92% thought the prevalence was more than twice as high as actual rates reported by the United States Census Bureau.

Concerning the United States cohabiting rates in 1960 compared to 2014, 17% of participants answered correctly (450,000) for 1960, and 21% answered correctly (7.5 million) for 2014. Additionally, most people (52%) gave the correct answer when asked what percentage of people in the U.S. cohabit before marriage (66%). A significant number of people (48%) thought the percentage was much lower.

Regarding the prevalence of cohabiting among Seventh-day Adventists, 9% answered correctly about how many Adventists cohabited according to a 1993-1994 survey (15%). But 87% thought the percentage was significantly lower. Likewise, 17% of participants answered correctly about how many Adventists reported cohabiting before marriage in 2010 (18%), and 83% thought the percentage was significantly lower.

When asked, “What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?,” 42% were either “comfortable” (25%) or “very comfortable (17%), 42% were “neutral,” and 17% were “uncomfortable.” No one said they were “very uncomfortable.” Likewise, when asked “How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?,” 63% were either “comfortable” (21%) or

“very comfortable” (42%), 21% were “neutral,” and 16% were either “uncomfortable” (8%) or “very uncomfortable (8%).

Most participants (57%) said they were either “willing” (48%) or “very willing” (9%) to minister to a cohabiting couple if asked by the church leadership, 30% said “I don’t know,” and 13% were either “unwilling” (4%) or “very unwilling” (9%).

The majority of participants (63%) indicated they were “not married” when asked if they were willing to be a mentoring couple for cohabiting couples. Of those who were married (37%), 89% said they would be willing to be a mentoring couple if their spouse agreed, but 11% said they were not willing.

Post-Seminar Survey

The post-seminar survey provided a comparison to the first survey, as the first 21 questions were identical. Three additional questions were asked at the end of the survey, which will be explained below. Based upon anonymous six-digit numbers, there were 10 people who completed both surveys, which simply indicates the composition of people who took the pre-seminar survey were not exactly the same as those who composed the group who took the second survey.

Out of 23 people who completed a question regarding if they had personally cohabited before, 9 (39%) said they had. This is a slight difference from the pre-seminar survey.

To the question, “Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?,” 22% said yes. The majority of participants (55%) said they did not know if cohabitation was a problem in their local church, but 41% said it was either “somewhat” of a problem (32%) or a “big problem” (9%).

Concerning participants knowledge of cohabitation, over half (55%) said they had a “medium” level, 45% said they had “high” level, and no one said they had a “low” level.

To the question, “What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?” 96% either “strongly disapprove” (52%) or “disapprove” (44%), but 4% were “neutral,” and no one approved.

When asked, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?” 91% of participants said they did, and 9% were not sure.

A very high percentage of participants (95%) said they believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples, but some did not believe that (5%).

In answer to a question regarding the increased likelihood of couples who cohabit before marriage getting divorced after marriage, 82% of participants answered correctly. When asked the percentage of cohabiting couples who do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year, only 29% gave the correct answer of 70%. Over 70% of participants thought the percentage was much lower.

Nearly one-third (32%) of participants knew the percentage of people who cohabited in the state of Missouri, which means 68% thought the prevalence was more than twice as high as actual rates reported by the United States Census Bureau.

Concerning the United States cohabiting rates in 1960 compared to 2014, 29% of participants answered correctly (450,000) for 1960, and 65% answered correctly (7.5 million) for 2014. Additionally, most people (57%) gave the correct answer when asked what percentage of people in the U.S. cohabit before marriage (66%). A significant number of people (43%) thought the percentage was much lower.

Regarding the prevalence of cohabiting among Seventh-day Adventists, 19% answered correctly about how many Adventists cohabited according to a 1993-1994 survey (15%). But 48% thought the percentage was significantly lower. For a similar question, 50% of participants answered correctly about how many Adventists were cohabiting in 2010 (18%).

When asked, “What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?,” 39% were either “comfortable” (35%) or “very comfortable (4%), 35% were “neutral,” and 26% were either “uncomfortable” (22%) or “very uncomfortable” (4%). Likewise, when asked “How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?,” 65% were either “comfortable” (39%) or “very comfortable” (26%), 26% were “neutral,” and 27% were “very uncomfortable.”

Most participants (61%) said they were either “willing” (52%) or “very willing” (9%) to minister to a cohabiting couple if asked by the church leadership, 30% said “I don’t know,” and 8% were either “unwilling” (4%) or “very unwilling” (4%).

The majority of participants (73%) indicated they were “not married” when asked if they were willing to be a mentoring couple for cohabiting couples. Of those who were married (27%), 100% said they would be willing to be a mentoring couple if their spouse agreed.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) said their view of cohabitation changed as a result of the seminar. Additionally, in response to the question, “As a result of today’s seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White,” 94% said yes. The last question gave participants a chance

to share what they thought could be done to improve the seminar, and several suggestions were given.

Analysis of Those Who Completed Both Surveys

For the 10 individuals who completed both surveys, an analysis was done to see how their answers changed or improved. On the first survey, none of the ten knew what percentage of couples in Missouri cohabit, but on the second survey, six out of 10 answered correctly. Similar improvements were made on many of the other factual-based questions.

Two individuals changed their views towards those living together outside of a committed marriage from “neutral” in the first survey to “disapprove” in the second. Another two shifted from “disapprove” to “strongly disapprove,” and one changed from “strongly disapprove” to “disapprove.” The training seminar influenced four out of 10 in strengthening their disapproval of cohabitation.

Three individuals said they were “comfortable” ministering to cohabiting couples on the second survey who had said they were “neutral” on the first. One who said he/she was “very comfortable” on the first survey changed to “comfortable” on the second. Two who said they were “comfortable” during the first survey changed to “neutral” on the second.

Concerning the question, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?,” 9 out of 10 said “yes” on both surveys. The one who changed indicated being “not sure” on the first survey, but “yes” on the second.

An improved willingness to minister to cohabiting couples was indicated by three individuals’ answers on the surveys, a 30% improvement.

Concerning the comfort level of inviting cohabiting couples to one's small group or Sabbath School class, two individuals went from "neutral" to "comfortable" and one individual went from "comfortable" to "very comfortable." At the same time, two individuals changed from "very comfortable" to "comfortable." Still, 30% of participants indicated an improvement in comfort level.

In answer to the question, "Has your view of cohabitation changed at all because of today's seminar?," six out of 10 said "yes," and four said "no." Five out of six participants indicated a clearer understanding that sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited in the Bible as a result of the seminar. While not a large sample size, these surveys still demonstrate the training seminar was effective in increasing two key areas: knowledge and willingness. However, it was not as effective in increasing the comfort level in ministering to cohabiting couples.

Implementing in Des Moines—August 19, 2017

Pre-Seminar Survey

While the complete results may be found in Appendix B, I will provide some highlights here. Out of 12 people who completed a question regarding if they had personally cohabited before, three (25%) said they had. That is higher than the 18% who said that they had lived together before marriage (in Monte Sahlin's study noted above).

To the question, "Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?," 33% said yes. The majority of participants (77%) said they did not know if cohabitation was a problem in their local church, but 15% said it was "somewhat" of a problem, and 8% said it was not a problem.

Concerning participants knowledge of cohabitation, nearly half (46%) said they had a “medium” level, 31% said they had “high” level, and 23% said they had a “low” level.

To the question, “What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?” 69% either “strongly disapprove” (38%) or “disapprove” (31%), but 31% were “neutral,” and none approved.

When asked, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?” 83% of participants said they did, and 17% were not sure.

A high percentage of participants (75%) said they believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples, but some did not believe that (25%).

In answer to a question regarding the increased likelihood of couples who cohabit before marriage getting divorced after marriage, 50% of participants answered correctly. Similarly, when asked the percentage of cohabiting couples who do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year, only 8% gave the correct answer of 70%. Nearly 92% of participants thought the percentage was much lower.

All of the participants thought the percentage of people who cohabited in the state of Iowa was higher than actual rates reported by the United States Census Bureau.

Concerning the United States cohabiting rates in 1960 compared to 2014, 8% of participants answered correctly (450,000) for 1960, and 33% answered correctly (7.5 million) for 2014. Additionally, over one-third of people (36%) gave the correct answer when asked what percentage of people in the U.S. cohabit before marriage (66%). A significant number of people (64%) thought the percentage was much lower.

Regarding the prevalence of cohabiting among Seventh-day Adventists, 8% answered correctly about how many Adventists cohabited according to a 1993-1994 survey (15%). But 84% thought the percentage was significantly lower. Likewise, 8% of participants answered correctly about how many Adventists were cohabiting in 2010 (18%), and 92% thought the percentage was significantly lower.

When asked, “What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?,” 34% were either “comfortable” (17%) or “very comfortable (17%), 25% were “neutral,” and 42% were either “uncomfortable” (25%) or “very uncomfortable” (17%). Likewise, when asked “How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?,” 58% were either “comfortable” (33%) or “very comfortable” (25%), 25% were “neutral,” and 16% were either “uncomfortable” (8%) or “very uncomfortable” (8%).

A fair number of participants (41%) said they were either “willing” (33%) or “very willing” (8%) to minister to a cohabiting couple if asked by the church leadership, 25% said “I don’t know,” and 34% were either “unwilling” (17%) or “very unwilling” (17%).

When asked if they were willing to be a mentoring couple for cohabiting couples, of those who were married (83%), 90% said they would be willing to be a mentoring couple if their spouse agreed, but 10% said they were not willing. Several participants (17%) indicated they were “not married.”

Post-Seminar Survey

A total of seven people completed the second survey at the conclusion of the training seminar. Based upon anonymous six-digit numbers, there were five people who

completed both surveys, which simply indicates the composition of people who took the pre-seminar survey were not exactly the same as those who composed the group who took the second survey.

Out of six people who completed a question regarding if they had personally cohabited before, one (17%) said he/she had. This is less than the pre-seminar survey.

To the question, “Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?” 71% said yes. The majority of participants (71%) said that cohabitation was a problem in their local church, either “somewhat” of a problem (57%) or a “big problem” (14%).

Concerning participants’ knowledge of cohabitation, (29%) said they had a “medium” level, 57% said they had “high” level, and 14% said they had a “low” level.

To the question, “What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?” Of the 100% they were either “strongly disapprove” (86%) or “disapprove” (14%). When asked, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?” One hundred percent (100%) of participants said they did. All participants (100%) said they believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples.

In answer to a question regarding the increased likelihood of couples who cohabit before marriage getting divorced after marriage, 71% of participants answered correctly. When asked the percentage of cohabiting couples who do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year, only 14% gave the correct answer of 70%. Over 85% of participants thought the percentage was much lower.

Nearly half (43%) of participants knew the percentage of people who cohabited in the state of Iowa. Concerning the United States cohabiting rates in 1960 compared to 2014, 57% of participants answered correctly (450,000) for 1960, and 57% answered correctly (7.5 million) for 2014. Additionally, most people (57%) gave the correct answer when asked what percentage of people in the U.S. cohabit before marriage (66%). A significant number of people (43%) thought the percentage was much lower.

Regarding the prevalence of cohabiting among Seventh-day Adventists, 57% answered correctly about how many Adventists cohabited according to a 1993-1994 survey (15%). But 29% thought the percentage was significantly lower. For a similar question, 57% of participants answered correctly about how many Adventists were cohabiting in 2010 (18%).

When asked, “What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?,” 57% were either “comfortable” (43%) or “very comfortable (14%), 14% were “neutral,” and 29% were “uncomfortable.” Likewise, when asked “How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?,” 86% were either “comfortable” (29%) or “very comfortable” (57%), and 14% were “very uncomfortable.”

Most participants (86%) said they were either “willing” (71%) or “very willing” (15%) to minister to a cohabiting couple if asked by the church leadership, and 14% said “I don’t know.”

When asked if they were willing to be a mentoring couple for cohabiting couples, 86% said they would be willing to be a mentoring couple if their spouse agreed, but 14% said they were not willing.

Nearly two-thirds (67%) said their view of cohabitation did not change as a result of the seminar. Two participants explained why they said their view did not change, noting that they already believed it was wrong before the seminar. Additionally, in response to the question, “As a result of today’s seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White,” 83% said yes. The last question gave participants a chance to share what they thought could be done to improve the seminar, and one suggestion was given.

Analysis for Those Who Completed Both Surveys

For the five individuals who completed both surveys, an analysis was done to see how their answers changed or improved. On the first survey, none of the five knew what percentage of couples in Iowa cohabit, but on the second survey, three out of five answered correctly. Similar improvements were made on many of the other factual-based questions.

One individual changed his/her view towards those living together outside of a committed marriage from “neutral” in the first survey to “disapprove” in the second. Another one shifted from “disapprove” to “strongly disapprove.” The training seminar influenced two out of five (40%) in strengthening their disapproval of cohabiting.

Two individuals said their comfort level ministering to cohabiting couples increased. One who said he/she was “very uncomfortable” on the first survey changed to “uncomfortable” on the second. One who said he/she was “neutral” during the first survey changed to “comfortable” on the second. This is a 40% increase in the comfort level for ministering to cohabiting couples.

Concerning the question, “Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?,” 100% said “yes” on both surveys.

An improved willingness to minister to cohabiting couples was indicated by two individuals’ answers on the surveys, which is another 40% improvement.

Concerning the comfort level of inviting cohabiting couples to one’s small group or Sabbath School class, one individual went from “comfortable” to “very comfortable.”

Three out of five participants indicated a clearer understanding that sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited in the Bible as a result of the seminar. While not a large sample size, these surveys still demonstrate the training seminar was effective in increasing the three key areas: knowledge, comfort, and willingness.

Conclusions

Did the three-part training seminar achieve its three goals of increasing (a) the level of knowledge and influencing the view about cohabitation; (b) the level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) the level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples? The spreadsheets in Appendix B provide the specific answers. Overall conclusions will be shared in chapter 6. The following are the individual church conclusions.

St. Louis

Concerning level of knowledge about cohabitation, every factual question, except one, saw a marked improvement on the second survey, which was given at the conclusion of the training seminar. For example, on the first survey, only 9% of participants answered correctly concerning the prevalence of cohabitation in the Adventist Church for

the time period 1993-1994, and 17% answered correctly for the 2010-time period, but 19% and 50% answered correctly for the questions on the second survey, respectively.

Participants' disapproval or strong disapproval for cohabiting increased from 55% in the first survey to 96% in the second. Similarly, in the first survey, 75% said they believe cohabiting was immoral and a violation of biblical principles, but the percentage increased to 91% in the second survey. Additionally, 92% of participants in the first survey believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples, but that percentage improved to 95% in the second survey.

In the comfort level for ministering to cohabiting couples' category, 42% of participants in the first survey were comfortable or very comfortable doing so, but the number decreased slightly to 39% in the second survey. On the other hand, 63% of participants were comfortable or very comfortable inviting a cohabiting couple to their small group or Sabbath School class, but the number improved to 65% in the second survey.

