2014

Seminar for Improving Marital Satisfaction in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua/Barbuda

Mark Lincoln Braithwaite
Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

SEMINAR FOR IMPROVING MARITAL SATISFACTION IN
THE NEW BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN ANTIGUA/BARBUDA

by

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Title: SEMINAR FOR IMPROVING MARITAL SATISFACTION IN THE NEW BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN ANTIGUA/BARBUDA

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Date completed: December 2014

Problem

The New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua and Barbuda had four marriage enrichment seminars, covering general topics, between 2006 and 2010. However, based on my observations the marital satisfaction of those who attended did not appear to improve as a result of these seminars. Matters such as commitment, communication issues, and handling conflict seemed to be the major factors which accounted for low marital satisfaction. The development of a seminar to address these specific needs was thought to be advantageous.
Method

A weekend seminar entitled, “Committed to my Spouse” was developed and presented in August 2013. A didactic approach was taken with the use of power point presentations and DVD illustrations. Focus groups were also incorporated as a form of assessment and analysis. In order to measure change the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS Scale) was used as a pre and post-test. The seminar focused on three core areas, commitment, communication skills, and problem solving. The success of the seminar was measured by employing the responses of the study sample to the EMS Scale and to their participation in a focus group.

Results

Twelve couples met the participation requirements and voluntarily decided to be a part of the study. One hundred percent (100%) of the couples attended all of the sessions. Results of the pre-test indicated that 75% of the participants indicated moderate to high levels of marital satisfaction while 25% indicated low to very low levels of marital satisfaction. Three months after delivery of the weekend seminar a post-test revealed that 77.3% indicated moderate to high levels of marital satisfaction while 22.7% of the respondents indicated low to very low levels of marital satisfaction. Since the completion of the study, one couple has separated.

Conclusions

Data collected through the EMS Scale did not indicate a significant variance between the pre and post assessments. However, focus group responses from the study sample suggest significant benefit was received from the marriage education process.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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THE NEW BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN ANTIGUA/BARBUDA

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

by
Mark Lincoln Braithwaite
December 2014
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CHAPTER 1

THE NEED TO ADDRESS MARITAL SATISFACTION IN
THE NEW BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

Problem

The New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Antigua and Barbuda had four marriage enrichment seminars between 2006 and 2010. However, the marital satisfaction of those who attended did not appear to improve as a result of these seminars. During my 21-month tenure as pastor in the district I received several complaints about various marital issues. Several of the issues raised were previously covered in the seminars. From my recollections, matters such as commitment, communication issues, and handling conflict seemed to dominate. As a result, many of the relationships appeared to be under major stress, and there seemed to be an attitude of tolerance, as opposed to genuine happiness, in many of the marriages in the church. I believe that two major contributing factors to this problem are a) a lack of follow-through on the principles shared at the marriage seminars, and b) weaknesses in the process of communication that has led to significant break-down in the marriage relationships.
Purpose

As a result of the challenges experienced, the task of this project is to develop and implement a weekend seminar in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist church. The seminar will address factors which affect marital satisfaction particularly those of commitment, communication, and conflict resolution. The seminar will be evaluated to determine what impact it had on marital satisfaction.

Assessing Marital Satisfaction in the New Bethel SDA Church

The challenges to marital satisfaction in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church were identified through interaction with several married couples who contacted me and indicated their dissatisfaction with certain areas of their marriages which seemed to have led to lower levels of satisfaction. In previous years, in order to address these concerns, my predecessor established a marriage club to assist in mitigating some of the challenges and give couples an opportunity to receive marital enrichment material. However, even with these interventions difficulties were still obvious.

Areas of Concentration

In spite of the fact that several marital enrichment programs had been held covering areas such as family finance, sexual expectations, relationship roles, and several other areas, three areas demanded the most attention: Commitment, communication, and conflict.
Commitment

The reluctance of couples to commit to relationship-building activities has a negative impact on overall marital satisfaction. The importance of finding pleasant, shared activities cannot be underestimated.

Many couples simply attempt to maneuver through the challenges of life and as a result, lose strength and are shaken (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Pastors who can tactfully share positive relationship building techniques may empower couples to enjoy greater levels of marital satisfaction.

Communication

There appears to be a direct relationship between communication and marital satisfaction. According to Chi, Epstein, Fang, Lam, and Li (2013) there is significant literature which links communication quality and marital satisfaction. It appears that mutually constructive communication seems to promote relationship quality while negative communication, such as criticism, leads to relationship break down and distress. A presentation specifically addressing communication concerns with an opportunity for focus group discussion has not been attempted before in the New Bethel SDA Church.

Conflict

Relationships change over time. Riehl-Emde, Thomas, and Willi (2003) suggest that no one can accurately determine the degree of change or an individual’s response to such things as economic pressure, the birth of a baby, or moving. These changes can place significant pressure on relationships and unexpected pressure can
create conflict and cause couples to give up and think that their situations are far too complex. Pastors who can share theological perspectives on the solution to marital concerns may provide a ray of hope for conflicted and struggling couples. According to Mahoney (2010), religion generally has a positive impact on marital satisfaction, therefore couples could benefit from a pastor’s assistance.

Need for Specially Designed Programs

Upon becoming pastor of the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist church, I was inundated with calls and visits from several individuals who shared concerns about their marital relationships. I was of the opinion that a seminar to address the most significant concerns that were registered would be an effective way to assist couples with valuable and needed education. While the preaching of sermons and the hosting of family life weeks have their place, a seminar would allow the presentations to be structured to address specific needs and also provide the opportunity for valuable feedback that could be documented.

A Proposed Weekend Seminar and Methodology

The present study is confined to the proposal of a weekend marital seminar and evaluation of the seminar to determine its impact on marital satisfaction. The seminar’s development emerged from my pastoral observations, theological foundations established in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, and theoretical constructs observed in relevant literature on marital satisfaction. A full description of the methodology is presented in Chapter 4; however, a simple overview is presented here.
Theological Construct

The biblical Old Testament account of creation sets the stage for understanding marital satisfaction. By placing Eve with Adam, God intended marital satisfaction through companionship (Gen 2:18). In the New Testament gospels Joseph demonstrates concern and love for Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt 1:18-25); while in the Pauline epistles Paul establishes that husbands and wives should seek to please each other (1 Cor 7:32-34). God instituted marriage as a covenant-based relationship which is both monogamous and heterosexual. It is within this context that marital satisfaction can be achieved. This type of commitment expressed between a man and his wife is built upon the commitment God expresses to humankind through the fact that we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Although the fall devastated the original intention of God, He had established the plan of salvation. It is through relationships that God has chosen to reveal Himself and His plan of salvation symbolically (Eph 5:25).

White (1942; 1952) offers significant counsel on marital relationships. She promotes the true source of marital happiness and satisfaction; the true source of happiness is God. Persons led by God will allow Him to be a part of their marital experience.

The marital experience can be challenging. As a result of sin the pristine environment which God intended has been significantly damaged, therefore marital relationships experience significant hardship and turmoil. A vibrant spiritual life can provide individuals with the necessary tolerance and restraint to navigate through the
difficulties of the marital experience. A more complete review of the theological foundations for this project appears in chapter 2.