The willingness to minister to cohabiting couples also improved from 57% being either willing or very willing in the first survey to 61% in the second survey. The willingness to serve as a marriage mentor for cohabiting couples stayed high in both surveys: 89% willing in the first survey, 100% willing in the second.

It should be noted that there were 29 participants in the first survey, 24 in the second, but only 10 individuals who completed both surveys (based upon anonymous six-digit identification numbers). Nevertheless, as a whole, participants' surveys in St. Louis clearly indicated an increase in knowledge about cohabitation as a result of the training

seminar. Their comfort level in ministering to cohabiting couples did not significantly change, but their willingness to minister to them improved.

Des Moines

Concerning the level of knowledge about cohabitation, every factual question saw improvement on the second survey, which was given at the conclusion of the training seminar. For example, on the first survey, only 8% of participants answered correctly concerning the prevalence of cohabitation in the Adventist Church for both time periods, 1993-1994 and 2010, but 57% answered correctly for both questions on the second survey, which is a 49% improvement.

Participants' disapproval or strong disapproval for cohabiting increased from 69% in the first survey to 100% in the second. Similarly, in the first survey, 83% said they believe cohabiting was immoral and a violation of biblical principles, but the percentage increased to 100% in the second survey. Additionally, 75% of participants in the first survey believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples, but that percentage improved to 100% in the second survey.

In the comfort level for ministering to cohabiting couples' category, 34% of participants in the first survey were comfortable or very comfortable doing so, but the number increased to 57% in the second survey. Similarly, 58% of participants were comfortable or very comfortable inviting a cohabiting couple to their small group or Sabbath School class, but the number improved significantly to 86% in the second survey.

The willingness to minister to cohabiting couples also improved from 41% being either willing or very willing in the first survey to 86% in the second survey. The

willingness to serve as a marriage mentor for cohabiting couples stayed very similar in both surveys: 90% willing in the first survey, 86% willing in the second. It should be noted that there were 13 participants in the first survey, seven in the second, but only five individuals who completed both surveys (based upon anonymous six-digit identification numbers). Nevertheless, as a whole, participants' surveys in Des Moines clearly indicated an increase in knowledge about cohabitation as a result of the training seminar. Their comfort level in ministering to cohabiting couples significantly improved, as did their willingness to minister to them.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND OBSERVATIONS ON LEARNING

Summary of the Project

The project intended to educate and equip churches to minister redemptively to cohabiting couples. The training seminar was composed of three presentations: (a) Living Together: What the Bible Says & Why It Matters to All of Us, (b) Cohabiting within the Church: We Can't Ignore It, and (c) Ministering to Cohabiting Couples with Grace.

In addition to sharing the biblical and scholarly research, practical ministry suggestions were given so that ministry could be implemented. Three biblical strategies were suggested: (a) Indirect with Intentionality: Jesus' Ministry to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42), (b) Direct with Grace: Jesus' Ministry to the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11), (c) Direct with Discipline: Paul's Counsel to the Church in Corinth Dealing with Sexual Immorality (1 Cor 5:1-13).

To measure the effectiveness of the training seminar to educate and equip churches, a pre-seminar and post-seminar survey were developed. Three key categories were measured through the surveys: (a) level of knowledge and personal view about cohabitation (14 questions); (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples (2 questions); (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples (2 questions).

Two churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference participated in the training seminar in August 2017. In compiling the surveys from both churches, there were 41 pre-seminar and 31 post-seminar surveys completed, and the data was carefully analyzed.

Method of Evaluation

The project would be classified as cross-sectional quantitative quasi experimental research because there was a one-time intervention over a short period of time, and there was no control group compared with those who went through the training seminar (Killam, 2013). The pre-seminar survey provided data to evaluate the participants' (a) knowledge and personal view about cohabitation; (b) level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples; (c) level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples.

The three-part training seminar was the intervention, or the experiment. After the intervention, the post-seminar survey was given to the participants to again evaluate the three areas mentioned above.

Interpretation of the Data

A careful analysis of the data provided valuable insights regarding the effectiveness of the intervention. The pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey of each participating church were compared with each other, respectively, and compared to the other participating church's data.

The survey questions were divided into four categories: (a) knowledge, (b) their comfort level, (c) willingness, and (d) experience. Particular attention was given to see if correct answers increased in the second survey, which would suggest the training seminar was effective in increasing knowledge about cohabitation. Furthermore, questions related

to comfort level and willingness were carefully examined to see if the training seminar affected participants positively in those areas. Questions were asked concerning whether participants had cohabited or knew others in the church who were, which may or may not have positively or negatively impacted their knowledge, comfort level, and willingness to minister to cohabiting couples.

In the post-seminar survey, two additional questions were added in order to get the participants' self-assessment on whether the seminar: (a) changed their views and (b) helped them clarify their theological positions on cohabitation.

Conclusions From the Survey Data

The data reveals that the participants in St. Louis had more personal experience with cohabiting than the Des Moines participants. Yet their experience did not seem to affect their disapproval of the practice. Both groups significantly increased their disapproval of cohabitation after attending the training seminar.

Another indication from the data of the first survey is that both churches underestimated the prevalence of cohabitation within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their answers on the second survey showed a greater understanding of how common the practice of cohabiting is among our church members.

In the first survey, a large majority in both churches expressed their belief that cohabitation is immoral and a violation of biblical principles. The training seminar appears to have helped others to come to that belief, as indicated by the data.

Additionally, the data from the second survey suggests a larger percentage of people believed the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples after attending the training seminar.

The data from the St. Louis surveys did not reveal a substantial increase in the participants' comfort level to minister to cohabiting couples. However, participants in Des Moines indicated an increased level of comfort in the second survey.

Concerning willingness to actually minister to cohabiting couples, the Des Moines participants' data shows a significant increase in willingness to do so. St. Louis' data also showed a slight increase in willingness in the second survey. At the same time, St. Louis participants indicated an increased willingness to participate as marriage mentors, whereas the Des Moines participants' data reveals a very slight decrease in willingness in that category.

Outcomes of the Intervention

Two questions were added to the end of the post-seminar survey as a way to measure overall outcomes of the intervention. In Des Moines, 1/3 of participants indicated a change in their view regarding cohabitation as a result of the training seminar. Likewise, nearly two-thirds of participants in St. Louis indicated the same.

Furthermore, a large percentage of participants (83%) in Des Moines reported that, as a result of the training seminar, they could see more clearly that sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. In St. Louis, an even higher percentage of participants (94%) indicated likewise.

The overarching purpose of the training seminar was to adequately prepare churches to minister to cohabiting couples. How or whether individuals and churches implement the strategies presented is beyond the scope of this project. However, the survey data reveals an overall improvement in all three categories measured: (a) knowledge, (b) comfort level, and (c) willingness.

Summary of Chapter Conclusions

In this section I will briefly summarize the theological and literary conclusions I have come to, as well as the conclusions from the project implementation.

Theological Conclusions—Chapter 2

A study of the Old and New Testaments, along with the writings of Ellen G. White, provided a theological understanding of sexual intimacy. Genesis 2 reveals God's ideal for sexual intimacy to occur only within the context of a committed marriage relationship. Only after leaving father and mother, and cleaving to one another in a marriage covenant, is the couple to become one flesh (Gen 2:24). Jesus and Paul also clearly uphold this ideal (Matt 19:1-12; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31).

Both the Old and New Testaments demonstrate the severe consequences of engaging in sexual intimacy outside the boundaries of the marriage covenant. Several examples were given such as the death penalty (Deut 22:23-24), obligatory marriage without the possibility of divorce (Deut 22:28-29), paying the bride price without getting the bride due to the father's veto-power (Exod 22:16-17), church discipline (1 Cor 5:1-5), and condemnation in God's judgment (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 6:9-10).

Three ministry strategies emerged from three New Testament stories involving sexual immorality: (a) indirect with intentionality: Jesus' ministry to the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42), (b) direct with grace: Jesus' ministry to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), (c) direct with discipline: Paul's counsel to the church in Corinth dealing with sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1-5).

In addition, two case studies from the ministry of Ellen G. White were examined. One case dealt with a pre-marital sexual relationship between Chapin and Mattie, who

were strongly warned of the eternal danger of their behavior. The second case dealt with a cohabiting couple revealed to Ellen White in vision. She rebuked the woman who had deceived everyone into thinking the man she was living with was her husband.

Conclusions From Current Literature—Chapter 3

The study of current literature shows that cohabitation rates in the United States have skyrocketed over the last half-century, going from a mere 450,000 people in 1960 to as high as 18 million in 2017. Even among Seventh-day Adventists, 18 % of members reported cohabiting before getting married.

Research revealed the primary reasons couples choose to cohabit: fear of marriage failure, avoiding the mistakes of their parents, individualism, testing the relationship, a substitute for marriage and devaluing of the marriage license, avoiding materialism, romantic passion taking precedence over commitment, and gradual acceptance leading to fewer inhibitions to cohabit. The amount of education and lack of religious involvement are also factors which affect the couple's choice to cohabit.

Numerous studies reveal the negative effects of cohabitation on adults and children. The negative effects are due, in part, to the unwise marriages formed since cohabiting couples have increased difficulty breaking up. Cohabiting couples are often unstable, less involved in church, and have a high chance of dissolution before marriage, but if they do marry, they have a higher likelihood of divorce, being unfaithful to their spouse, and experiencing negative effects on their health and finances.

Children may also be negatively affected when their parents choose to cohabit. Sometimes such children grow up without one of their biological parents, and have a higher rate of exposure to risky behaviors (such as alcohol consumption and cigarette

smoking) by the parent and cohabiting partner. In addition, these children report a higher frequency of physical and sexual abuse, as well as more financial challenges when they live in a cohabiting household.

The literature review found a consensus regarding the importance of ministering to cohabiting couples with grace and truth. The church must uphold the biblical ideals of marriage and sexual purity, not condemning couples, but calling them to a higher standard. At times, redemptive discipline may be needed, but is usually a last resort if all other ministry attempts fail.

Furthermore, seven practical suggestions were given for churches to effectively minister to cohabiting couples: (a) pastors to educate their congregations by preaching about cohabitation, (b) require a rigorous premarital inventory to objectively assess the relationship, (c) train mentor couples with strong marriages who can encourage cohabiting couples to make moral choices over five to six sessions, (d) teach couples how to communicate and resolve conflicts, (e) establish church policy for cohabiting couples, (f) educate the cohabiting couple regarding the dangers and myths of cohabitation, and (g) encourage couples to attend a seminar for engaged couples.

It was shown that if groups of churches collectively establish similar practices and guidelines for ministry to cohabiting couples, and uphold God's ideal of marriage, then entire communities can experience stronger marriages, fewer divorces, and less cohabiting couples.

While churches have an important role to play, the parents of the cohabiting couple can and should use their influence to encourage their children to honor God by

following the biblical teaching that sexual intimacy is approved only within the covenant of marriage.

Project Implementation Conclusions—Chapter 4

After initial consultations with the pastors of the two respective churches in Iowa and Missouri, I concluded that my initial plan to assess the ministry of the churches to cohabiting couples over an extended time period was not feasible. The church in Des Moines did not have any cohabiting couples they were aware of to minister to, as the cohabiting couples they had recently married. The church in St. Louis was hesitant to adopt a new ministry of this nature considering their leadership was already stretched thin with other issues and ministries, but they were willing to be trained and equipped for such a ministry to develop in the future. Therefore, I decided to shift my focus away from the churches ministering to cohabiting couples because (a) the churches having cohabiting couples was a variable out of my and the churches' control, and (b) the churches being willing to adopt a new ministry specifically for cohabiting couples was also out of my control.

As a result, I shifted my project to a cross-sectional quantitative quasi-experimental research project. This shift allowed for both churches to participate and receive the training. In order to discover the effectiveness of the training seminar, I carefully analyzed the data from the pre- and post-seminar surveys, measuring participants' knowledge, comfort level, and willingness.

Overall Conclusions

This ministry project has led me to three overall conclusions. First, the biblical ideal for covenant marriage between one man and one woman needs to be taught widely within our homes, churches, and educational institutions to deter the increasing popularity of cohabitation in the culture and in the church. With the home, church, and educational institutions unitedly presenting the clear biblical teaching that sexual intimacy is to be enjoyed only within marriage, the impact upon all age groups will be much greater.

The second conclusion I have reached is that educating church leaders, members, and young people about the negative effects related to cohabitation is essential. The current research reveals many harmful effects cohabitation has upon both the adults and children, and many people are probably unaware of these facts. Again, parents, churches, and schools play a very important role in this educational process.

The third conclusion is that a comprehensive marriage ministry is needed not only in individual churches, but in churches collectively. Comprehensive marriage ministry would include ministry to couples in various stages of life and relationships: pre-marital preparation, marital enrichment including restoring marriages in crisis and helping to bring reconciliation to separated couples, post-marital care for those who experienced divorce or death of a spouse, preparation for remarriage, and strengthening stepfamilies.

The power of multiple churches, from various denominations, unitedly implementing comprehensive marriage ministry is demonstrated through whole cities creating Community Marriage Policies (McManus & McManus, 2008) which have significantly reduced both the divorce rate as well as the cohabitation rate.

Recommendations

Several recommendations have arisen out of this intervention and research project.

1. Due to the initial success of the training seminar intervention, further development of the seminar is worth exploring. In the future, I recommend the training seminar be conducted in a church setting with the intention of the church putting into practice the strategies learned over the course of six months to one year. After that time period expires, it would be beneficial for the church leadership to analyze the effectiveness of the strategies, and develop them further.

2. In the future, when implementing this seminar, it would be better to spread the presentations over two weekends, or at least two days. Covering all three sections in one day is not ideal. In addition, it would be worth exploring the value of registering participants in order to seek a commitment from them to attend all sessions so that they can reap the most benefit. In order to encourage people to commit to attending the entire seminar, incentives could be given for preregistration and also for completion of the training, such as Scott Stanley's book *The Power of Commitment*.

3. My project implementation was a general training seminar open to all church attendees on the particular Sabbath it was scheduled. Due to the sensitive nature of ministering to cohabiting couples, I recommend exploring the implementation of a similar training seminar specifically for church pastors, university and academy faculty/staff, and youth pastors/youth directors. Training the church leadership would be an effective way of widening the influence of this very practical research project which addresses a growing societal problem.

4. Furthermore, I recommend the training seminar could be developed in the following three ways: (a) Adding a section that explores cohabitation among various people groups, including minority groups and immigrant populations. Cultural factors could be researched to see what role the culture plays in an increase or decrease in cohabitation rates compared to national averages. (b) Adding a qualitative component to the pre- and post-seminar survey which allows participants to be able to say whether or not they have had personal experience with cohabitation and how this may have affected them emotionally. (c) Exploration of modifying the training seminar in such a way that it could be presented in part to a non-religious audience, such as a public high school.

5. Since more education is needed concerning cohabitation, I recommend other church leaders, teachers, researchers, and pastors develop additional presentations, seminars, projects, and sermons that can inform people of the negative effects of cohabitation and why God's ideal plan of covenant marriage is much better.