Theoretical Construct

Contemporary marriage scholars recognize several determinants of marital satisfaction. Various theoretical constructs provide material for the development of seminars aimed at enhancing marital satisfaction. In order to respond to the needs of the New Bethel SDA Church, consideration was given to the theoretical constructs which supported commitment, communication, and conflict resolution as the main areas to be addressed. Contemporary marriage scholars confirm that these are significant areas which affect marital satisfaction (Ahmadi, Azad-Marzabadi, & Nabipoor Ashrafi, 2008).

Personal observation, current empirical marriage literature, and a theological foundation all merge to deliver a seminar which focuses on three significant areas: commitment, communication, and handling conflict. The seminar will be evaluated to determine its effect, if any, on marital satisfaction.

Intervention Overview

In order to measure change, data measuring marital satisfaction will be collected using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS Scale). The assessment will be done once, before the seminar, and again, three months after the seminar has been completed, as a means of evaluating the success and/or failure of the planned approach.
The seminar will be conducted over a weekend, with interactive presentations, and fill-in-the-blank worksheets provided. At the end of each presentation focus group discussions will be facilitated.

Each session will begin with prayer, and the presenter will introduce the topic. The sessions presented will be as follows: Commitment, patterns that destroy oneness, communication and problem solving – conflict resolution.

When the presentation is ended and the focus group discussion concluded a participant will be asked to pray to bring an end to the session. Chapter 4 gives a more complete description of the seminars and focus group discussions.

**Anticipated Personal Outcomes**

During my life in pastoral ministry, I have always desired to assist in the process of family life education. It comes from my personal belief that families form the building blocks of any society; therefore, better families should translate into a better society. Throughout the progress of this project it is my belief that the research will enable me to become more knowledgeable in this field.

Pastoral ministry provides a unique opportunity for pastors to be invited into the circumstances of other families. From my observations, family life educational programs are often generic. This particular project is a step towards the development of an ongoing ministry which will seek to assess the needs of challenged families and then provide specific seminars which will address these needs. Although the effort necessary to develop specific programs is great the results can be extremely rewarding when couples can move from merely surviving to thriving.
Many parishioners often relate general or even detailed information about their marital concerns. As this project progresses the material that I am exposed to should increase my ability to effectively educate couples who are experiencing low levels of marital satisfaction. One of my life goals is to become a Certified Family Life Educator. Although completing this project will not automatically qualify me as a Family Life Educator, it will assist me in developing the correct attitude in preparation for this process. A disciplined approach to reading material in the area of family life along with disciplined study and writing habits should allow me to achieve my goal.

My interest in family life has had a recognizable impact on my peers in ministry. Many often seek my assistance when addressing couples who may be experiencing low marital satisfaction. I believe that sharing from my experience during this project, and eventually sharing my results and recommendations will create a deeper interest among my colleagues with respect to the influence that marriage seminars have on marital satisfaction.

As I develop this seminar model, it is my desire that individuals who participate may see the benefits and as a result see heightened levels of marital satisfaction. Although there is no guarantee with respect to the eventual outcomes the possibility exists that persons may benefit from the material.

Finally, the completed project will become a resource that pastors can use for educational purposes in their own pastoral districts.
Definition of Terms

It is necessary to define three main terms. The first term is marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction refers to an individual’s global evaluation of the marital relationship (Hinde, 1997) and is associated with the quality of marital interactions, as well as individual well-being (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). It also refers to marital happiness – who is happy in marriage and who is not (Markman, Blumberg, & Scott, 2001).

The second term is marital quality. Marital quality refers to the results that one discovers from a global evaluation of one’s marriage. For example the question can be asked, “All things being considered, how happy are you with your marriage?” (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987).

The third term is religiosity. Religiosity can be defined as a person’s spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and involvement with a faith community (Flor & Knapp, 2001);(Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Summary

This study is not designed to be a comprehensive consideration of marital satisfaction, but it does seek to address the impact of a marital enrichment seminar on participant couples’ marital satisfaction in the New Bethel SDA church. The design is aimed at improving marital satisfaction. The final results and recommendations will be shared in Chapter 5. The purpose of this study is to propose and implement a seminar for the improvement of marital satisfaction in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua/Barbuda.
The study is outlined as follows: Chapter 1 presents a rationale for the project and reviews critical components of the project's structure. Chapter 2 reviews theological constructs and creates a theological foundation for a seminar which addresses marital satisfaction. Chapter 3 provides a brief historical overview and then seeks to review current empirical marriage literature concerning marital satisfaction. This review of literature provides further validation for the development of a seminar which addresses marital satisfaction. Chapter 4 outlines the formation of the seminar and shares details about the implementation process. Chapter 5 shares the outcomes and findings of the seminar and presents recommendations for further improvement and research.

**Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that participation is voluntary and participants who begin the study may choose not to complete it. Another limitation is that participants could lose their personal identification numbers which would make it impossible to measure change.

**Delimitations of the Study**

Due to the time limitations of the program the follow-up assessment is planned for three months after the seminar. Secondly, the sample size could be relatively small since participation will be limited to married couples from the New Bethel SDA Church. Thirdly, couples will be expected to be married a minimum of three years as the study will focus more on couples who would have already passed the “honeymoon” phase of marriage.
CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON

MARITAL SATISFACTION

The purpose of this chapter is to address the matter of marital satisfaction from a theological perspective, focusing on the foundational principles as established in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. The foundational principles to be examined will include a) a summarization of the biblical discussions on marriage, b) the importance placed on relational commitment as expressed in God’s relationship to humankind, c) an examination of the view that relationships are at the core of the plan of salvation, d) an investigation of Ellen White’s perspective on marital relationships, and e) an exploration of the view that a healthy spiritual life may translate into a more fulfilling marital experience.

As I seek to discover a theology for marital satisfaction, the underlying desire is that this search will reveal practical biblical ways of improving marital satisfaction. As Canale (2005) states: “At first sight, believers in sola scriptura may think the interpretation of the text is all theologians need to do to understand divine truth” (p. 30). The author continues, “Understanding God requires understanding what the texts say and mean for us today” (p. 30). There is a difference between understanding divine truths and the application of divine truths. As a result, the purpose of this study is to provide a theology that will positively impact an individual’s personal
marital experience; thus, moving theology from a mere understanding to an application of relevant principles.

**Marital Satisfaction in the Old Testament**

According to Gangel (1977a), the basic purpose of marriage surfaces in Gen 2:18 where God says, “it is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” This paragraph beginning at verse 18 identifies the significance of fellowship or companionship as God’s original and primary intent. God seems to indicate that marital happiness is associated with companionship. In support of this thought, Gen 4:1 suggests that, Adam “knew” Eve and she conceived a son. Rock (2000) highlights that the Hebrew word יָדָה (yāda) literally means “to know,” but also “to experience,” “to understand,” and “to care about.” It is used of sexual relations in the sense of a full knowledge and deep relation between partners. Having a satisfying sexual relationship in marriage may suggest that it is more likely that a couple is experiencing marital happiness than when they are not having a satisfying sexual relationship.

The declaration by God that, “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18) indicates that human beings are social and are born with the desire for interaction. The most dominant desire appears to be found in the friendship and joys of romance and marital relations. The strong compulsion for marital relations appears to exude from a love that forms the foundation for this sacred choice. Hence, there is a strong appreciation for the mental, physical, and spiritual qualities of a member of the opposite sex, together with a conscious decision to cherish and respect that person until “death do us part” (Rock, 2000).
Several authors consider the many aspects of biblical marriage which include but are not limited to, the institution of marriage, the celebration of marriage, the symbolism of marriage, the blessings of companionship, the demonstration of love, sexual fulfillment, the roles of spouses, the purpose of marriage and the family among others (Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Gangel, 1977a; Rock, 2000). A direct reference to marital satisfaction or marital happiness does not seem to appear in scripture, but the inference that God intends for couples to enjoy the abundant life that one flesh implies (Gen 2:24) is extremely strong throughout. In this regard, there appears to be a correlation between monogamy, which was God’s original plan, and marital happiness. Gangel (1977a) suggests, that the human race had hardly begun its expansion when we see in Lamech the first distortion of God’s plan for monogamy (Gen 4:19). God created one wife for one man, but man in his sin was not satisfied with this arrangement.

Throughout the Pentateuch, the practice of polygamy is traceable with a measure of commonality (Gen 25:1, 6); Esau (Gen 26:34, 35; 28:8, 9); Jacob (Gen 29:30); Elkanah (1 Sam 1, 2); David (1 Sam 25:42-44; 2 Sam 5:13-16; 1 Chr 14:3); and, of course Solomon (Gangel, 1977a). In each of these cases marital happiness is clearly distorted. From the biblical examples above, a cursory review will quickly reveal a number of significant challenges that polygamy presents. The most prevalent issue is that of jealousy. From Abraham’s wives to Elkanah’s wives the issue of jealousy manifested itself through provocation, bitterness, sadness, grief, and sadness of spirit. David’s affair cost him peace of mind, and led him to a plethora of lies and eventually to murder. In Solomon’s case his opulence eventually led him to declare
that, “all is vanity” (Eccl 1:2). God designed human beings to live in monogamous relationships. It was God’s intent that the husband and wife relationship would be exclusive and provide companionship, care, Godly support, passionate sexuality, and emotional contentment among other things. The conclusion then is that since the introduction of sin humankind’s genuine happiness has been eroded by the practice of polygamy.

**Marital Satisfaction in the New Testament**

The earliest reference to marital satisfaction or happiness in the New Testament is seen in Joseph’s demonstration of love for and protection of Mary (Matt 1:18-25). Here, although they are still in an engaged state, it is fair to assume that the same attitudes of tenderness and affection continued into the marriage as there is no evidence of discord in the childhood home of Jesus (Gangel, 1977b). In the Pauline Epistles, it is established that husbands and wives ought to please each other. Even though this may cause greater difficulties while trying to serve the Lord it is not to be disputed. Pleasing each other, as husband and wife, is one of God’s major purposes in marriage (1 Cor 7: 32-34) (Gangel, 1977c).

**Covenant Relationship**

Within the context of a fallen world, marital happiness finds its theological underpinnings only as it is viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual. Marriage was to be a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image,
and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh” (Flowers, 2004b). Marital happiness or satisfaction is then only truly accomplished within the context of the covenant relationship. Marriage has been corrupted by sin; the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant (Flowers, 2004b).

**Relational Commitment as Expressed in God’s Relationship to Humankind**

God desired to be in relationship with humankind. This relationship, as expressed in the Word of God, provides much insight into how human beings should relate to each other, since we were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). In support of this idea, Blackaby and King (1998) state,

> God Himself pursues a love relationship with you. He is the One who takes the initiative to bring you into this relationship. He created you for a love relationship with Himself. This love relationship can and should be real and personal to you. This love relationship, however, is not a one-sided affair. He wants you to know Him and worship Him. Most of all He wants you to love Him. (p.79)

The ultimate expression of the love relationship which God has with human beings is captured in the *proto evangelion*, where God expresses that He will destroy sin, while Himself being affected through the incarnation of His Son (Gen 3:5). Therefore, the love of God reveals it’s most astonishing and unexpected manifestation in the life and death of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:39; 1 John 4:10; Rom 5:8). This love that
God expresses through His Son to His children surpasses all knowledge (Eph 3:19). Ultimately, it follows that divine love is the source (1 John 4:7) and model (1 Cor 13) of human love (Canale, 2000).

God expresses His love through the establishment of a covenant with humanity. This covenant is promissory in character (the blessings and salvation of God are given by God, not earned by human beings) but looks for humanity’s response of faith and obedience. The heart of this covenant is God’s steadfast love spoken of throughout scripture and at times equated with the covenant (Deut 7:9; 1 Kgs 8:23; Neh 9:32; Dan 9:4) (Blazen, 2000). God expresses His love through covenant form, and it is this very quality of love which should be found in love relationships which culminate with marriage. Enshrined in the idea of a covenant is also the idea of mutual happiness and satisfaction.

Flowers (2004b) grasped the concept of covenantal love and assert that, marriage is a special human covenant—a mutually binding agreement with each other before God that includes promises, privileges, and obligations. Genesis 2 uses covenantal language: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23). Attachment, mutuality, and self-giving further describe this covenant as the bride declares, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Cant 2:16, NKJV; cf. 6:3; 1 Cor 7:3, 4). This covenantal language expresses mutual satisfaction and happiness and is rooted in the covenantal relationship which God establishes with His children and which has elements of reciprocation between the two parties.
Relationships and the Plan of Salvation

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in an officially voted statement indicates that:

Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God's self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. ("An affirmation of marriage,” 1996).

This covenant element of marital relationship leads to the establishment of family, and forms the basis through which God has chosen to reveal Himself and His plan of salvation symbolically through scripture. According to Gangel (1977a), there are several references in the New Testament which highlight this: a. Jesus is the Son of the Father (Rom 1:3,4,9; 5:10; 1 Cor 15:24; Rev 2:27; 14:1); b. Christ is the husband of the church, the virgin bride (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:9; 22:17); c. God is our Father (Rom 1:7; 8:14-17,21; 1 Cor 1:3, 8:6; Rev 21:7); d. Christ is like a husband (Eph 5:25), and e. Christ’s feast with the believers is like a wedding (Rev 19:7-9).

Sin has deformed human kinship ties, but God’s act in Christ reconciles humanity to Himself and restores oneness in human relationships (2 Cor 5:18, 19; Gal 3:28; Eph 4:3; 5:21-6:9). Galatians 3:28 represents a powerful affirmation for viable human relationships: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ, all barriers that separate people from each other are abolished whether religious, cultural, or social (Flowers, 2004a). The sin problem has created brokenness, and noticeably we observe that God restores the broken estate through relationship.

According to Rock (2000), marriage serves as a symbol of the intimate
relationship between God and His people (Jer 3; Ezek 16; Hos 1-3). God courts and marries Israel and establishes an intimate relationship with the nation. Israel apostatizes, and it is identified as adulterous. In the New Testament, marriage is a symbol of the relation between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22, 23). The consummation of all things is called the “Marriage of the Lamb,” when Christ takes His “bride,” the church, with Him (Rev 19:7-9).

The very nature of the relationship that God established with His children highlights the nuances of relationships. In Adam and Eve we see the Fall (Gen 3:6), and God’s desire to keep the young couple, and by extension the entire human race, in relationship with Him and also secure their salvation (Gen 3:15). Relationships are at the core of the plan of salvation. God establishes and maintains a viable relationship with His children. In like fashion marriage relationships, in spite of human brokenness, can in many ways reflect God’s plan for relational happiness and satisfaction.