6. While chapter 2 briefly developed a theology of sexual intimacy exclusively within the boundaries of marriage, and biblical strategies for ministering to people in cohabiting relationships, further research and wider dissemination could bring greater benefit to the church. Several articles or perhaps a stand-alone book could be developed that could be distributed to wider Adventist audiences would be helpful, especially in western societies where cohabitation is a significant problem.

7. Since Community Marriage Policies have been effectively implemented in many cities, with participation from many denominations, I would recommend that local Adventist churches explore if and how this could effectively be done in their context. Furthermore, I recommend that Conferences within the North American Division

consider implementing a Community Marriage Policy conference-wide, so that all Seventh-day Adventist Churches have the same policies regarding comprehensive marriage ministry, which have proven to lower divorce and cohabitation rates.

8. In the literature review, I discovered a scarcity of Adventist scholarship on cohabitation. To strengthen our church's understanding and position, I recommend cohabitation be researched further by professors and scholars in our educational institutions, by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, and by other ministry practitioners. The research could then be shared with students, pastors, family life educators, and other church leaders in classroom settings and at conferences such as the annual Adventist Conference on Family Research and Practice (ACFRP), sponsored by the General Conference and North American Division Family Ministries Departments, held on the campus of Andrews University.

9. Finally, due to the increasing number of cohabiting couples in many countries around the world, I recommend the General Conference consider specifically mentioning and addressing cohabitation in the *Church Manual*. Furthermore, I recommend specifically strengthening the chapter titled "Discipline" to include the three biblical strategies for ministering to cohabiting couples. The strategies could be used to effectively minister to people in a variety of compromising situations in addition to cohabitation.

My Transformation as a Ministry Professional

Another aspect of this project has been my own growth and transformation as a minister. There are three areas of growth that I have noticed. The first one is the recognition of my own blind spots. This occurred to me after talking with one of the

pastors from one of the churches where I was going to implement my seminar. His open and honest feedback showed me a blind spot in my project, and as a result, I made some key changes that made dramatic improvements to the practical strategies I planned to share with both congregations. His input led me to see that the biblical examples I had cited in my project should actually become the biblical strategies for ministry to cohabiting couples. Additionally, I realized my instructions for ministering to cohabiting couples needed to be tempered with a dependence on the Holy Spirit's leading.

The second area of growth I have noticed through this process is my need to study more thoroughly the incredible depths of God's Word. While the word cohabit is not mentioned in Scripture, after studying this topic over these years, I now see there are several instances where the practice of cohabitation was taking place. In addition, I never knew Ellen G. White dealt with cohabitation in her day until I started researching for this project. Certainly, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy have proven to be, once again, the greater and lesser light that provide clear instruction even for 21st century issues such as cohabitation.

The third area of growth for me is the realization of how much research has been done, and that by carefully searching one can discover amazing insights from other scholars and practitioners. Indeed, this paper has not exhausted the topic of cohabitation. Much more information is available and becoming available as more research is done on this exploding phenomenon.

Through this process, I have been reaffirmed in my desire to be a lifelong learner because, there is undoubtedly a vast amount of biblical and scholarly research available

that can both educate and equip one for more effective ministry. I am thankful for this transformational experience.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH APPROVAL AND CONSENT



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

Iowa-Missouri Conference

May 9, 2017

Institute Review Board

Andrews University

4150 Administrative
Drive, Room 322
Berrien Springs, MI
49104-0335

To Whom It May Concern:

The Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists welcomes the opportunity with Jared Miller and Andrews University in his DMin Project Dissertation entitled, "Training Teams from Selected Churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for Ministry to Cohabiting Couples."

He has permission to implement his project at the St. Louis and Des Moines churches this coming August.

Sincerely,

Robert M Wagley

Executive Secretary

1005 Grand Avenue • P.O. Box 65665 • West Des Moines, Iowa 50265-0665
(515) 223-1197 • Fax: (515) 223-5692 • Email: imsda@ucollege.edu • Website: www.imsda.org

June 26, 2017

Jared Miller

Tel: 515-528-3996

Email: jaredandkatiem@gmail.com jared.miller@adventistemr.org

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

IRB Protocol #: 17-088 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Doctor of Ministry

Review Category: Expedited **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** David Penno

Title: Training teams from selected churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for Ministry to cohabitating couples.

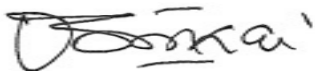
This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your IRB application for research involving human subjects entitled: *“Training teams from selected churches in the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for Ministry to cohabitating couples”* IRB protocol number 17-088 under Expedited category. This approval is valid until June 26, 2018. If your research is not completed by the end of this period you must apply for an extension at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. We ask that you inform IRB whenever you complete your research. Please reference the protocol number in future correspondence regarding this study.

Any future changes (see IRB Handbook pages 10-11) made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Please use the attached report form to request for modifications, extension and completion of your study.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risk with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, (see IRB Handbook page 11) this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any projectrelated physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Katherine, by calling (269) 473-2222. Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely



Mordekai Ongo
Research Integrity & Compliance Officer

Andrews University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Pastor Jared Miller is conducting a research study as part of his Doctor of Ministry project, in partial fulfillment for his Doctor of Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Research Title: “Training Teams From Selected Churches In The Iowa-Missouri Conference Of Seventh-Day Adventists For Ministry To Cohabiting Couples.”

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to educate, train, and prepare Seventh-day Adventist teams to minister to cohabiting couples.

Duration of participation in study: On the day of the three-part seminar, I understand that I will be required to complete a pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey which will take approximately 20 minutes of my time (10 minutes for each survey).

Benefits: The benefits of participating in this study is education on an increasingly prevalent social topic, and understanding how to minister to cohabiting couples in various ways.

Risks: There are no risks involved in this study.

Voluntary Participation: I have been informed that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am aware that there will be no penalty or loss of benefits I'm entitled to if I decide to cancel my participation in this study. And that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document. However, the data will eventually be published as a Doctor of Ministry project, but the data will in no one disclose your identity. The researcher, Jared Miller, will keep the records in a secure place.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the supervisor of Pastor Jared Miller, Dr. Jeffrey Brown (301-680-6000) or Pastor Jared Miller himself at jaredm@andrews.edu for answers to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at (269) 471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read the contents of this Consent and received verbal explanations to questions I had. My questions concerning this study have been answered satisfactorily. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. I am fully aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact Pastor Jared Miller.

Signature (Subject)

Date

Signature (Researcher)

Date

APPENDIX B
TRAINING CHURCHES OUTLINE

TRAINING CHURCHES OUTLINE

1. Communicating with the local pastor to appeal for commitment of leaders to attend and be involved in this training.
2. Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar Survey
 - a. The pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey will measure three things:
 - 1) Level of knowledge about cohabitation in society and the theological foundations for the SDA position on it;
 - 2) Level of comfort in ministering to cohabiting couples;
 - 3) Level of willingness to intentionally minister to cohabiting couples.
3. Sabbath Training Seminar
 - a. Part 1: Sabbath School: *Living Together: What the Bible Says and Why It Matters to All of Us*. Lays the biblical foundation from the OT; covers current research on reasons for, negative effects of cohabiting, and prevalence.
 - b. Part 2: Sabbath Sermon: *Cohabiting within the Church: We Can't Ignore It*. Reaffirms the OT biblical foundation with the NT; reveals Adventists prevalence of cohabiting and the church's perception; presents God's grace for those who have cohabited.
 - c. Part 3: Afternoon Session: *Ministering to Cohabiting Couples with Grace*. Guidelines and potential errors. Strategies to minister to cohabiting couples, with differences for members and non-members.
 - i. Guidelines and potential errors.
 - ii. Biblical examples
 1. Indirect with intentionality: Jesus' ministry to Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42)
 2. Direct with grace: Jesus' ministry to woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11)
 3. Direct with discipline: Paul's counsel to church in Corinth dealing with sexual sin (1 Cor 5:1-13)
 - iii. Practical suggestions for a cohabiting couple which includes at least one of them being a church member
 1. Visitation plan
 - a. Intentionally building relationship and trust
 - b. Attempting to connect them to Jesus
 - c. If previously married, determine if there are biblical grounds to remarry
 - d. Complications of divorce and remarriage
 2. Prepare/Enrich pre-marriage preparation
 3. Mentoring couple
 4. Sponsor couple to engaged couples weekend
 5. Waive all wedding/reception fees as gift from church
 6. If unwilling, give three to four months to reconsider it
 7. Offer 3-5 again. If unwilling, consider proceeding with redemptive disciplines process.
 - iv. Practical suggestions for a cohabiting couple who are non-members but connected to church
 1. Visitation plan

- a. Intentionally building relationship and trust.
 - b. Attempting to connect them to Jesus.
2. Prepare/Enrich pre-marriage preparation
3. Mentoring couple
4. Sponsor couple to engaged couples weekend
5. Waive all wedding/reception fees as gift from church

APPENDIX C
SEMINAR SURVEY ONE

COHABITING, COMMITMENT, AND THE CHURCH

SEMINAR SURVEY ONE

This is an anonymous survey. Pastor Jared Miller is a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. Your responses are completely anonymous. The purpose of the survey is to determine the knowledge and view about cohabitation, as well as determine the comfort level of ministering to cohabiting couples and the willingness to do so.

Survey Instructions:

- In order to correlate the pre-and post-surveys, an identification number needs to be created using the six-digit number of your mother or father's date of birth (mm/dd/yy), for example: December 14, 1935 would be written 121435.
 - Please write the six-digit identification number here: _____
 - Do not write your name.
 - Please circle only one answer for each question.
 - When you finish completing the survey, it will be collected.
1. What level of knowledge would you say you have regarding cohabitation?

a. High b. Medium c. Low

 2. What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?

a. Strongly disapprove b. Disapprove c. Neutral d. Approve e. Strongly approve

 3. According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Missouri are in cohabiting households?

a. 5.2% b. 12.8% c. 1.4% d. 2.3%

4. According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Iowa are in cohabiting households?
 - a. 8.8%
 - b. 2.6%
 - c. 4.7%
 - d. 1.6%

5. In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 1960?
 - a. 120,000
 - b. 255,000
 - c. 450,000
 - d. 750,000

6. In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 2014?
 - a. 9 million
 - b. 7.5 million
 - c. 4.9 million
 - d. 2.1 million

7. According to a 1993-1994 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, what percentage of people reported living together before marriage?
 - a. 4.2%
 - b. 9.7%
 - c. 18%
 - d. 15%

8. According to a 2010 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), what percentage of those people reported living together before marriage?
 - a. 4.2%
 - b. 9.7%
 - c. 18%
 - d. 15%

9. Is cohabitation a problem in your local church?
 - a. Yes, a big problem
 - b. Yes, somewhat
 - c. No, not a problem
 - d. I don't know

10. Couples who cohabit before marriage are _____% more likely to get divorced after they marry.
 - a. 10
 - b. 20
 - c. 30
 - d. 50

11. _____% of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year.
 - a. 25
 - b. 60
 - c. 70
 - d. 45

12. What effects does cohabitation have on children and their families?
- a. Worse financially than married couples
 - b. Experience more physical and sexual abuse
 - c. Cohabiting couples spend more money on alcohol/tobacco and less on education than married couples
 - d. All the above
 - e. Only b and c
13. Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?
- a. Very uncomfortable
 - b. Uncomfortable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Very comfortable
15. Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
16. If the church leadership asked you to minister to a cohabiting couple, what would you say is your level of willingness to do so?
- a. Very unwilling
 - b. Unwilling
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Willing
 - e. Very willing
17. Do you believe the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
18. If you are married, would you be willing to be a mentoring couple for a cohabiting couple?
- a. Yes, if my spouse agreed
 - b. No
 - c. I am not married
19. How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?
- a. Very uncomfortable
 - b. Uncomfortable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Very comfortable
20. Have you ever cohabited (lived with someone of the opposite sex and engaged in a sexual relationship)?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

21. In the United States, nearly _____ of people cohabit before they marry.

- a. 40% b. 66% c. 33% d. 20%

APPENDIX D
SEMINAR SURVEY TWO

COHABITING, COMMITMENT, AND THE CHURCH

SEMINAR SURVEY TWO

This is an anonymous survey. Pastor Jared Miller is a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. Your responses are completely anonymous. The purpose of the survey is to determine the knowledge and view about cohabitation, as well as determine the comfort level of ministering to cohabiting couples and the willingness to do so.

Survey Instructions:

- In order to correlate the pre-and post-surveys, an identification number needs to be created using the six-digit number of your mother or father's date of birth (mm/dd/yy), for example: December 14, 1935 would be written 121435.
- Please write the six-digit identification number here: _____
- If you did not complete the pre-survey, you may still complete this post-survey.
- Do not write your name.
- Please circle only one answer for each question.
- When you finish completing the survey, it will be collected.