In support of this position, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has highlighted in a position document that:

The gospel opens the eyes of marriage partners to see one another as persons of value and worth redeemed by Christ, each deserving of dignity and respect. This is manifested in the gracious way they love, accept and forgive each other, their willingness to listen, to understand and to connect with each other. It can also be seen in the way they reconcile their differences and resolve their conflicts. The gospel has the power to transform both natural and cultural practices, freeing each couple to explore their giftedness and develop a partnership compatible with God’s original design for marriage. ("Biblical perspectives on marriage," 2006)
Ellen White’s Perspective on Marital Relationships

White (1942) offers copious counsel on marital relationships often promoting the true source of marital happiness and satisfaction. One of her most profound statements regarding marital relationships indicates that:

The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities. (p. 356)

It appears that there are three clear points that are established here. Firstly, marriage is a covenant; secondly, God is the source of marital happiness; and thirdly, that there are responsibilities in marriage.

Marriage as Covenant

The Creator of the universe instituted marriage, therefore “Marriage is honorable” (Heb 13:4). Marriage is a blessing when the divine principles, upon which it is established, are recognized and obeyed. In this relation, it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature (White, 1958).

One of the foundational principles of marriage, as suggested by White (1952), is the happiness of the race. Couples are, even in the fallen state of sin, to benefit from happiness and satisfaction in their relationships. The covenantal element of marriage is powerfully illustrated as God covenants with His people to be their God. White (1907) captures it this way:

In the Bible the sacred and enduring character of the relation that exists between Christ and His church is represented by the union of marriage. The Lord has joined His people to Himself by a solemn covenant, He promising to be their God, and they pledging themselves to be His and His alone. He declares: “I will
betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies.” Hosea 2:19. And, again: “I am married unto you.” Jeremiah 3:14. And Paul employs the same figure in the New Testament when he says: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ 2 Corinthians 11:2. (p. 420)

Marriages fall into the same covenantal category as the relationship that God has with His children. Spouses must observe the permanent and exclusive nature of the marital bond. There is also a reciprocal element where spouses are expected to respond to the love that is expressed.

God is the Source of Marital Happiness

True marital happiness comes from God. The success and eventual happiness in a marriage is the result of selecting a spouse who will assist in creating the environment in which the marriage can grow and thrive. In this regard, the counsel given highlights that marriage is something that will influence and affect life, both in this world and in the world to come. Therefore, according to White (1952), a sincere Christian will not plan for marriage without the knowledge that God approves the relationship. One will not want to choose for oneself but will feel that God must choose. We are not to please ourselves for Christ pleased not Himself.

White (1952, p. 102) highlights the true desire of the creator of this world by stating that:

God wants the home to be the happiest place on earth, the very symbol of the home in heaven. Bearing the marriage responsibilities in the home, linking their interests with Jesus Christ, leaning upon His arm and His assurance, husband and wife may share a happiness in this union that the angels of God would commend. It is only the love of God that can truly motivate happiness and satisfaction in a home and between two persons.

Amidst the struggles of gender, it is quite clear that a firm understanding of
God’s Word does not support any view which promotes any form of gender dominance in marital relationships. God is indeed the source of true happiness in marital relationships, and attitudes which can facilitate hurt and brokenness will only flourish if God is not given the place of preeminence that he deserves. White (1952, p. 120) reiterates this point in the following statement:

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

Responsibilities in Marriage

Satisfying marriage also involves the careful negotiation of responsibilities within the home. Both individuals must have an awareness of how to navigate through household duties. White (1983) speaks of this as she addresses younger persons who are preparing for marriage. She stresses that, before assuming the responsibilities involved in marriage, persons should have such an experience in practical life as will prepare them for its duties. Since both men and women have a part in homemaking, boys as well as girls should gain knowledge of household responsibilities. Making a bed and tidying a room, washing dishes, preparing meals, and washing clothes, are skills that do not make a boy any less a man; these skills will actually make him happier and more useful.

Healthy Spirituality and the Marital Experience

Several definitions of religiosity exist (Hackney & Sanders, 2003).
Religiosity however, can be defined as a person’s spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and involvement with a faith community (Flor & Knapp, 2001; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Examples of spiritual beliefs include belief in the eternal nature of marriage; examples of religious practices include prayer and study of scripture. Aspects of religious involvement include attendance at religious meetings, participation in other faith community activities, or making financial contributions to a faith community (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many individuals. Religion is said to: enhance one’s life and marital satisfaction, to assist and guide one through crisis and chronic illness, to provide an outlet of support when facing psychological stress, and to create happiness (Weaver et al., 2002). In support of this, Marsh and Dallos (2000) observe that praying helps couples to control their feelings effectively and that the couples’ relationship with God helps them to handle marital anger in an appropriate way.

Many persons view religiosity as spirituality; however, there is a difference between the two. In this regard however, we utilize the term religiosity to also represent the spiritual life.

A healthy spiritual life would engender a good understanding of how God expects spouses to relate to each other within the context of a marriage. Many individuals misunderstand the biblical roles outlined in scripture particularly in Ephesians 5; hence, several relationships do not benefit from the wholesome happiness and satisfaction that God intended. The essence of the instruction given in Ephesians 5 is that, in order for marital harmony to exist spouses must be willing to
submit to each other in reverence to Christ, rather than focus on the establishment of roles. Ephesians 5 does deal with domestic roles according to Sampley (1971), which are treated in the so-called *Haustafel* (Eph 5:22 – 6:9), “the table of household duties that exist in the mutual relationships of the family” (p. 10). However, these roles are to be executed within the context of mutual love and respect for Christ.

According to (Flowers, 2004a), proponents of the differing views on this passage find themselves dealing with the hermeneutics of the scriptural passages and with farther-reaching questions of gender relationships in the Bible and in culture. What is the meaning of “submission”? What is the meaning of “male headship”? One view distills the matter to a straightforward question of male leadership and female response to that leadership. Submission or subjection to that leadership is the duty of the wife based on typical meanings of the Greek *hupotasso* as used, for example, in Rom 13:1, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Cultural notions of male leadership are not challenged in the traditional view, but men are admonished to exercise their authority and leadership in Christ like ways.

As indicated previously, a healthy spiritual life can provide an individual with the necessary skills to navigate through the challenging realities of marital despondence, despite powerful cultural views to the contrary. Marital happiness is not an ethereal misnomer; it is something that is achievable and is measurable. Ahmadi, Azad-Marzabadi, and Nabipoor Ashrafi (2008) indicate in their study that, nine subscales were considered when addressing marital satisfaction. These were: personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure
activities, sexual relationship, parenting, friends and family, and religious orientation. The suggestion is that if there is harmonious and balanced development in these areas marital satisfaction can be achieved. By the same token, the complexity involved in keeping these nine sub-scales in balance is quite formidable. It is only through mutual respect and healthy spirituality that balance and harmony can be brought into any marital relationship.

Couples who are motivated by the love of Christ will strive to exercise humility and a sense of service as they navigate through their relationship (Matt 18:1-4; 20:25-28; 23:1-12; Mark 9:35; 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:2-17; Phil 2:1-8). The gospel, opens the eyes of each spouse to see one another as persons of worth redeemed by Christ and deserving of dignity. This is manifested in the way they love, accept and forgive each other, their willingness to listen, to appreciate, and to connect with each other. It can also be recognized in the way they resolve their conflicts. The gospel has the ability to transform both natural and cultural practices, freeing each couple to develop a partnership compatible with God’s original design for marriage.

Jesus taught and modeled the way of spiritual leadership demonstrating the appropriate limits of power and authority in relationships. He warned His followers not to desire power and in contrast not to allow others to exercise undue power over them, as this is not in keeping with the principles of His kingdom. With Jesus came a new paradigm that invited men and women to reach their full potential and to be responsive to each other’s needs.

The marriage relationships of Christians is shaped by these gospel principles (Eph 5:21-6:9; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 John 2:9, 10). At the cross of Christ humanity has been
brought together and the barriers that have created inequalities between male and female removed (Rom 2:11; 3:23; 1 Cor 11:11; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-18). Unity in marriage is achieved by mutual respect and love. No one is greater (Eph 5:21-28). Paul’s understanding that husbands and wives have equal rights and responsibilities in their sexual relationship highlights the mutuality to which Christian couples are called in marriage (1 Cor 7:3, 4). The entrance of sin led to the subjection of the wife to the husband; however, the gospel emphasizes the love and submission of all believers, including husbands and wives, to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). Husbands and wives are to submit to one another, wives through their love, respect, and honor for their husbands (Eph 5:33; Col 2:18; Titus 2:4; 1 Pet 3:1, 2), and husbands through their self-sacrificing love for their wives (1 Cor 7:3, 4; Eph 5:21, 24, 25). Husbands are called to honor their wives as fellow heirs of salvation in a grace-filled marriage (1 Pet 3:7). The principles of the gospel prohibit either husband or wife assuming rulership within marriage ("Biblical perspectives on marriage,” 2006).

**Summary and Implications**

The theology of marital satisfaction or marital happiness is one which demands attention and study. It is quite clear that marital happiness, although not addressed directly in scripture, is a desire that is implied for the marital relationship. God arranged the first marriage which was monogamous and heterosexual for the benefit on humankind. With the inception of sin, marital happiness diminished immediately as Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and their lives were cut short.
Even in this fallen state, the image of God can still shine through as human beings still have the capacity to experience lasting and happy marriages. God established a covenant relationship with Israel as a means of expressing the benefits of covenant, and also to cement His eternal love relationship with His children. This covenant concept is one that can be shared in parallel with marital relationship. Marriage is a covenant relationship between a husband and wife which has the power to exist even in the midst of challenges.

White (1952) supports the biblical claims and passionately makes the plea for harmony in marital relationships. Successful marital relationships are foundational to the happiness of human beings who enjoy being in relationship. Successful and happy marital relationships are also beneficial as building blocks for a viable community and society.

Family life specialists identify several determinants of marital happiness (Ahmadi et al., 2008; McCabe, 2006). White (1952) also shares in the belief that there are several valuable contributors to marital happiness. The Bible clearly identifies monogamy and heterosexuality as ingredients for marital happiness. It appears that a combination of factors come together to advance the cause for marital happiness. The theology of marital happiness, as we have examined it, clearly indicates that, along with all of the above listed factors a healthy spiritual experience enhances marital satisfaction.

This healthy spiritual experience does not operate within a vacuum, as can be observed with several Bible characters who, although being men of God, still had
unhappy and unhealthy marital experiences. The successful marital experience is one of balance and integrity which seeks to place God in His rightful position.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE RELATING TO MARITAL SATISFACTION

Literature relating to marital satisfaction is diverse. Several broad areas can be considered and include individual factors such as personality and attributions (Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Regan, 2008). Another area could focus on the dynamics of a relationship such as communication, sexual satisfaction, and conflict (Ahmadi et al., 2008; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998). Yet another area could be the broader context of a relationship, for example, the role of children. Along with this reality there are several theoretical pillars that could be considered, for example, the uncertainty reduction theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and the companionate theory of marriage (Wilcox & Nock, 2006), among others. A full literature review of each related discipline would be time consuming and beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, although this literature review may include work in each of these areas, its emphasis is on literature which directly affects marital satisfaction, marital happiness, and religiosity with a necessary look at historical development in the area.

The reviewed works are divided into the following categories: first, a brief but essential review of historical material with emphasis on the changes in focus of marital research over a 50 year period; second, theoretical constructs which affect the study of marital satisfaction; third, consideration of gender ideology, egalitarian
attitudes, and traditional attitudes which affect marital satisfaction; fourth, an examination of religiosity as a factor in marital satisfaction; fifth, other determinants affecting marital satisfaction, and finally, the efficacy of marital education programs on marital satisfaction.

The scope of this literature review is to discover what constitutes marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction refers to an individual’s global evaluation of the marital relationship (Hinde, 1997) and is associated with the quality of marital interactions, as well as individual well-being (Bradbury et al., 2000). It also refers to marital happiness, who is happy in marriage and who is not (Markman, Blumberg, & Scott, 2001). Marital satisfaction and marital happiness can therefore be considered as one and the same. According to Regan (2008), marital satisfaction appears to change over time and is influenced by such things as traits, dispositions, and personality attributes which may influence marital satisfaction for both spouses. McCabe (2006) in support of Regan (2008), indicates that relationship satisfaction is determined by a myriad of factors and that the relative importance of these factors is likely to vary among couples. Sinha and Mukerjec (1990) suggest that marital satisfaction occurs when the couple feels most satisfied with one another. Various scholars have an almost common understanding of what marital satisfaction means (Durodoye, 1997; Spanier, 1976; Stack & Eshleman, 1998); however, the factors that affect marital satisfaction are the subject of much debate.

**Review of Historical Material**

Factors related to marital satisfaction have been a subject of interest for quite some time. As early as 1938, researchers focused on psychological factors related to
marital happiness (Terman, Buttenweiser, Ferguson, Johnson, & Wilson, 1938). Out of this study other researchers began to investigate various factors. In the 1940’s, there was an emphasis on spousal personality characteristics associated with marital happiness. Findings demonstrated that the perception of the spouse’s personality, rather than his or her personality, was related to marital quality (McCabe, 2006, p. 42).

The 1950’s

Developments in the 1950’s saw research interests move to a focus on the interactional styles of individuals in a relationship (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956). Attention here was placed on the roles of cognition, affect, pattern of interaction, level of social support, and violence within marital relationships (McCabe, 2006). A focus on cognition and affect also brought attention to the function of conflict and conflict resolution on marital satisfaction.

The 1980’s to 1990’s

The 1980’s and 1990’s saw an interest in the development of factors which led to divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). The 1990’s also saw studies being pursued on the nature of interactions between husband and wife (Bradbury et al., 2000). “For example, they investigated the demand/withdraw pattern, in which one spouse (typically the wife) criticizes the other spouse, who then withdraws and disengages from confrontation. The end result of this repeated process is a decline in marital satisfaction” (McCabe, 2006, p. 42).
Implications

From the above historical overview, it is reasonable to suggest that the study of marriages and marital satisfaction is a relatively new field. Over the decades studies have revealed much useful information. However, it is also notable that due to the many varied approaches it is difficult to have a common approach to addressing marital concerns.