1. What level of knowledge would you say you have regarding cohabitation?

- a. High b. Medium c. Low

2. What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?

- a. Strongly disapprove b. Disapprove c. Neutral d. Approve e. Strongly approve

3. According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Missouri are in cohabiting households?

- a. 5.2% b. 12.8% c. 1.4% d. 2.3%

4. According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Iowa are in cohabiting households?
a. 8.8% b. 2.6% c. 4.7% d. 1.6%

5. In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 1960?
a. 120,000 b. 255,000 c. 450,000 d. 750,000

6. In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 2014?
a. 9 million b. 7.5 million c. 4.9 million d. 2.1 million

7. According to a 1993-1994 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, what percentage of people reported living together before marriage?
a. 4.2% b. 9.7% c. 18% d. 15%

8. According to a 2010 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), what percentage of those people reported living together before marriage?
a. 4.2% b. 9.7% c. 18% d. 15%

9. Is cohabitation a problem in your local church?
a. Yes, a big problem b. Yes, somewhat c. No, not a problem d. I don't know

10. Couples who cohabit before marriage are _____% more likely to get divorced after they marry.
a. 10 b. 20 c. 30 d. 50

11. _____% of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year.
a. 25 b. 60 c. 70 d. 45

12. What effects does cohabitation have on children and their families?
- a. Worse financially than married couples
 - b. Experience more physical and sexual abuse
 - c. Cohabiting couples spend more money on alcohol/tobacco and less on education than married couples
 - d. All the above
 - e. Only b and c
13. Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?
- a. Very uncomfortable
 - b. Uncomfortable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Very comfortable
15. Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
16. If the church leadership asked you to minister to a cohabiting couple, what would you say is your level of willingness to do so?
- a. Very unwilling
 - b. Unwilling
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Willing
 - e. Very willing
17. Do you believe the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
18. If you are married, would you be willing to be a mentoring couple for a cohabiting couple?
- a. Yes, if my spouse agreed
 - b. No
 - c. I am not married
19. How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?
- a. Very uncomfortable
 - b. Uncomfortable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Very comfortable
20. Have you ever cohabited (lived with someone of the opposite sex and engaged in a sexual relationship)?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

21. In the United States, nearly _____ of people cohabit before they marry.

- a. 40% b. 66% c. 33% d. 20%

22. Has your view of cohabitation changed at all because of today's seminar?

- a. Yes b. No

Please explain:

23. As a result of today's seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

- a. Yes b. No

24. What could be improved about this seminar?

APPENDIX E
ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Analysis of the Survey Questions

Number of questions relating to:

- I. Knowledge and view about cohabitation: 14 (questions 1-8, 10-12, 15, 17, 21)
 - a. Knowledge of prevalence in society: 5 (questions 3-6, 21)
 - b. Knowledge of prevalence in the church: 2 (questions 7-8)
 - c. General knowledge: 4 (question 1, 10-12)
 - d. View concerning morality of: 3 (question 2, 15, 17)
- II. Comfort level of ministering to cohabiting couples: 2 (question 14, 19)
- III. The willingness to minister to cohabiting couples: 2 (question 16, 18)
- IV. Their experience with cohabiting or of knowing of cohabiting couples personally or in the church: 3 (questions 9 and 13, 20)

APPENDIX F
SURVEY RESULTS FOR ST. LOUIS

Table 1: Survey Results from St. Louis

#	Questions	St. Louis, Survey 1		St. Louis, Survey 2		Increase
		Total Responses	Answers	Total Responses	Answers	
1	What level of knowledge would you say you have regarding cohabitation?	29	(48%) said they had a "medium" level, 28% said they had "high" level	22	(55%) said they had a "medium" level, 45% said they had "high" level	7%+ medium; 17%+ high
2	What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?	29	55% either "strongly disapprove" (31%) or "disapprove" (24%)	23	96% either "strongly disapprove" (52%) or "disapprove" (44%), but 4% were "Neutral"	21%+ strongly disapprove; 20%+ disapprove
3	According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Missouri are in cohabiting households?	24	8%	19	32%	24%+
4	According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Iowa are in cohabiting households?	23		19		
5	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 1960?	24	17%	21	29%	12%+
6	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 2014?	24	21%	20	65%	44%+
7	According to a 1993-1994 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, what percentage of people reported living together before marriage?	23	9%	21	19%	10%+
8	According to a 2010 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), what percentage of those people reported living together before marriage?	24	17%	20	50%	33%+
9	Is cohabitation a problem in your local church?	28	36% either "somewhat" of a problem (25%) or a "big problem" (11%)	22	41% said it was either "somewhat" of a problem (32%) or a "big problem" (9%).	7%+ somewhat; - 2% big
10	Couples who cohabit before marriage are _____% more likely to get divorced after they marry.	22	41%	22	82%	41%+
11	_____ % of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year.	22	41%	21	29%	12%-
12	What effects does cohabitation have on children and their families?	18		22		
13	Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?	24	29%	23	22%	
14	What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?	24	42% were either "comfortable" (25%) or "very comfortable" (17%)	23	39% were either "comfortable" (35%) or "very comfortable" (4%), 35% were "neutral", and 26% were either "uncomfortable" (22%) or "very uncomfortable" (4%)	10%+ comfortable; - 13% very comfortable
15	Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?	24	75%, yes	23	91% yes, 9% not sure	16%+
16	If the church leadership asked you to minister to a cohabiting couple, what would you say is your level of willingness to do so?	23	(57%) said they were either "willing" (48%) or "very willing" (9%)	23	(61%) said they were either "willing" (52%) or "very willing" (9%)	4%+ willing
17	Do you believe the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples?	24	92%, yes	21	95% yes	3%+
18	If you are married, would you be willing to be a mentoring couple for a cohabiting couple?	24	Of those who were married (37%), 89% willing, 11% unwilling	22	Of those who were married (27%), 100% willing	11%+
19	How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?	24	63% were either "comfortable" (21%) or "very comfortable" (42%)	23	65% were either "comfortable" (39%) or "very comfortable" (26%), 26% were "neutral", and 27% were "very uncomfortable."	18%+ comfortable, - 16% very comfortable
20	Have you ever cohabited (lived with someone of the opposite sex and engaged in a sexual relationship)?	23	35%, 8 people	23	39%, 9 people	4%+
21	In the United States, nearly _____ of people cohabit before they marry.	21	52%	21	57%	5%+
22	Has your view of cohabitation changed at all because of today's seminar?			23	65%, yes	
23	As a result of today's seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.			16	94% yes	

APPENDIX G
SURVEY RESULTS FOR DES MOINES

Table 2: Survey Results from Des Moines

#	Questions	Des Moines, Survey 1		Des Moines, Survey 2		Increase/Decrease
		Total Responses	Answers	Total Responses	Answers	
1	What level of knowledge would you say you have regarding cohabitation?	13	46% Medium; 31% high	7	(29%) said they had a "medium" level, 57% said they had "high" level	26%+ high; -2% medium
2	What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?	13	69% either "strongly disapprove" (38%) or "disapprove" (31%)	7	100% either "strongly disapprove" (86%) or "disapprove" (14%)	31%+
3	According to the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Missouri are in cohabiting households?	12		7		
4	According to the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Iowa are in cohabiting households?	12	0% answered correctly	7	43%	43%+
5	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 1960?	12	8%	7	57%	49%+
6	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 2014?	12	33%	7	57%	24%+
7	According to a 1993-1994 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, what percentage of people reported living together before marriage?	12	8%	7	57%	49%+
8	According to a 2010 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), what percentage of those people reported living together before marriage?	12	8%	7	57%	49%+
9	Is cohabitation a problem in your local church?	13	15% Somewhat	7	"somewhat" of a problem (57%) or a "big problem" (14%).	Big difference
10	Couples who cohabit before marriage are _____% more likely to get divorced after they marry.	12	50%	7	71%	21%+
11	_____ % of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year.	12	8%	7	14%	6%+
12	What effects does cohabitation have on children and their families?	12		7		
13	Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?	12	33%	7	71%	38%+
14	What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?	12	34% were either "comfortable" (17%) or "very comfortable" (17%)	7	57% were either "comfortable" (43%) or "very comfortable" (14%)	26%+ comfortable; -3% very comfortable
15	Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?	12	83%, yes	7	100%	17%+
16	If the church leadership asked you to minister to a cohabiting couple, what would you say is your level of willingness to do so?	12	(41%) said they were either "willing" (33%) or "very willing" (8%)	7	(86%) said they were either "willing" (71%) or "very willing" (15%)	45%+ overall, 38%+ willing; 7% very willing
17	Do you believe the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples?	12	75%, yes	7	100%	25%
18	If you are married, would you be willing to be a mentoring couple for a cohabiting couple?	12	90% yes, 10% no	7	86% yes, 14% no	Similar
19	How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?	12	58% were either "comfortable" (33%) or "very comfortable" (25%)	7	86% were either "comfortable" (29%) or "very comfortable" (57%)	4%- comfortable, 32%+ very comfortable
20	Have you ever cohabited (lived with someone of the opposite sex and engaged in a sexual relationship)?	12	25%	6	17%	
21	In the United States, nearly _____ of people cohabit before they marry.	11	36%	7	57%	21%+
22	Has your view of cohabitation changed at all because of today's seminar?			6	33% yes	
23	As a result of today's seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.		139	6	83% yes	

APPENDIX H
COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS FROM ST. LOUIS AND DES MOINES

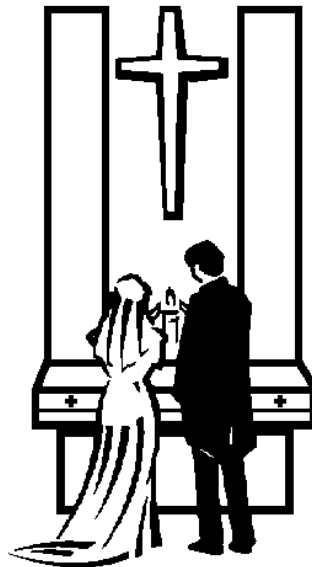
Table 3: Comparison of the Results from St. Louis and Des Moines

#	Questions	St. Louis 10		Des Moines 5	
		Percent correct on first survey	Percent correct for those who took both	Percent correct on first survey	Percent correct for those who took both
1	What level of knowledge would you say you have regarding cohabitation?				
2	What is your view towards those living together (cohabiting) outside of a committed marriage?				
3	According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Missouri are in cohabiting households?	0%	60%	0%	40%
4	According the United States Census Bureau, what percentage of people in Iowa are in cohabiting households?	20%	50%	0%	60%
5	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 1960?	10%	30%	0%	60%
6	In the United States, approximately how many people were cohabiting with their partner in 2014?	20%	80%	20%	60%
7	According to a 1993-1994 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, what percentage of people reported living together before marriage?	0%	10%	20%	60%
8	According to a 2010 survey of Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division, of those who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), what percentage of those people reported living together before marriage?	20%	50%	0%	60%
9	Is cohabitation a problem in your local church?				
10	Couples who cohabit before marriage are _____% more likely to get divorced after they marry.	30%	60%	75%	80%
11	_____ % of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year.	40%	20%	25%	20%
12	What effects does cohabitation have on children and their families?	60%	100%	100%	80%
13	Do you personally know a Seventh-day Adventist who is cohabiting?				
14	What is your comfort level in ministering to a cohabiting couple?				
15	Do you believe cohabiting is immoral and a violation of biblical principles?				
16	If the church leadership asked you to minister to a cohabiting couple, what would you say is your level of willingness to do so?				
17	Do you believe the church should intentionally minister to cohabiting couples?				
18	If you are married, would you be willing to be a mentoring couple for a cohabiting couple?				
19	How comfortable would you be inviting a cohabiting couple to your small group or Sabbath School class?				
20	Have you ever cohabited (lived with someone of the opposite sex and engaged in a sexual relationship)?				
21	In the United States, nearly _____ of people cohabit before they marry.	70%	70%	25%	60%
22	Has your view of cohabitation changed at all because of today's seminar?				
23	As a result of today's seminar, I see more clearly how sexual immorality and cohabitation are prohibited by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.				

APPENDIX I
COHABITING, COMMITMENT, AND THE CHURCH WORKBOOK



***Cohabiting,
Commitment,
and the Church***



Presented by Pastor Jared Miller



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

Iowa-Missouri Conference

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the *Cohabiting, Commitment, and the Church* seminar! I hope and pray this seminar will be educational and inspirational for you. Creating and presenting this seminar is a key component of my educational experience as a Doctor of Ministry student at Andrews University.

Here are the three sections we will cover:

9:30am *Part 1: Living Together: What the Bible Says & Why It Matters to All of Us*

11:00am *Part 2: Cohabiting within the Church: We Can't Ignore It*

2:00pm *Part 3: Ministering to Cohabiting Couples with Grace*

My prayer is that God will bless you through this seminar,

Pastor Jared Miller
IA-MO Conference Family Ministry Director
www.imsda.org/family

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Cohabiting, Commitment, and the Church, Part 1:

Living Together: What the Bible Says

& Why It Matters to All of Us

Definition

- The word “cohabit” comes from two Latin words: *co* ‘together’ and *habitare* ‘dwell.’
- It’s defined this way:
 - “Live together and have a sexual relationship without being married” (*Oxford Dictionaries*, 2016).
 - “To live together as if married, usually without legal or religious sanction” (*Dictionary.com*, 2016).

Types of Cohabiting Couples

- Concerning the timing of when couples start cohabiting, there are three types:
 - “The accelerated cohabitators” who have a strong romantic attraction and begin living together within the first six month of dating, and represent the majority of cohabiting couples.
 - “The tentative cohabitators” who have never cohabited before and who date for between seven to 12 months before cautiously moving in together.
 - “The purposeful delayers” who were together between one to four years before beginning to cohabit (Sassler as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013).
- Additionally, concerning whether cohabiting couples end up marrying, there are four types of cohabiting couples:

- “Spousal cohabiters” who cohabited only once and then married.
- “One-time cohabiters” who had a cohabiting relationship dissolve and then later married someone else.
- “Serial cohabiters” who had multiple cohabiting relationships that dissolved before they ended up marrying (according to Vespa and Painter II, 2011).
- Then, of course, there are some cohabiting couples who never marry.

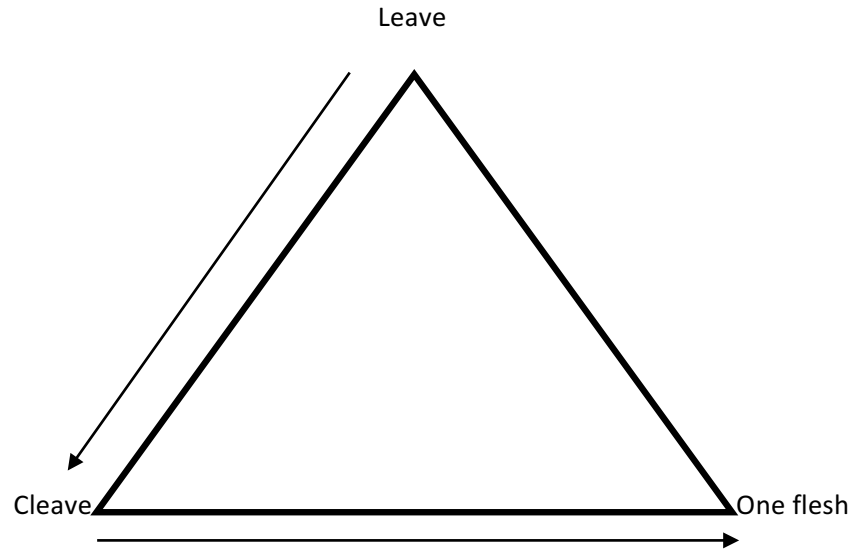
Is Cohabiting Biblical? What Does the Bible Say?

- “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).
- From creation, specifically Gen 2:24, God established the pattern for all future marriages and sexual relationships.
- The Hebrew word for “leave” is *azab*, which means “to leave, forsake, loose.”
 - Both the man and his wife were to leave their parents, and physically and psychologically establish their own home.
 - Their loyalty shifted from their biological family to the spouse they were forsaking all others for.
 - Leaving parents indicates that the man and woman are mature enough to provide for themselves.
 - The word *azab* also can mean “to permit”, which suggests “The man has to get permission of the parents to unite himself with their daughter as his wife” (Brown & Brown, *The Total Marriage*, p. 37).
 - Leaving father and mother involves a public action in front of witnesses, including God and the couple’s family members.