Theoretical Constructs Which Affect the Study of Marital Satisfaction

Various theories have shaped the discussion regarding marital satisfaction. The following theories will be considered: the uncertainty reduction theory (URT), interdependence theory, general theory of family communication, cultural value theory, life course theory, modernization theories, status inconsistency theory, the companionate theory of marriage and the sound relationship house theory, with a view of their impact on marital satisfaction.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) posits that uncertainty shapes a person’s behavior within the initial interaction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Further research and refining of the URT has led to scholars defining relational uncertainty as the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within interpersonal relationships. The construct encompasses all of the questions individuals have about participating in a close relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002). While Berger and Calabrese (1975) suggest that URT may diminish marital quality because communication between partners is more difficult, Knobloch and Solomon (2002) present a contrast by suggesting that ambiguity may enhance
marital quality by providing an aura of excitement, mystery, and romance. Scholars are yet to examine the direct link between relational uncertainty and marital quality; however, logic would suggest that positive and negative associations are reasonable (Knobloch, 2008).

**Interdependence Theory**

Another theory that impacts marital satisfaction is the Interdependence Theory. This theory suggests that people act to maximize rewards and minimize cost; therefore, rewarding relationships are also more satisfying (Givertz, Segrin, & Hanzal, 2009). The Interdependence Theory is a part of a group of theories generally known as theories of commitment. These theories in general suggest that persistence in a relationship is a function of both the satisfying experiences that unite partners and also circumstances that make it difficult to exit a relationship (Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, & Clarke, 2006). The measure of satisfaction in a relationship will theoretically determine how dependent and committed a person is to the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). There seems to be some measure of consensus among the authors that satisfaction in a relationship will theoretically lead to greater commitment; thus satisfaction and commitment are related.

**General Theory of Family Communication**

The general theory of family communication, which focuses on the organized knowledge structures that family members use to communicate and exchange ideas, is useful for examining the extent to which family communication enhances family strength and satisfaction (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). Family communication scholars, over the last decade have delineated the family communication patterns and
environments associated with a variety of individual, relational, and systemic outcomes (Schrodt, 2009). The result has been the documentation of the influence of family communication on conflict management styles (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b), interpersonal skill in romantic relationships (Koesten, 2004), cognitive flexibility (Koesten, Schrodt, & Ford, 2009), and resiliency behaviors (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). The belief that early family interaction or the lack thereof impacts the ability of individuals to function well and have reasonable levels of satisfaction in marital relationships is supported by Schrodt (2009) who suggests that, these lines of research confirm Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s (2002a) assertion that the ways that families communicate have significant implications for the social development of family members.

Modernization Theories and Cultural Value Theories

Wong and Goodwin (2009), in a study across cultures discovered that a stable relationship with one’s spouse, spousal support, partnership with the spouse, and stable family finances were important factors that contributed to marital satisfaction. It was indicated that cultural differences also appear; however, these differences were consistent with the findings of modernization theories and cultural value theories. Modernization theories of close relationships (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998/2002) propose that, although material interests and economic circumstances were once decisive factors as individuals approached marriage, there is an increased emphasis on romantic love and intimacy in close relationships as societies modernize. Hence, marital satisfaction, even across cultures, appears to be dependent, not only on financial factors, but also romantic love and intimacy.
Life Course Theory

Life course theory is a multidisciplinary approach that builds upon a variety of disciplines (e.g., sociology, social demography, and developmental psychology). Individual outcomes, such as, subjective well-being or happiness in a marital union are considered in relation to life course phases (e.g., midlife) (Mitchell, 2010). Mitchell (2006, 2009, 2010) further states that, with respect to life course theory life is not experienced the same way by all families either across societies, within a given society, or across the life stages of family development. It is therefore assumed that families vary in their perceptions, resources, and cultural/social locations and that these components influence the quality of family relationships. There is limited research which focuses on the role of culture or ethnicity in predicting marital satisfaction. Despite this fact, marital traditions and practices can vary widely across families and cultures (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). For example, early research suggests that marital relations tend to be perceived in a more positive light given the salience of family values in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Asian,) than individualistic ones (e.g., British). Other studies propose that marital interactions, communication styles, and satisfaction may both vary and be similar across diverse cultures (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007).

Status Inconsistency Theory

Another theory for consideration is the status inconsistency theory. This theory defines individuals in terms of their relative positions in four vertical hierarchies: Income, occupation, education and ethnicity (Lenski, 1954), and assumes that couples report low marital quality and overall happiness if wives’ statuses are
higher than their husbands’ (Hornung & McCullough, 1981). Gong (2007) refutes this claim and posits that the original theory assumes that individuals in status systems try to maximize their individual satisfaction; therefore, those individuals with inconsistent statuses are less happy. Nevertheless, when the theory is extended to couples, wives and husbands may not only consider their own individual economic and psychological well-being, but also take their spouses’ situations in mind in marital relationships. As a result, status inconsistency within couples does not have the same disadvantage that it may have for individuals. Ultimately, Gong (2007) concludes that, the status inconsistency theory has little bearing on marital quality or global happiness for either wives or husbands.

Companionate Theory of Marriage

Another theory for review is the companionate theory of marriage. This theory suggests that egalitarianism in practice and belief leads to higher marital quality for wives and higher levels of positive emotion work on the part of husbands (Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Emotion work can be defined as emotional labor which includes emotion regulation (Zapf, 2002). Erickson (1993) says that emotion work involves the management of ones feelings. Many contemporary family scholars argue that egalitarian marriages are characterized by the kind of emotion work, affection, empathy, and quality time devoted to intimacy that makes for high-quality, stable marriages (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). The last four decades have seen a general decline in marital quality (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004). Continued research has led some scholars to conclude that this development may be, in part, a product of the fact that women with increasingly egalitarian gender role
attitudes are married to men who have not adopted a sufficiently egalitarian approach to marriage (Amato & Booth, 1995; Wilcox & Nock, 2006).

Rogers and Amato (2000), express gender attitudes as expected roles for men and women and power relations. Traditional attitudes view men as breadwinners and women as homemakers with a corresponding differential in power. Egalitarian or nontraditional attitudes focus on sharing economic and caring tasks and dividing power more equally. An ongoing debate continues with respect to the relationship between gendered family roles and marital stability. Becker (1991) argues that a traditional division of labor contributes to marital stability because partners trade services and therefore depend on each other. As a result, a departure from the traditional division of labor and arguably from the belief in a traditional division of labor will be detrimental to marriage. Oppenheimer (1994), on the other hand, argues that egalitarian roles may actually be better for marriages because various burdens will be more evenly distributed; therefore, egalitarian roles and attitudes should be beneficial for those in marriages, thus increasing marital happiness.

The Sound Relationship House Theory

Successful marriages are emotionally intelligent relationships, where the couple is able to stop negative thoughts and feelings about each other from overwhelming the positive ones (Gottman & Silver, 2007). An examination of the Sound Relationship House Theory as espoused by Gottman (1999) highlights additional variables affecting marital satisfaction which are not considered in the nine subscales mentioned by Ahmadi et al., (2008).
There are seven principles to be considered which have the potential to improve marital satisfaction and they are: enhancing love maps, nurturing fondness and admiration, turning toward each other instead of away, letting your partner influence you, solving your solvable problems, overcoming gridlock, and creating shared meaning. The first three levels express the essential components of the couple’s friendship upon which the other four are built (Gottman & Silver, 2007).

According to Gottman (2007), the first principle is, enhancing love maps. This principle addresses the need for spouses to be intimately involved in each other’s worlds and to be aware of their partner’s inner psychological needs by taking the time to know them. The second principle, nurturing fondness and admiration, is critical for a successful marriage. In the marriage spouses may be distracted by their partner’s personality flaws; however, there is still a strong desire to show honor and respect. In this principle, the idea is to consistently build a culture of appreciation, fondness, and affection rather than focus on negative habits and behaviors. The third principle, turning toward each other instead of away, speaks to spouses making bids for each other’s attention, humor, affection, and support. A spouse will either turn away from these bids or turn towards them. When the choice is made to turn towards these bids it forms a solid foundation for emotional connectedness. Understanding how your partner requests connectedness, and then turning towards them with a caring response, will build the relationship positively.

The fourth principle, letting your partner influence you, considers taking the other partner’s feelings and opinions into account during times of conflict resolution, decision making, and at other times. Gottman (2007) suggests that this fourth
principle builds positive affect. Positive affect increases the odds that a marriage will survive and even thrive. The fifth principle, solving your solvable problems, addresses conflict management. For problems that are solvable five steps are suggested: Soften your startup, learn to make and receive repair attempts, soothe yourself and each other, compromise, and be tolerant of each other’s faults. Gottman (2007) concludes that these steps need very little training and can be considered as simply having good manners. The sixth principle, overcoming gridlock, acknowledges that there are some problems that are not solvable. The primary aim, in this situation, is to progress from gridlock to dialogue. The author recognizes gridlock as

a sign that you have dreams for your life that aren’t being addressed or respected by each other. By dreams I mean the hopes, aspirations, and wishes that are a part of your identity and give purpose and meaning to your life. (Gottman & Silver, 2007, p. 217)

Couples that enjoy a greater sense of marital satisfaction recognize that, “helping each other realize their dreams is one of the goals of marriage” (Gottman & Silver, 2007, p. 219). The seventh and final principle, creating shared meaning, highlights that it is very important for a couple to create a culture for their family which is rich with symbols, rituals, and meaning. This creates a sense of family which is very important for marital satisfaction. The development of a culture, however, can create difficult moments. Gottman (2007, p. 244) strongly suggests that, “a crucial goal of any marriage, therefore, is to create an atmosphere that encourages each person to talk honestly about his or her convictions.” The idea is that the more the couple shares openly and respectfully about their convictions, the more likely it is that there will be a stronger development of shared meaning.
The Sound Relationship House Theory addresses several critical areas. Some areas, for example, the fourth principle, let your partner influence you, and the fifth principle, solve your solvable problems, along with aspects of the sixth principle, overcoming gridlock, were considered, although from different perspectives, in other theoretical discussions above. Clearly, this theory addresses very important considerations which have influenced the discussion on marital satisfaction and provided extremely valuable insight to the body of knowledge.

Implications

The theoretical constructs associated with this field of study are varied and provide great insight in addressing the study of marital satisfaction. It is clear that the incorporation of several fields of study is very necessary for continued development. The field of sociology, psychology, and theology are among the areas that researchers have utilized in addressing marital satisfaction across age groups and cultures. Of particular interest in the development of the intervention strategy for the New Bethel SDA Church were areas which addressed commitment, communication, and conflict.

According to the Interdependence Theory (Givertz et al., 2009), commitment is a function of both satisfying experiences and factors of constraint which make it difficult to exit a relationship. With respect to communication, the General Theory of Family Communication, as discovered in the literature review, indicates that family communication patterns have significant bearing on interpersonal skills in romantic relationships among other areas. Uncertainty shapes a person’s behavior and thus relational uncertainty can lead to conflict in a marriage; also, different phases of life
create varying challenges to relationships which, if not handled well, could lead to conflict within the marital experience.

The intervention strategy utilized these theoretical constructs as the basis for addressing the educational needs of the married couples at the new Bethel SDA Church. Other considerations impacted the intervention strategy and will now be discussed.

**Gender Ideology, Egalitarian, and Traditional Attitudes Which Affect Marital Satisfaction**

Proponents of covenant marriage consider gender type obligations as a biblical dictate. According to Sanchez, Nock, Wright, and Gager (2002), these biblical dictates serve to strengthen the family. Within this egalitarian era, the stigma of gender subordination is diffused by presenting it as a service to God and by crafting a hybrid form of gender traditionalism that incorporates emotional ethics of egalitarianism (Baker, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009). Both spouses may use covenant marriage as a symbolic means to subordinate their own personal desires to make their marriage work as a gendered team. In fact, covenant couples may be practicing an emergent gender display that incorporates a belief in a strict, divinely ordained gender hierarchy in marriage with values that endorse principles of mutuality and egalitarianism (Baker et al., 2009).

Status inconsistency theory assumes that couples hold traditional gender ideologies. It is only inconsistency that is a violation of traditional gender ideology. When the wife’s characteristics/attainments are higher than the husbands there are
negative outcomes for wives’ and husbands’ marital quality. If the wife has lower characteristics/attainments than her husband’s, consistent with traditional ideology, this form of inconsistency is not perceived as detrimental to the couple’s marriage (Greenstein, 1996). Gong (2007), in contrast, argues that because status inconsistency theory assumes the traditional gender ideology it should hold only for wives or husbands who hold this view and should not apply to wives or husbands who hold egalitarian ideology. In support of Gong (2007), Wilcox and Nock (2006) in examining the status inconsistency theory find no evidence for the argument that women are happier in marriages with egalitarian practices and beliefs. This finding by extension suggests that marriages where both persons have egalitarian views may not be necessarily more satisfying. In summary then, the interaction between the terms of status inconsistency and gender ideology provide little support to the notion that the marital quality of wives and husbands who hold traditional gender ideologies is more affected by status inconsistency than those with egalitarian ideologies (Gong, 2007).

In later life, those who hold egalitarian attitudes report significantly higher levels of marital happiness than do those with more traditional attitudes. However, this is only significant for men (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006). It seems that egalitarian attitudes are particularly important when held by men. This finding is consistent with Vannoy and Philliber’s (1992) argument that husbands’ attitudes are more important for marital quality than are wives’ attitudes. It is apparent that gender ideology has changed significantly over the past few decades though possibly less so among older persons. It is important to examine the relationship between gender ideology and marital happiness. Traditional attitudes focus on males as breadwinners
and women as homemakers, with a corresponding differential in power sharing, economic and caring tasks, and dividing power more equally (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006). Comparatively, husbands with egalitarian attitudes report higher levels of marital happiness than do husbands with more traditional attitudes. In fact, husbands with the most egalitarian attitudes are four times as likely to report high levels of marital happiness than the more traditional husbands are (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006). Conversely, wives with more egalitarian attitudes report lower levels of marital happiness (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Wives with more egalitarian attitudes report lower levels of satisfaction with marriage and greater marital discord and are more likely to have their marriages end in divorce than their more traditional counterparts (Amato & Booth, 1995). Some researchers conclude that increases in women’s economic power are not significantly related to marital happiness (Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Implications

Egalitarianism challenges traditional gender ideologies, and suggests that couples with an egalitarian outlook would enjoy greater marital satisfaction. Researchers have concluded however, that couples with egalitarian attitudes may not necessarily experience greater levels of marital satisfaction. Couples who hold egalitarian attitudes have reported experiencing greater levels of marital satisfaction as well as lower levels of marital satisfaction. The findings concerning the impact of gender ideology, egalitarianism, and traditional attitudes on marital satisfaction appear to be inconclusive.
Religiosity as a Factor in Marital Satisfaction

Due to the relative ease with which a married couple could acquire a divorce the covenant marriage movement was developed in the United States of America during the late 1990’s in an effort to preserve the institution of marriage. The requirements for a license for this type of marriage are heightened and include, but are not limited to, premarital counseling and a sworn affidavit acknowledging marriage as a lifelong commitment (Sanchez et al., 2002). This development can be taken to suggest the relative dissatisfaction that married couples have experienced in their marital relationships. This dissatisfaction often propelled couples to seek a divorce. It is interesting to note that the impetus for covenant marriage represents an effort by some religious groups as a means of strengthening the institution of marriage (Cade, 2010). As religious groups attempt to safeguard the institution of marriage, it may be asked, “what role does religion play in the level of satisfaction within a marriage?”