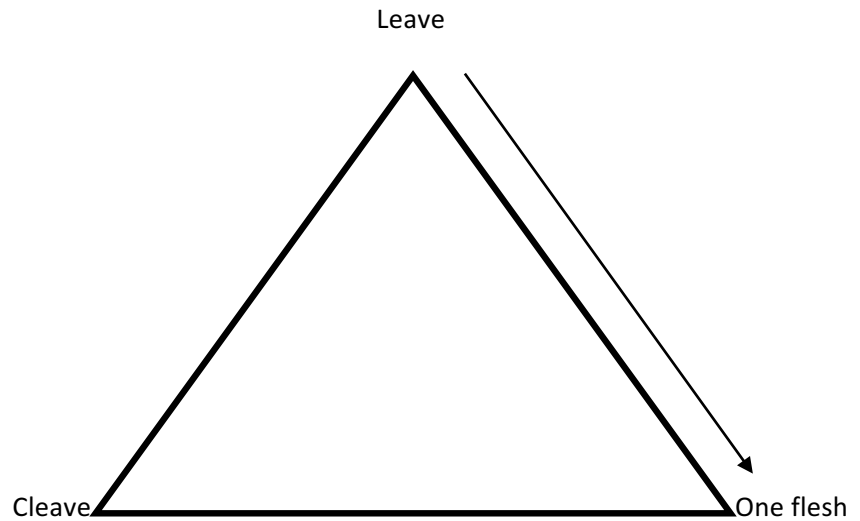
- Gen 2:22 describes God bringing the newly created Eve to Adam. In the context of Eden, the marriage of Adam and Eve was public with God as witness and officiant. It was not merely a private arrangement between Adam and Eve alone.
- The Hebrew word for “cleave” or “be joined” is *dabaq*—a technical term in the Old Testament used for making a covenant and, in the context of 2:24, a marriage covenant.
 - The word gives the idea of permanence.
 - The language used in Gen 2:22-24 is describing wedding vows, a mutual clinging to one another by the man and woman. The Edenic model of marriage involves leaving one’s family and clinging to one’s spouse in a permanent covenant commitment.
- **Key Point:** Only after the leaving and cleaving takes place, is the first couple described as becoming one flesh.
 - The sequence is vitally important: first leave, then cleave, then become one flesh.
- Thus, the pattern for all future marriage relationships is established:
 1. Leaving one’s family by placing priority and loyalty upon one’s spouse, and also includes getting permission of the parents to unite with their daughter.
 2. Cleaving to one’s spouse in a permanent lifelong covenant commitment.
 3. Then becoming one flesh through sexual union.
- **Key Point:** The biblical theology for sexuality is established in Gen 2:24 in that it occurs only in an exclusive and permanently committed relationship. When exclusivity and a permanent and public commitment are present, only then is sexual intimacy enjoyed with Divine approval and blessing.
- With the clear emphasis from Gen 2:24 on the public leaving and covenant cleaving to one’s spouse, Frank Hasel emphasizes that the context of these principles is found in the

perfection of Eden. Since these principles are already in place “before the entrance of sin, how much more is this protective and stabilizing framework essential after the Fall, when man because of his sinfulness is prone to be unreliable and unfaithful” (*Marriage: Biblical and theological aspects*, Vol. 1, 2015, p. 35).

- The Triangle: The Biblical Model (from *The Total Marriage*, by Brown and Brown, 1999)



- The Triangle: The Cohabiting Model



- **Key Point:** The Divine pattern established in Eden is not met in any way by modern cohabiting relationships.

Marriage as a Covenant

- 1) Proverbs 2:16-17 (NIV), “It [discretion, understanding, wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.” The adulteress has ignored the marriage covenant that she made before God.
- 2) Malachi 2:14 where a man is referred to as dealing treacherously with the wife of his “marriage covenant.”

Consequences for Premarital Sex

- Sexual oneness occurring before the marriage covenant does not follow the Divine ideal established by God in Eden. Deut. 22 shows that there were severe consequences for sexual behavior outside the ideal established in Eden
- **Case #1:** Deut. 22:13-21 reveals the consequences of premarital sex in the context of a husband finding out his wife was not a virgin on their wedding night. If the young woman’s father and mother cannot provide evidence of her virginity, namely a bloody cloth sheet, then the woman was to be stoned to death.
- Richard Davidson’s research reveals the seriousness of this sin:
 - “First, the penalty is death. Second, she is to be executed by all the men of the city, indicating that this is an offense against the social order of the whole community as well as against her husband and father. Shame has been brought upon the honor of the community. Third, her act is described as *nebala*, a term used for serious disorderly and unruly conduct that violently threatens a breakdown in social order. Fourth, the seriousness of this offense is also underscored by describing the

woman's action as "prostituting herself" (*zana*, having illicit sexual relations) while in her father's house (i.e., under his legal protection/jurisdiction). Finally, the gravity of the sexual offense is even further reinforced by the expurgation formula of v. 21: 'So you shall purge the evil from your midst.'" (*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, 2007, p. 358)

- In this particular case, the deceitfulness of the woman in claiming to be a virgin when she knows she is not, along with the actual premarital sexual behavior, makes this a sin worthy of the death penalty.
- **Case #2:** a man who seduces a single woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, to have sex with him.
- Ex 22:16-17 parallels Deut. 22:28-29, yet brings out unique points.
- In Deut. 22, the premarital sex has several consequences:
 - (a) the man has to pay the full bride price of 50 shekels,
 - (b) the man is required to marry the woman,
 - (c) the man will not be allowed to divorce her throughout his entire life.
- Ex. 22:16-17 introduces the aspect of seduction, where the man seduces the woman into premarital sex. The consequences are:
 - (a) he has to pay full bride price and marry the woman,
 - (b) the woman's father can refuse to give her to the man in marriage,
 - (c) the man would still be required to pay part of the bride price for the woman since it would be more difficult for the family to receive full bride price for her since she was no longer a virgin
- This legislation seems to be very balanced and protective of the family, the woman, and society in general.

- First of all, the temporary pleasures of the sexual encounter would be weighed by both the man and woman against the knowledge that should they get caught, they would be required to get married to each other, and have no possibility of divorce.
 - This protects the woman from a lustful man who wants sex but does not want commitment, and it also provides security for her both financially and socially.
- The fact that, in Ex 22, the father has “veto” power, so to speak, protects the girl from being forced to marry a man who thought to force her into marriage by having sex with her. The father’s decision also protected the family because it prevented the lady from manipulating the choice of the marriage partner by her sleeping with the man she would like to marry.
- Davidson concludes:
 - “The provision that the father was not required to have his daughter marry the one who seduced her seems also to provide further evidence within Scripture for the conclusion that sexual intercourse per se does not constitute a marriage. As with God’s ideal in Eden, the “cleaving” (or marriage covenant) was to come before the “becoming one flesh” (sexual intercourse). But even if there is sexual intercourse before the formalizing of the marriage covenant, this does not automatically mean that the sexual partners are married” (*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, 2007, p. 361).
- Davidson succinctly concludes, “While Pentateuchal legislation does not directly address the practice of cohabitation, it does deal with the foundational premise upon which cohabitation is based—the right for men and women to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage” (*Does marriage still matter?* Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute. www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org, p. 3).

Three Key Old Testament Examples

- Key example #1: Ezra 9-10 depicts a situation that may be very similar to today's common practice of cohabiting.
 - This case is very unique in Scripture. Ezra calls upon all those who have married pagan women to “do [God’s] will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives” (Ez 10:14). As a result of Ezra’s call to reform, “113 Jewish men (seventeen priests, ten Levites, and eight-six lay persons) put away their wives” (Davidson, *Marriage: Biblical and theological aspects*, Vol. 1, 2015, p. 194).
 - The original Hebrew words used in Ezra 9-10 reveal that Ezra did not use the common language of the day to describe putting away and separating oneself from. The explanation is that “these marriages, once they were recognized to be a direct violation of the command of the Torah, were not considered legitimate, valid marriages” (Davidson, *Marriage: Biblical and theological aspects*, Vol. 1, p. 194). Since these were invalid marriages, the normal word for divorce is not used. Since these unions were invalid and the specific language for divorce is not used, perhaps these relationships resembled more of a “common-law marriage or informal live-in arrangement that might later lead to a formal marriage” (Davidson, *Marriage: Biblical and theological aspects*, Vol. 1, p. 195). We can conclude from this story that cohabitation is not in harmony with God’s will.
- Key example #2: The Importance of Virginitv in the Old Testament
 - Examples of the importance of virginitv are plentiful in the OT: (a) Abraham’s servant found the beautiful virgin Rebekah for Isaac (Gen 24:16, 43); (b) the High Priest was not permitted to marry anyone except a virgin (Lev 21:13-14); (c) Absalom murdered his brother Amnon because he raped their virgin sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-39); (d) Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi took vengeance on Shechem

(and his father and all the males of his city) by murdering him (and them) for his disgraceful rape of their virgin sister in Gen 34.

- Key example #3: Samson and Delilah
 - Scholars suggests Samson visited her at least four times or more.
 - Delilah “pestered him daily with her words and pressed him” (Judg 16:16). This may have been similar to a short-term cohabiting relationship, at least in the sense of their sexual relationship.
 - How did Samson and Delilah’s short-term cohabiting relationship work out? It ended with seduction, deception, betrayal, blindness, and ultimately the death of Samson. If Samson had followed God’s plan for marriage, certainly his story would’ve been much different.

Why Does it Matter? Increasing Prevalence in Society

- “Recent research shows that for people born before 1928 and reaching early adulthood before World War II, the cohabiting rate was just 2 percent” (Glenn Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference*, 2011, pp. 14-15).
- In the United States, research reveals between 50-66% of people cohabit before they marry (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007, p. 104; “Age at coresidence, premarital cohabitation, and marriage dissolution: 1985-2009” A. Kuperberg (2014). *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76, 352-369).
- The number of cohabiting couples in the United States has risen from 450,000 people in 1960 to more than 7.5 million today (*The Family*, Balswick & Balswick, 2014).

- According to a United States Census Bureau survey from 2008-2012, over 136,000 (2.3% of the population) people in Missouri cohabit, while nearly 53% of adults are married.
- In Iowa, over 75,000 (2.6% of the population) people cohabit, whereas 55% of adults are married.
- In Britain the cohabitation rate rose from 5% in the 1960s up to about 70% in the 1990s. Furthermore, “Of women marrying a second time in the 1990s, about 90 percent will cohabit before their second marriage” (Brown & Brown, 1999, p. 38).
- Other studies indicate that the majority of high-school students, 57% in one study and 66% in another, think it is acceptable to cohabit before marriage

Reasons Why People Cohabit

1. Passion taking precedence over commitment
2. Testing the compatibility of a partner (trial marriage)
3. They do not want to make the same mistakes as their parents
4. A substitute for marriage that can end easily without divorce (Brown & Brown, 1999, p. 39)
5. Devaluing the marriage license (they say it's just a piece of paper)
6. Individualism & independence (Brown & Brown, 1999)
7. Lack of religion
8. Gradual acceptance leading to fewer inhibitions (becoming accepted more and more in society)
9. Not enough money for the wedding they want or rejection of weddings as expensive and materialistic
10. Lack of education

Negative Effects of Cohabiting

1. Increase of divorce after getting married
 2. Instability of the relationship
 3. Unfaithfulness in future marriage. For example, women who cohabit and then marry, are 3.3 times more likely to have an affair than a woman who had not cohabited (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007)
 4. Increase in alcoholism, depression, and mental illness
 5. Nearly twice as likely as married couples to report physical abuse
 6. Higher rates of sexual and physical abuse among children
 7. Financial disadvantages (not same tax benefits as those who are married; cohabiting relationships that dissolve hurt the individuals financially in-part because there is the absence of legal protections that marriage would provide)
 8. Makes breaking up harder due to intimacy, financial investments, etc. (Red flags a couple would notice in each other in a normal dating relationship oftentimes are overlooked by cohabiting couples because they feel trapped by having their lives joined in many ways.)
 9. Many cohabiting couples stop attending church
- **Key Point:** living together (cohabiting) should matter to all of us—because it’s negatively affecting millions of people throughout this country and around the world.

○ **Additional Notes:**

Cohabiting, Commitment, and the Church, Part 2: Cohabiting within the Church: We Can't Ignore It

1. In the United States between _____ to two-thirds of people (50-66%) cohabit before they marry (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, 2007, p. 104; “Age at coresidence, premarital cohabitation, and marriage dissolution: 1985-2009” A. Kuperberg (2014), *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76, 352-369).
2. In a 2010 NAD survey, of those Seventh-day Adventists who reported being married in their lifetime (94%), _____ of members reported living together before marriage. That is nearly 1 in 5 members. This is a slight increase from a 1993-1994 survey that revealed 15% of Adventists cohabited before marriage. (Monte Sahlin, *Adventist Families in North America*, 2010).
 - His research included 1,397 people from a random, double blind sample of families in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.
 - Monte Sahlin concludes that cohabitation is “an established pattern of behavior among Adventists that does not appear to be changing.”
3. Approximately _____ of the Adventists surveyed reported cohabitation as a problem in their local church.
 - Of the 40% that view cohabitation as a problem in their church, 7% view it as a “big problem.”
4. Cohabiting couples are _____ as likely as married couples to break up within ten years. When you “test-drive” the relationship by cohabiting, you actually _____ the car.

- Within the first five years of marriage, 20% of couples will either divorce or separate, and within ten years the percentage increases to 33%. In comparison, 49% of cohabiting couples break up within the first five years, increasing to 66% after ten years (J. Stott, *Issues facing Christians today* (4th ed.). p. 363).
- Couples who begin by cohabiting are 50% more likely to get divorced after they marry (Balswick & Balswick, 2008, p. 163). But estimates are even higher in some Western European countries, reaching as high as an 80% greater chance of divorcing (NCCB Marriage and Family Committee, p. 108).
- Additionally, research shows that 70% of cohabiting couples do not result in marriage and end shortly after living together for one year (Balswick and Balswick, 2008). One author found, "The median duration of cohabitation is 1-3 years. One third of couples cohabit for less than a year. 16% live with their partner for more than 5 years" (Kieran Scott, *Perspectives on marriage: A reader* (3rd ed., (2007) pp. 114-133), p. 118). Others suggest the numbers are higher: they say 50% of cohabiting couples split up within one year, and only 10% continue cohabiting for more than five years (according to Lichter and Qian (as cited in Priem & Surra, 2013).
- **Key point:** If couples think cohabiting will prevent them from making the same mistakes as their parents by avoiding a painful divorce, the numbers show their relationship is far more likely to end if they cohabit than if they committed themselves in marriage.
- 50% of cohabiting births are unplanned (Vespa & Painter II, 2011). Between one-fourth and nearly one-half of all children spend time with a parent who, at some

point in their life, is cohabiting (Heuveline and Timberlake (as cited in Balswick & Balswick, 2008).

- There is evidence of higher rates of [sexual and physical] abuse among children with cohabiting parents (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2002; Popenoe, 2009).
 - **Key point:** Now that we have seen and heard the research, and understand that the rates of cohabiting have skyrocketed in society, and is even occurring before marriage for almost 20% of Seventh-day Adventists—it is safe to say that as a church, we cannot ignore it. When we consider all the negative effects of cohabiting, we cannot simply ignore it. We cannot ignore it when our young people and older people are getting swept away by this tidal wave created by the devil.
5. God's design for marriage from the beginning (Gen. 2:24) involves three components: 1) leaving; 2) cleaving (public & permanent commitment), 3) one flesh (sexual union). The sequence is _____.
- The Divine pattern established in Eden is not met in any way by modern cohabiting relationships.
6. "Jesus, Paul, and the N.T. church were _____ in upholding fidelity in marriage by rejecting any premarital or extramarital sex" (*Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, Vol. 1, 44).
- **Key point:** One interesting fact is that Jesus' first public miracle occurred during a public wedding celebration, which emphasizes Jesus' approval of the marriage relationship and the continued importance in the NT of witnesses to that marriage covenant.
 - Matthew 19:3-6, "The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" 4 And He answered

and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 "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'? 6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

- Please notice that Jesus quotes from Gen 1 and 2 in reaffirming God's ideal for marriage from the beginning of human existence.

7. "The permanence of the one-flesh union is analogous to all other kinship ties. We never cease to be parents, children, brothers, or sisters, and these identities carry with them certain obligations to others. So why should our identity as _____, and the attendant obligations to our spouses be any different? (*Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, Vol. 1, 222).

- In vs. 7, the Pharisees' second question to Jesus concerns why Moses "commanded" them to give a certificate of divorce.
- **Key point:** In vs. 8, Jesus clarifies that Moses did not "command" but rather "permitted" them to get divorced because of the hardness of their hearts.
- Jesus repeats the same exception clause almost identical to Matt 5:32, but in Matt 19:9 Jesus says both the spouses would be guilty of committing adultery if they remarried for any reason except sexual immorality (*porneia*).

8. Twice _____ refers the Pharisees back to the ideal of marriage based upon Gen. 2:24 (Matt. 19:4, 8). Paul did too (see 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31).

- Jesus' emphasis on the permanency of marriage and that divorce is not an option leads the disciples to conclude that if that is the case, then it is better to not marry (Matt 19:10).

- Jesus' response to His disciples is that not all can accept the option of not marrying, but some can. Those who can accept it are referred to by Jesus as eunuchs.
 - Several types of eunuchs are described, but all have one thing in common: celibacy.
 - **Key point:** In other words, those who are unable to accept the permanent covenant relationship of marriage have one option: celibacy.
 - Cohabiting in a marriage-like relationship without the permanency of a covenant marriage is not an option for Christians who follow the Bible. Such an arrangement would be considered sexual immorality (*porneia*) which is forbidden by Scripture.
9. "For this is the _____ of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonian 4:3).
- **Key point:** "The Scriptures label sex between unmarried persons as fornication . . . and consistently condemn it as conduct unbecoming to a Christian. . . . We do not regard premarital sex as something culturally determined. The wrongness of fornication, for the Christian, is not a matter for society to decide" (Wittschiebe, *God Invented Sex*, 1974, p. 190).
 - Paul is categorically declaring all forms of sexual immorality such as adultery, premarital sex, cohabitation, homosexuality, and incest contrary to the will of God.
10. God's will for our sexuality is _____ (1 Thess. 4:7), not passionate lust like the Gentiles (1 Thess. 4:5).
- Additionally, Paul suggests that to commit sexual immorality is actually to defraud a brother (1 Thess 4:6). The SDABC suggests Paul is teaching that, "Fornication is a form of robbery, since it takes that which rightfully belongs to another" (Vol. 7, p. 244).

- **Key point:** In other words, by committing sexual immorality a man robs another man of his future wife's virginity and sexual innocence (Hasel, 2015, p. 46).
- Paul makes it clear that no matter how secret this sinful action may be, God knows, and God is the one who will judge and take vengeance on such sinful behavior (I Thess 4:6).
- Therefore, Frank Hasel concludes "that no one has the right to be [sexually] promiscuous before, during, or after marriage. . . . Thus virginity and abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage is the ideal maintained in the New Testament" (*Marriage: Biblical and theological aspects* (Vol. 1), p. 46).

11. "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own _____, and let each woman have her own _____" (1 Cor 7:2). For Paul, one answer to sexual immorality is marriage; another answer is singleness and celibacy (1 Cor 7:7-9).

- As it relates to cohabiting, clearly Paul's counsel to a couple is that a committed marriage is the solution to their sexual desires and needs, which follows the biblical pattern.
- **Key point:** Therefore, Paul's solution to a couple that desires to be sexually active is that they should publicly commit to each other in marriage before engaging in sexual intimacy.
- Just like Jesus, Paul, too, referred back to Genesis 2, the original pattern for marriage established in Eden, throughout his writings (I Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31).

12. "Marriage is to be held in honor among _____, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

- Once again, marriage is upheld as the biblical pattern and only legitimate relationship wherein sexual intimacy may be enjoyed (Knight, 2003, p. 243).

- The fact that the marriage bed can be defiled is indicated by the text, and the second part of the verse clarifies that it is by the actions of fornicators and adulterers that the marriage bed becomes defiled.
- Paul's teaching is a clear encouragement for sexual purity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage, and a clear warning for those who disregard God's laws.
- The biblical teaching regarding cohabiting is very clear.
- But don't miss this! The NT church struggled with this kind of stuff too. Paul's message is full of hope when he writes:

13. "Such were some of you [meaning fornicators—sexually immoral, cohabiters, adulterers, idolaters, etc.]. But you were _____, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). God's _____ is sufficient.

- **Key point:** The sin of sexual immorality is not the unpardonable sin. God's grace is sufficient.
- **Key point:** Those who have sinned sexually may be washed (forgiven) by God's grace, and sanctified (made holy) through the indwelling Christ.
- Christians in Corinth had experienced redemption and transformation from their old sinful lives.
- **Key point:** Paul's emphasis on redemption gives hope for anyone who has sinned sexually, through cohabiting, or in any other way.

14. Concerning the message God gave Ellen White for a woman in a cohabiting relationship, she said, "The message was given them in _____ and _____, to save them from deception and dangerous error" (Ellen White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 133).

- The rest of the story: Early in the ministry of Ellen White, in 1850, she and her husband James went to visit the town of Camden, NY. God revealed to Ellen a lady there who was deceiving His people. On Sabbath they met her, and she claimed to be a sincere and faithful follower of God. The next day, Sunday, since James' sermon was not flowing, he called the group to prayer. During prayer, Ellen received a vision of the deceptive woman again. The woman was "represented to me as being in perfect darkness. Jesus frowned upon her and her husband" (Ellen White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 132). After she came out of vision, she shared "with trembling, yet with faithfulness" what God had shown her. The deceptive woman initially denied what Ellen had seen, and claimed God knew she was righteous.
- A short time later, the woman confessed that she had been deceiving the people. She had been living with a man for several years, and had deceived everyone into believing he was her husband. She had actually been married to another man and had a child with him, but then abandoned them. She had been cohabiting with this other man for years. Ellen White explained that the woman confessed and "Even went from house to house among her unbelieving neighbors, and confessed that the man she had been living with for years was not her husband.... Many other wicked acts she confessed. Her repentance seemed to be genuine, and in some cases she restored what she had taken wrongfully" (Ellen White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 133).
- This is one clear example of where Ellen White refers to a cohabiting relationship as wicked, but ends with the woman genuinely repenting and confessing her sin. Notice how Ellen White concludes the story, "As a result of this experience, our

brethren and sisters in Camden, and their neighbors, were fully established in the belief that God had revealed to me the things which I had spoken, and that **the message was given them in mercy and love, to save them** from deception and dangerous error” (Ellen White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 133).

- Why did God reveal that sister’s cohabiting case to Ellen White in a dream and a vision? In mercy and love, to save them—including the woman cohabiting.

Answers: half, 18%, 40%, twice, break, vital, unanimous, spouses,

Jesus, will, holiness, wife, husband, all, washed, grace. mercy, love

Cohabiting, Commitment, and the Church, Part 3: Ministering to Cohabiting Couples with Grace

Five Guidelines for Ministering to Cohabiting Couples

The Balswicks are a well-known Christian couple that have authored some key books regarding family and sexuality. They suggest five guidelines concerning how the church should respond to cohabiting couples:

- 1) Uphold the biblical standard that sexual intercourse is to be part of the marriage covenant, and communicate that to the couple in a convincing way.
- 2) Encourage couples who are already engaging in sexual intercourse to make the covenant commitment of marriage and that by doing so their relationship will become deeper and more stable.
- 3) Compassionately welcome a cohabiting couple that is pregnant into the church. This demonstration of love and grace may encourage the pregnant couple to move towards making the commitment of marriage for their and their child's benefit.
- 4) The church should be willing to conduct weddings for cohabiting couples even if they are pregnant or already have children. By so doing, they are encouraging couples to make a full commitment to each other.
- 5) When cohabiting couples choose to continue to cohabit instead of marrying, the church should "continue to show love and grace" (*Authentic Human Sexuality*, 2008, pp. 179-180).

The Church Can Err in Two Ways

"The church can err in two ways:

- 1) Either by compromising the truth of Scripture and failing to uphold the sacred purpose of marriage, or
- 2) By condemning and shutting the doors to those who cohabit.

In upholding marriage as God's way with one hand, we should extend God's grace with the other" (*Authentic Human Sexuality*, 2008, pp. 180-181).

Three Strategies for Ministering to Cohabiting Couples

1. Indirect with Intentionality: Jesus' Ministry to Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)
2. Direct with Grace: Jesus' Ministry to Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)
3. Direct with Discipline: Paul's Counsel to Church in Corinth Dealing with Sexual Sin (1 Cor 5:1-13)

Indirect with Intentionality: Jesus' Ministry to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)

- Jesus' dialogue with the woman at the well appears to be a gentle rebuke to a woman involved in a cohabiting relationship. Jesus invited the woman to call her husband, and when she responded that she had no husband, Jesus clarified, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly" (John 4:17-18).
- Jesus is trying to help the woman realize her need as a sinner, while at the same time offering her living water (*SDABC, Vol. 5, p. 939*).
- "Jesus had convinced her that He read the secrets of her life; yet she felt that He was her friend, pitying and loving her. While the very purity of His presence condemned her sin, He had spoken no word of denunciation, but had told her of His grace, that could renew the soul" (*Ellen White, Desire of Ages, pp. 189-190*).
- **Key point:** In ministering to cohabiting couples, or those in immoral relationships, following Jesus' model of dialoguing with them in order to help them feel their need is an important

step. Communicating friendship and love, sincere concern, and extending God's grace and forgiveness for the individuals is also of utmost importance.

Direct with Grace: Jesus' Ministry to Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

- The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus in order to trap Him. Jesus' response to their question about stoning her to death, as Moses commanded (John 8:5), successfully delivered Him from their trap and saved the woman's physical life.
- But it is Jesus' response to the woman herself that provides the balanced model for helping individuals caught in sexual sin, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11b).
- **Key point:** Like the Samaritan woman's story above, the woman caught in adultery does not feel condemned by Jesus either, yet there is also the clear call to go and sin no more. Forgiveness and grace are extended, and at the same time Jesus expects both women's lives to change through a turning away from sin.

Direct with Discipline: Paul's Counsel to Church in Corinth Dealing with Sexual Sin (1 Cor 5:1-13)

- The case of sexual sin Paul faced in 1 Cor 5 involves an individual who was engaging in a sexually immoral relationship with his father's wife. This individual apparently completely resisted any appeal by the church to go and sin no more.
- I found several lessons from this biblical account, and the *Adventist Review* published an article I submitted explaining them. Here's a portion of it: "We can learn several things from Paul's counsel to this church:
 - 1) Church discipline must be done with the right spirit: deep concern for the spiritual condition of the person living in open sin (1 Cor. 5:2).
 - 2) Church discipline is done under the authority of Jesus Christ by church members

when gathered together (verses 4, 5).

3) The goal of disciplinary action is redemptive—leading the person to be saved in the end (verses 5)” (“Redemptive discipline: Tackling a tough topic biblically,”

Adventist Review, February 25, 2015).

- One clear teaching of Scripture is that God disciplines those He loves, and that He uses the church in doing so at times (Prov 3:12; Matt 18:15-17; Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19).
- The purpose of discipline is redemption, so that the erring one will turn from sin and be saved in the end.
- **Key point:** Ellen White writes, “If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God’s servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p. 263).
- The church has a work to do for people even if they remain outside of the church. The work is to lovingly appeal for people to repent—not condemning them, but calling them, like Jesus, to go and sin no more.
- **Key point:** Again, Ellen White (1911) provides balanced counsel for how the church is to deal with members struggling with sin, “To hate and reprove sin, and at the same time to show pity and tenderness for the sinner, is a difficult attainment. . . . We must guard against undue severity toward the wrongdoer, but we must also be careful not to lose

sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There is need of showing Christlike patience and love for the erring one, but there is also danger of showing so great toleration for his error that he will look upon himself as undeserving of reproof, and will reject it as uncalled for and unjust" (*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 503-504).

- As the church seeks to minister to cohabiting couples, and others who have fallen into sexual sin, may God help us to maintain that proper balance the Ellen White suggests. We must not be too severe or harsh in how we deal with people, but we must also remember we serve a holy God, and that sin is offensive to Him.
- At times, the church needs to implement redemptive discipline. The Bible and the writings of Ellen White provide examples of how to deal lovingly yet firmly with individuals as the church seeks to minister to cohabiting couples and those involved in sexual immorality.

Three Case Studies

- 1) A Case Study from My Ministry: Indirect with Intentionality
 - Developing a relationship with them
 - Studying the Bible with them
 - Inviting them to church/to a small group/to a Sabbath School class
 - Trying to get them connected to Jesus
 - Not dealing with the issue of cohabiting head on—but rather letting it come up naturally over the course of time, as the Holy Spirit leads that conversation to happen
 - As God leads, in His timing, sharing the truth of God's Word with them with grace

- God convicts them to make the situation right—ultimately either marry or separate

2) A Case Study from Ellen White’s Ministry: Direct with Grace

- The other story from my sermon is a case study of the direct with grace approach.
- God gave Ellen White a dream and a vision about this woman who was cohabiting with a man, and who had left her real husband and child in England.
- God used Ellen White to be direct with the woman, with grace—as Ellen White said, “***The message was given them in mercy and love, to save them*** from deception and dangerous error.”
- Shortly after the direct message was given, the woman was convicted, and genuinely repented and confessed her sin.

3) A Case Study from Ellen White’s Ministry: Direct with Discipline

- Ellen White wrote to an Adventist young man named Chapin Harris who was romantically involved with a young lady named Mattie Stratton. According to Ellen White, they were clearly engaging in premarital sex, “Conducting [themselves] as only man and wife should conduct themselves towards each other. . . . Your behavior is unbecoming and unchristian. When you should both be in your beds you have been in one another's society and in one another's arms nearly the whole night” (*Manuscript Releases, Vol. 4*, pp. 217-218).
- Ellen White wrote strong letters of rebuke to Chapin for this sexually immoral relationship.
- God showed Ellen White what took place between Chapin and Mattie, activity that would “make angels blush” (p. 223).

- Several times in her letters, Ellen White referred to Satan leading Chapin and Mattie into their sinful behavior, and stated that Chapin would not have become involved in sexual immorality except that he was under the bewitching power of Satan (p. 224).
- Ellen White asserted that their behavior had brought the frown of God upon themselves and the church, and that they were negatively influencing others (p. 219).
- **Key point:** Chapin and Mattie’s behavior was referred to as sin, offensive to God. White warned Chapin, “You are risking your eternal interest in the company of this girl” (p. 216). In White’s view, Chapin was “[trifling] with eternal things” (p. 219). She viewed this as a salvation issue, and appealed to the couple to confess and repent of their sin (pp. 227-228).
- Concerning how the church should have handled the situation, Ellen White wrote, “Chapin should have been released from every responsibility in the cause of God when he showed no disposition to heed the light given. The rebuke of the church should have been upon him” (*Letter 3*, 1879).
- **Key point:** Ellen White used the second strategy—direct with grace first—as she wrote him letters appealing for him to turn away from their sinful behavior. And when Chapin continued in sin without repentance, she recommended the third strategy be used, direct with discipline.
- Chapin ended up marrying Mattie, and in 1902 he wrote a letter thanking Ellen White for her “kind interest in me and for the way in which you brought to me the message of reproof and warning” (*The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Fortin and Moon (2014), p. 402).

- **Key point:** Let me point out that one of Ellen White’s letters to Chapin above was dated 1879. Chapin’s letter thanking Ellen White for the reproof and warning didn’t come until some 23 years later in 1902.
- That reminds me of Hebrews 12:11, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” No doubt Chapin didn’t appreciate her direct approach and rebuke at the time, but later on he thanked her for it because he knew she was right.
- Let me point out also that while Ellen White indicates premarital sex makes the angels blush, concerning marital sex she declares, “Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy vigils will hallow the marriage chamber” (*Adventist Home*, p. 94).
- **Key point:** There is clearly a dividing line between unholy and holy sexual activity. In the context of marriage, sexual activity is looked with favor upon by God and all of His angels.
- Any sexual activity outside of the committed marriage relationship is a sin against God. Ellen White upheld God’s ideal pattern for marriage and sexual intimacy established in the Garden of Eden.

Practical Suggestions for Cohabiting Couples who are Non-Members

For a cohabiting couple who are non-members but connected to church in some way (attending, has family who are church members, etc.):

- Either the indirect with intentionality or direct with grace strategy could be used with this couple.
- The indirect with intentionality strategy is preferred so that

1. A relationship of trust and friendship is established (i.e. the couple knows they are loved).
 2. The couple has an opportunity to begin Bible studies, join a small group at church, and/or be adopted by a mentoring couple where they have the opportunity to experience fellowship, friendship, and discipleship.
 3. As the couple gets closer to Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict them that cohabiting is wrong and they'll want to make a change because they love God and want to do what pleases Him.
- Since every couple and situation is unique, the direct with grace strategy may also be appropriate in this case. Let the Holy Spirit lead as the ministry unfolds. Rely upon God to know if or when to be direct with grace. For example, if the couple brings it up on the first or second visit or small group meeting, this may be an open door to be direct with grace.
 - The direct with discipline strategy would not be used with this couple since neither are church members.

A Ministry Plan for Non-Members

1. Get acquainted visit; offer to begin Bible studies with them and/or invite them to join a small group.
2. If they are willing, the next visit would start the series of Bible studies.
3. Through the course of the lessons, God's plan for marriage would come up at some point.
4. As the Holy Spirit leads, and you sense the couple feeling convicted and open to counsel: gently deal with their cohabiting situation, encourage them to follow God's

Word, and move out of the cohabiting living arrangement and/or agree to a Premarital Sexual Covenant to abstain from sex until marriage (go and sin no more).

5. Continue the Bible studies until completion. At the same time, move to the next step below.

Ministry that May be Included in the Indirect with Intentionality and Direct with Grace

Strategies:

6. If the pastor is trained in the Prepare/Enrich pre-marriage counseling program, have the church cover the \$35 assessment fee.
 - a. I recommend using Prepare/Enrich Marriage Savers workbook which includes 6 pages specifically for cohabiting couples.
 - b. The pre-marriage counseling program will typically meet 6-8 times, which may take anywhere from 2-4 months, depending on the frequency of meeting.
7. The church would also assign a Mentoring Couple to mentor the cohabiting couple. This couple would try to befriend the couple through socializing, eating together, and doing activities together. They would attempt to model a healthy marriage relationship.
 - a. Visit www.marriagementoring.com to learn more.
 - b. Get the book: *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring: Connecting Couples to Build Better Marriages* by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrot.
8. Locate an “Engaged Encounter” weekend seminar, and sponsor the couple to attend it including lodging in separate rooms. The Mentoring Couple could attend with the couple for support and to room with them in their respective rooms.
 - a. Union College and Andrews University both have Adventist Engaged Encounter weekends. Contact them directly for more information.
 - b. www.facebook.com/groups/adventist.engaged.encounter

9. If your church has a rental fee for weddings & receptions, waive the fee to encourage this couple.
10. These three gifts (Prepare-Enrich premarital program, Engaged Encounter, waiving fee to use church) of the church to the couple give them an opportunity to move forward towards marriage with an inexpensive option.

Practical Suggestions for Cohabiting Couples who are Members

- Either the indirect with intentionality or direct with grace strategy could be used with this couple.
- The indirect with intentionality strategy is preferred so that
 1. A relationship of trust and friendship is established (i.e. the couple knows they are loved).
 2. The couple has an opportunity to begin Bible studies, join a small group at church, and/or be adopted by a mentoring couple where they have the opportunity to experience fellowship, friendship, and discipleship.
 3. As the couple gets closer to Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict them that cohabiting is wrong and they'll want to make a change because they love God and want to do what pleases Him.
- Since every couple and situation is unique, the direct with grace strategy may also be appropriate in this case. Let the Holy Spirit lead as the ministry unfolds. Rely upon God to know if or when to be direct with grace. For example, if the couple brings it up on the first or second visit or small group meeting, this may be an open door to be direct with grace.
- The direct with discipline strategy may be used with this couple since at least one is a church member. See the section on direct with discipline below.

A Ministry Plan for the Direct with Grace Strategy:

1. If not acquainted with the couple, visit them to get acquainted & pray with them.
2. Prayerfully consider the timing as to when to discuss with them their cohabiting relationship. The first visit may not be the best time to discuss this, but be sensitive to how God will lead during the first visit.
3. During the second visit, within one month of the first, their cohabiting relationship may be discussed. Listen for understanding. Gently deal with their cohabiting situation, encourage them to follow God's Word, and move out of the cohabiting living arrangement or agree to a Premarital Sexual Covenant to abstain from sex until marriage (go and sin no more).
4. If neither has been married before, ask the couple if they are willing to consider getting married.
5. The team may offer to assist the member in immediately moving out of the cohabiting situation. Finding a temporary residence would enable the person to come up with a new plan for their life.

Steps 6-10 as I mentioned previously with the indirect with intentionality strategy.

Complications of Divorce & Remarriage

1. If one or both have been married before, learn more about those marriages and divorces to determine if they have biblical grounds to remarry. See the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2015 edition, pages 157-160 (included in the additional resources section for your convenience).
2. The pastor and elders should be consulted regarding the relationship to carefully determine if the couple has biblical grounds to remarry.

3. The IA-MO Conference Divorce and Remarriage Committee can also be consulted with as needed. The current chairman of this committee is Pastor Eddie Cabrera (417-840-2806 or ejcabrera59@gmail.com).
4. If the pastor/elders and/or Conference determine there are no biblical grounds for remarriage, this message should be lovingly communicated to the couple.
5. If they do not have biblical grounds to get remarried, encourage them to be faithful to God and His revealed will concerning marriage and remarriage, and wait for God's timing if He would release them to remarry in the future (through death, adultery, fornication of previous spouse; or true conversion, repentance with the fruit of repentance (Matthew 3:8), re-baptism). If they have biblical grounds to get remarried, and are interested in exploring that option, encourage the steps previously mentioned.

A Ministry Plan for the Direct with Discipline Strategy:

1. Only for church members.
2. Depending on what happens with the indirect with intentionality and direct with grace strategies, the situation may end up transitioning to the direct with discipline strategy as a last resort.
3. If the couple is unwilling to participate in either of the two strategies described above, the team may decide to specifically pray for them for the next three or four months. During the first two months, other visits or calls could be made to pray with the couple, bring them literature, invite them to church activities, or invite them for a meal at one's home or a restaurant in order to build up the relationship and trust. During the third or fourth month, the team should offer the marriage preparation process again, accompanied by the pastor. If the couple remains

unwilling to participate in the ministry process, the pastor may proceed with the redemptive discipline process as outlined in the *Church Manual*, pgs. 57-68.

4. Three to six months after the direct with grace strategy is used, if the person is unwilling to accept the church's counsel, the church pastor may proceed with the redemptive discipline process as outlined in the *Church Manual*, pgs. 57-68 (attached in the additional resources section for your convenience). The goal of the redemptive discipline process is for the couple to repent and commit their lives to following Jesus as their Savior and Lord.
5. Redemptive discipline is not condemning the couple and kicking them out of church, but is rather a formal disapproval of behavior by the church with the desire that the couple change behavior and be fully reunited with the church and God through aligning their relationship with God's moral standards.
6. The church compromises the truth when they fail to implement redemptive discipline. This must be done extremely carefully, lest the couple feel unwelcomed and unloved. The couple needs the loving support of the church throughout the redemptive discipline process just as a child needs the loving support of a parent when he/she is being disciplined.
7. Examples of a time when this strategy could be used:
 1. A local elder moves in with his girlfriend. The timeline may be faster since it involves a person in an important spiritual leadership position.
 2. A married member leaves his wife and moves in with another married woman, who is also a member of the church.
8. This strategy needs to be carefully processed with the pastor before proceeding.

9. This strategy is typically for extreme cases or cases where the indirect with intentionality and direct with grace strategies have been attempted without success.
10. If the couple rejects those strategies, and is rebelling against God and the church, then the direct with discipline strategy should be considered. The goal of the direct with discipline process is for the couple to repent and commit their lives to following Jesus as their Savior and Lord.
11. Direct with discipline should be redemptive discipline.

Support from Ellen White for Direct with Discipline

- Fornication, or sexual immorality, is condemned as sin throughout the writings of Ellen White.
- She wrote, “I have seen that Satan is leading the minds of even those who profess the truth to indulge in the terrible sin of fornication” (*Testimonies for the Church* (Vol. 2) p. 478). The principle by beholding we become changed is the reason she suggests Seventh-day Adventists have sunken into the sin of fornication.
- Since Adventists have such great light, White says, “If they [commandment keepers] commit fornication or adultery, their crime is of tenfold greater magnitude than” those who do not believe obedience to the law is required (*Testimonies for the Church* (Vol. 2) p. 451).
- How should the church respond to the fornication which is taking place in it? According to Ellen White, the camp should be cleansed of all fornicators or adulterers. Rank or position does not matter; even those in the highest positions of the church should be removed from leadership if they are found to be committing fornication or adultery:
 - “Cleanse the camp of this moral corruption, if it takes the highest men in the

highest positions. God will not be trifled with. Fornication is in our ranks;I know it, for it has been shown me to be strengthening and extending its pollutions. There is much we will never know; but that which is revealed makes the church responsible and guilty unless they show a determined effort to eradicate the evil. Cleanse the camp, for there is an accursed thing in it.

“The words of God to Joshua are: “Neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.” These things are written for our benefit, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 427-428).

Conclusion

- Increasing prevalence of cohabiting in society
- Prevalence of cohabiting within the church
- Negative effects cohabiting has on families and children
- The biblical position on cohabiting and sex outside of committed marriage is clear
- Ellen White agrees with and upholds the biblical teaching.
- Three strategies to minister to cohabiting couples with grace, including practical suggestions for how to do so.

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Additional Resources

- Biblical Research Institute Article, “Seventh-day Adventist Position on Cohabitation?” by Miroslav Kis
- Biblical Research Institute Article, “What is wrong with cohabitation?” by Angel Rodriguez
- *Church Manual* section on Divorce and Remarriage
- Article by Pastor Jared Miller, “Redemptive Discipline” (*Adventist Review*, Feb. 25, 2015).

Seventh-day Adventist Position on Cohabitation

Author: Miroslav M. Kiš

What practical guidance is the Adventist Church providing on this subject. This brief document provides guidelines by one of our best-recognized ethicists.

Cohabitation may be defined as a living arrangement of any unmarried heterosexual couple who share common residence and sexual intimacy. There exists a great variety of configurations in this form of relationship. Some appear as virtual marriages shy only of formal, public contractual vows, while others are short-term episodes for the sake of convenience.

The most frequently mentioned advantages of cohabitation are:

- Opportunity to try out the partner before marriage
- Freedom to begin or end the relationship at will
- Financial advantages
- More relaxed sexual controls
- Combination of the autonomy of singleness with the emotional and sexual closeness

similar to marriage

Seventh-day Adventists maintain the biblical stance on human intimacy. Marriage is the only context where true and complete closeness can be achieved with the most benefits and security. (Genesis 2:24) Here are some of the troubling points of cohabitation:

1. The Back Door Syndrome The key ingredient of cohabitation is the open door to leave without the messy consequences of a divorce. But some consequences of cohabitation can be worse.

a. All through the relationship the partners keep sending double messages. On the one hand they say, "I love you, and I desire to live close to you," and yet the initial agreement says, "Don't get too close, because I might be gone one day...any day." Such an arrangement creates a deep sense of insecurity.

b. The recurring irritations of daily living are treated as trivial, due to the lack of motivation to invest in a temporary relationship. As a consequence, few learn to adjust and acquire the skills of conflict resolution so much needed in marriage.

c. True, deep love requires total and permanent commitment (Song of Solomon 6:3, 8:6,7). It is impossible to develop such a love in a temporary, insecure setting.

2. Absence of vows Marriage vows are implicit in the biblical concepts of betrothal (Matthew 1:18) and permanent commitment to one's partner (Malachi 2:15,16). Their function is to make the intentions of the couple public, thus safeguarding the sanctity of marriage. While the marriage vows promise faithfulness for both the present and the future, cohabitation is a private arrangement concerned only with the present.

3. Community Concerns According to the Bible, marriage is not just a private event (Genesis 24). It unites families. The community offers the couple a certain protection and expects some responsibilities as well. In this way marriage becomes the solid foundation of every community.

Cohabitation, on the other hand, ignores community and is itself too unstable to lend support to a larger society.

4. Absence of Union of Lives The union of lives is one of the most essential roles assigned to sex, according to Scripture (Genesis 2:24). Cohabitation engages a life-uniting act without a life-uniting intent. Such a lifestyle proves to be destructive of inner integrity of human personality.

5. Children The Bible mandates that children be raised in an environment of permanent love, constant care, and unfailing security (Genesis 4:1, 2; Ephesians 6:1- 4). Yet, cohabitation's intent is to avoid such lasting responsibilities, because it considers them as constraints on the freedom and autonomy of each partner.

In conclusion, the Seventh-day Adventist Church echoes the biblical disapproval of any arrangement other than the institution of marriage. It recognizes that the emergence of cohabitation often signals deeper needs. Frequently the partners who seek refuge in such arrangements carry the wounds of repeated marital failures, infidelity, abuse, selfishness, or many other tragedies. For that reason, the Church seeks to minister to each individual, while upholding the biblical standard of conjugal union as the only legitimate form of cohabitation.

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Date: 5/30/01

Source: <http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/practical-christian-living/what-wrong-cohabitation>

What is wrong with cohabitation?

Author: Ángel Manuel Rodríguez

From a biblical standpoint, what's wrong with cohabitation?

The term "cohabitation" is usually defined as a short- or long-term heterosexual relationship out-side of marriage. Since the term itself carries a negative or pejorative connotation in our society, there is a tendency to replace it with the more technical one: "partnering."

The topic itself is complex and difficult to address. The practice of cohabitation has usually been understood to be an indication of moral or social decadence, but that is no longer the case. Western society is accepting it as a type of marriage that society itself encourages by tax laws with "marriage penalties" and by reducing the Social Security benefits of widows or widowers who remarry. Besides, cohabitation is promoted by the communication systems of Western society as a valid alternative to traditional marriages.

In order to properly evaluate the subject we have to examine the biblical understanding of marriage and then determine whether cohabitation is or is not compatible with it.

1. Instituted by God: It is the common Christian belief that marriage was instituted by God Himself and that it was very good (Gen. 1:31; 2:22-24). He regulated the operation of everything He created in order to ensure its proper function and interaction with the rest of the created world (e.g., Gen. 1:4, 12, 17, 18). After creating Adam and Eve, God brought them together and defined the way they would relate to each other (Gen. 2:24). Therefore, marriage should be a reflection of the original relationship that God established between woman and man. Any claim for independence from the divine intention for marriage is seriously suspect.

2. Communal Witness: Marriage is not an arrangement made between two individuals in isolation from God and other humans. A biblical marriage takes place in the sight of other persons in order to introduce into the relationship the element of mutual responsibility. Originally, Adam and Eve were united in the presence of God Himself. Since then the union of two persons in matrimony has been a community event (e.g., John 2:1). Establishing a family was not to be a matter of individual discretion but an event that had an impact on society at large. This understanding is not popular in a culture that praises individualism, but it is important in a society that seeks to preserve its values and integrity.

3. Permanent Commitment: The union effected in marriage establishes a relationship of ultimacy and permanency. In the Bible marriage is not an experiment by which it is to be determined whether or not the couple will remain fully committed to each other. It is the expression of a love that is so pure and so deep that it is willing to express itself in a lifelong commitment. In this new relationship the spouse leaves mother and father in order to be united to the object of that love (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). There is a separation that leads into a new type of permanent unity grounded in love. It is within that unity of mutual self-respect, commitment, and permanency that sexual activity takes place as a "sacramental" expression of the existential unity of the couple. That act unites lives and not simply bodies.

4. Evaluation: Cohabitation is a union of two persons without seeking the blessing of God and the formal approval of the community. Hence, it is fundamentally a relationship for the present with little concern for the future of the relationship. The element of mutual commitment is significantly less than in a Christian marriage and often becomes an occasion for fear on the part of at least one of the partners. There is also in this type of relationship a significant risk for emotional hurt that leaves indelible scars. No one should pretend that she or he can live only for the present without taking into consideration the future and God's intentions for our social and spiritual well-being.

Church members should do all they can to help cohabiting couples to be united in Christian marriage. We should love and care for them in spite of the fact that we do not approve of their lifestyle. They simply do not yet know the beauty of a truly Christian home.

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Date: 7/12/01

Source: <http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/adventist-heritage-practical-christian-living/seventh-day-adventist-position-cohabitation>

Church's Position on Divorce and Remarriage

"Acknowledging the biblical teachings on marriage, the Church is aware that marriage relationships are less than ideal in many cases. The problem of divorce and remarriage can be seen in its true light only as it is viewed from Heaven's viewpoint and against the background of the Garden of Eden.

"Central to God's holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution and the officiator at the first marriage. After the Lord had revealed to Adam that Eve was verily bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, there could never arise a doubt in his mind that the two of them were one flesh. Nor could ever a doubt arise in the mind of either of the holy pair that God intended that their home should endure forever.

"The Church adheres to this view of marriage and the home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

"The Church believes in the law of God and also in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God's holy standards.

"Nothing presented here is intended to minimize the mercy of God or the forgiveness of God. In the fear of the Lord, the Church here sets forth the principles and practices that should apply in this matter of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

"Though marriage was first performed by God alone, it is recognized that people now live under civil governments; therefore, marriage has both divine and civil aspects. The divine aspect is governed by the laws of God, the civil by the laws of the state.

"In harmony with these teachings, the following statements set forth the position of the Church:

1. When Jesus said, "Let not man put asunder," He established a rule of conduct for the Church, under the dispensation of grace, that must transcend all civil enactments that would go beyond His interpretation of the divine law governing the marriage relation. Here He gives a rule to which His followers should adhere even if the state or prevailing custom allows larger liberty. "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."—TMB 63. (Also see Matt. 5:32; 19:9.)

2. Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow has generally been seen to mean adultery or fornication. However, the New Testament word for fornication includes certain other sexual irregularities (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 1:24-27). Therefore, sexual perversions, including incest, child sexual abuse, and homosexual practices, are also recognized as a misuse of sexual powers and a violation of the divine intention in marriage. As such they are just cause for separation or divorce.

Even though the Scriptures allow divorce for the reasons mentioned above, as well as for abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-15), the church and those concerned

should make earnest endeavors to effect a reconciliation, urging the spouses to manifest toward each other a Christlike spirit of forgiveness and restoration. The church is urged to relate lovingly and redemptively toward the couple in order to assist in the reconciliation process.

3. In the event that reconciliation is not effected, the spouse who has remained faithful to the spouse who violated the marriage vow has the biblical right to secure a divorce and also to remarry.

4. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow (see sections 1 and 2 above) shall be subject to discipline by the local church. (See pp. 62-68.) If genuinely repentant, the spouse may be placed under censure for a stated period of time rather than removed from church membership. A spouse who gives no evidence of full and sincere repentance shall be removed from membership. In case the violation has brought public reproach on the cause of God, the church, in order to maintain its high standards and good name, may remove the individual from membership.

Any of these forms of discipline shall be applied by the church in a manner that would seek to attain the two objectives of discipline—to correct and redeem. In the gospel of Christ, the redemptive side of discipline is always tied to an authentic transformation of the sinner into a new creature in Jesus Christ.

5. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and who is divorced does not have the moral right to marry another while the spouse who has been faithful to the marriage vow still lives and remains unmarried and chaste. The person who does so shall be removed from membership. The person whom he/she marries, if a member, also shall be removed from membership.

6. It is recognized that sometimes marriage relations deteriorate to the point where it is better for a husband and wife to separate. “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10, 11). In many such cases, the custody of children, the adjustment of property rights, or even personal protection may necessitate a change in marital status. In such cases it may be permissible in some countries to secure what is known as a legal separation. However, in some jurisdictions such a separation can be secured only by divorce.

A separation or divorce that results from factors such as physical violence or in which “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow” (see sections 1 and 2 above) is not involved does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried, committed adultery or fornication, or died. Should a member who has been thus divorced remarry without these biblical grounds, he/she shall be removed from membership, and the one whom he/she marries, if a member, also shall be removed from membership. (See pp. 62-68.)

7. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and has been divorced and removed from membership and who has remarried, or a person who has been divorced on other than the grounds set forth in sections 1 and 2 above and has remarried, and who has been removed from membership, shall be considered ineligible for membership except as provided below.

8. The marriage contract is not only sacred but also possibly more complex when, for example, it involves children. Hence, in a request for readmittance to membership, the options available to the repentant may be severely limited. Before final action is taken by the church, the request for

readmittance shall be brought by the church through the pastor or district leader to the conference committee for counsel and recommendation of steps the repentant one, or ones, may take to secure readmittance.

9. Readmittance to membership of those who have been removed for reasons given in the foregoing sections shall normally be on the basis of rebaptism. (See pp. 49, 67, 68.)

10. When a person who has been removed from membership is readmitted to membership, as provided in section 8, every care should be exercised to safeguard the unity and harmony of the church by not giving that person responsibility as a leader, especially in an office that requires the rite of ordination, unless by very careful counsel with conference administration.

11. No pastor has the right to officiate at the remarriage of any person who, under the stipulation of the preceding paragraphs, has no scriptural right to remarry.”

Source: *Church Manual*, 2015, pages 157-160.

Redemptive Discipline

Tackling a tough topic biblically

A few of my eighth-grade friends were up to no good one Sabbath afternoon when I attended a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in Lincoln, Nebraska. They stopped by my house, less than a mile from our school, and invited me to hang out with them. I joined them, and we walked to the academy gym (which was down the hill from the elementary school).

One of the doors to the gym was broken—it would not lock properly. We knew that with two hard tugs, quickly executed one after the other, it would open without a key. So we went to the gym door, opened it easily, and went inside the gym. While we were in there we raided the school’s kitchen and helped ourselves to some soft drinks. After a short time we left uneventfully. By early that next week word had gotten out, and we were busted.

What is the loving thing to do when kids break the rules in a school setting? *Discipline*. If I remember right, I got an in-school suspension for two days for breaking into the school and stealing some pop.

I am not proud of myself or my friends for what we did. We undoubtedly deserved the punishment we received. The school disciplined us, and that was the *loving* thing to do. Disciplining children and teenagers is necessary at times. Similarly, God disciplines His children.

Solomon writes, “For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights” ([Prov. 3:12](#)).¹ Paul emphasizes the same point by quoting Solomon, saying, “. . . for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” ([Heb. 12:6](#)). Clearly, love and discipline are closely connected in Scripture.

In the midst of God’s message to the church of Laodicea, God’s love and discipline are once again mentioned: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” ([Rev. 3:19](#)). God is calling His people to submit themselves to His discipline, acknowledge and confess their sins, and repent (i.e., turn away from sin). If they do, God will “abundantly pardon” ([Isa. 55:7](#)).

That is *redemptive discipline*—discipline for the purpose of salvation. God does not discipline His people to condemn them to hell; He disciplines them because He loves them and wants to save them from the wages of sin, which is eternal death.

God disciplines and corrects His people because He loves them and wants what is best for them. Many parents discipline their children for the same reasons. The purpose of God’s disciplining His people is to develop in them a character that reflects His perfect character.

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that God disciplines those He loves. Certainly God can discipline His people directly, but does He ever use His church to discipline His people?

Paul on Church Discipline

First Corinthians 5 describes a difficult situation faced by the church in Corinth: a man had an incestuous relationship with his father’s wife, which was a crime punishable by death in the Old Testament (see [Lev. 20:11](#)). We can learn several things from Paul’s counsel to this church:

Church discipline must be done with the right spirit: deep concern for the spiritual condition of the person living in open sin ([1 Cor. 5:2](#)).

Church discipline is done under the authority of Jesus Christ by church members when gathered together (verses 4, 5).

The goal of disciplinary action is redemptive—leading the person to be saved in the end (verses 5).

Let's take a closer look at each of those points. First, church discipline must be done with the right spirit. [First Corinthians 5:2](#) mentions “mourning” (NLT)² when it describes the church's attitude toward the person living in rebellion against God who will be separated from the church family. When church discipline is needed, the church should mourn for the person who is departing from God's revealed will.

Second, church discipline is done under the authority of Jesus Christ by the members of the church when they gather together. Church discipline is not to be done by just a few church leaders. The pastor and church board are not to make the decision by themselves. Instead they are to bring the matter before church members in a business meeting.

Third, the goal of the disciplinary action is redemptive—leading the person to be saved in the end. Paul undoubtedly taught that church discipline is necessary. When the person living in open sin is separated from the church family and “delivered to Satan,” it is done so that the individual will repent and be saved. *Church discipline, done right, is redemptive discipline*, leading a straying person to return to God with a repentant heart.

Jesus on Church Discipline

Jesus Himself teaches about church discipline in Matthew 18. Here is how He says the process should work:

You go to erring members individually (verse 15). If they do not listen, proceed to step two.

Bring another member or two along to address the situation (verse 16). If they do not listen to the two or three witnesses, proceed to step three.

Bring the matter to the church to decide (verse 17). If they don't listen to the church, they have chosen to separate themselves from Christ's body; therefore, they are to be treated as a heathen or tax collector. And how are God's people to treat heathens and tax collectors? We are to love them and try to lead them to a saving relationship with Jesus. *Church discipline, done right, is redemptive discipline*.

Ellen White is spot-on when she writes, “If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted.”³

But What About . . . ?

I can think of two main objections concerning church discipline. Some will quote [John 8:2-11](#) and Jesus' statement to the woman caught in adultery, that whoever was without sin should cast the first stone. Others may quote [Matthew 7:1](#): "Judge not, that you be not judged" (NKJV).⁴ Here are some answers to these genuine objections considering the larger biblical context.

Does the story of Jesus showing mercy to the woman caught in adultery nullify Jesus' and Paul's teachings concerning church discipline? Certainly not! *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* suggests: "Jesus is not stating a general principle, one that would make absolute sinlessness the necessary condition of fitness for taking part in the punishment of guilt. This would nullify law, for no one fitted to carry out the execution could be found."⁵

Jesus practiced redemptive discipline with the woman caught in adultery. He did not condemn her; He saved her physical life from the death penalty. He also invited her to "go and sin no more" ([John 8:11, NKJV](#)). That is what redemptive discipline does: it calls people to leave their life of sin and find forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus.

What about [Matthew 7:1](#), in which we are challenged not to judge others? A careful reading of the context suggests that Jesus is referring to judging people's motives. We cannot read minds and hearts. However, the text is not saying that we cannot judge whether people's actions are right or wrong. On the contrary, concerning the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul said he had "already judged . . . him who has so done this deed" (verse 3, NKJV).

A Balancing Act

God calls the church to discipline straying members lovingly and in a redemptive way, so that they can be won back to the Savior. *Church discipline, done right, is redemptive discipline.*

Ellen White reveals the proper balance when she writes, "To hate and reprove sin, and at the same time to show pity and tenderness for the sinner, is a difficult attainment. . . . We must guard against undue severity toward the wrongdoer, but we must also be careful not to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There is need of showing Christlike patience and love for the erring one, but there is also danger of showing so great toleration for his error that he will look upon himself as undeserving of reproof, and will reject it as uncalled for and unjust."⁶

I see two ditches we need to avoid. One ditch is having "undue severity toward the wrongdoer." The other ditch is "[losing] sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin." I pray for the right balance in my life and in my church—a balance that hates sin but loves the sinner.

And I pray for my church, that collectively we may receive divine wisdom to be agents of redemptive discipline.

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2. Bible texts marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.
3. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 7, p. 263.
4. Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
5. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1956), vol. 5, p. 986.
6. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 503, 504.

Source: <http://www.adventistreview.org/1506-14>

Marriage Mentoring Training Resources

The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring: Connecting Couples to Build Better Marriages, by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrot. Available at: www.marriagementoring.com.

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