Spiritual beliefs include belief in the eternal nature of marriage; examples of religious practices include prayer and study of scripture. Aspects of religious involvement include attendance at religious meetings, participation in other faith community activities, or making financial contributions to a faith community (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

According to Parsons et al., (2007) when a couple decides to marry the individuals begin the process of negotiating (or renegotiating) issues that may arise such as childrearing, careers, place of residence, holidays, and religious denominations to name a few. During this process of negotiation before and during
marriage each individual assesses his or her own values and morals to decide which
ones are the most important to incorporate into the relationship. This process is not
always easy, and many times it is the cause of tension, conflict, and dissatisfaction in
the marriage.

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many individuals. Religion is
said to enhance one’s life and marital satisfaction, to assist and guide one through
crisis and chronic illness, to provide an outlet of support when facing psychological
stress, and to create happiness (Weaver et al., 2002). The process of a couple
determining their religious path, among other things, can create tension as Parsons et
al. (2007), indicate; however, religion is described as enhancing one’s marital
satisfaction. Various scholars present different perspectives on the impact of religion
on marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction and religion have been linked throughout time.
Frequently, it has been reported that interfaith marriages are associated with less
marital satisfaction (Parsons et al., 2007). Heaton and Pratt (1990) found that same-
faith marriage increases one’s marital satisfaction and stability because both spouses
have similar religious beliefs leading to less conflict with each other. In a Seventh-
day Adventist study Oliver (2008, p. 71), concurs with Heaton and Pratt (1990) by
stating that: “individuals who have similar religious beliefs and affiliation tend to
enjoy higher levels of satisfaction and stable relationships in marriage when
compared to individuals who are dissimilar in this regard.” When considering the
impact of religious practice on marital satisfaction Oliver (2008) indicates that being
involved in various religious observances may cause couples to benefit from higher levels of marital satisfaction and stability.

Chinitz and Brown (2001) found that the more spouses agreed on religious issues the less marital conflict they experienced which led to an increase in their marital stability. In contrast, Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that individuals in interfaith marriages had a higher rate of divorce than those in same-faith marriages; whereas, Koper (2001) found that the divorce rate was no higher for interfaith marriages than in the general population.

In an older but valuable study Hatch, James, and Schumm (1986), suggest that simply getting people to be more religious or to pray together may not have an immediate, direct impact on an outcome variable such as marital satisfaction. If religious faith affects marital satisfaction then the quality or level of religious faith or experience ought to influence intervening variables. If one's religious experience changed in some way that did not affect key intervening variables (or perceptions of the same) then it would quite likely not affect marital satisfaction. The implication is that religion by itself, without any corresponding effect on the intervening variables, might not be expected to influence family life in a significantly positive way (Hatch et al., 1986). Giblin (1997) argued that religion affects communication, conflict resolution, decision making, commitment, sexuality, and parenting dimensions of marriage. These represent some of the intervening variables mentioned above.

Additionally, Ahmadi, Azad-Marzabadi, and Nabipoor Ashrafi (2008), indicate that in their study nine subscales were considered when addressing marital satisfaction. These were: personality issues, communication, conflict resolution,
financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, parenting, friends and family, and religious orientation. Of the nine sub-scales considered communication, parenting, and religious orientation accounted for the highest rate of religiosity.

In a study by Hunler and Gencoz (2005), religiousness was found to be significantly associated with marital satisfaction. However, religiousness and marital problem solving were not found to be related to each other. That is, religiousness did not enhance marital problem solving abilities. However, Marsh, and Dallos (2000) observed that praying allowed couples to control their feelings effectively, and that the couples’ relationship with God helped them to handle marital anger in an appropriate way. Anger resolution in marriage is an extremely critical skill necessary for the achievement of marital satisfaction.

Religiousness appears to have a positive impact on marital satisfaction. However, religiousness without the benefit of other necessary skills such as communication and conflict resolution skills, has little impact on a relationship. Parsons et al. (2007) in their study, indicate that religiosity had no effect on marital satisfaction. This may be so because each spouse’s religious affiliations may not affect their marital satisfaction, but rather the satisfaction may be more strongly influenced by the couple’s similarities and differences in their religious beliefs.

In another study, Mitchell (2010, p. 179) posits that, “marital happiness is found to be related to “religiosity,” i.e., being moderately or “somewhat” religious rather than “very religious” as measured by frequency of religious attendance.” Mitchell (2010) concludes by suggesting that moderate levels, as opposed to very
high levels, of religious attendance decreases marital happiness, which may be indicative of more ambiguous religious commitments.

Other Determinants Affecting Marital Satisfaction

McCabe (2006) suggests that, much of the literature on marital satisfaction centers on discussing whether persons with similar personality types are more likely to form satisfying relationships. In this regard, it was observed that considerations such as high levels of neuroticism were associated with low marital satisfaction (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). By contrast Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford (1997) found marital satisfaction to be associated with higher levels of openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

Further considerations with regards to marital satisfaction have been shared, for example, in a study by Crawford, Houts, Huston, and George (2002) on compatibility, leisure, and satisfaction in marital relationships it was indicated that husbands’ pursuit of activities that they liked but their wives disliked, both with and without their wives, was the most important factor in reducing their own satisfaction as well as their wives satisfaction. The authors indicate that the assumption that couples who pursue joint activities would be happy has limitations.

In another study by Mitchell (2010) an exploration of midlife marital happiness among four Canadian cultural groups discovered that cultural factors would predict marital happiness; also, marital happiness is found to be related to immigration status (i.e., greater marital happiness is found in being Canadian vs. being foreign-born).
A study of trends in marital happiness by gender and race from 1973-2000 reveals that race and gender each have independent and statistically significant effects with white and male respondents reporting greater levels of marital happiness than their black and female counterparts (Corra, Carter, Carter, & Knox, 2009).

Another study of interest (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006), which addresses gender and marital happiness in later life suggests that marriage cohorts present one of the strongest influences on marital satisfaction. Belonging to the post-World War II marriage cohort has negative effects on marital happiness. The last half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century provided a different social environment for marriage than that of the first half of the century. It is reasonable then to suggest that the context within which marriage occurs and not just individual characteristics is important in determining marital happiness (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001).

**The Efficacy of Marital Education Programs on Marital Satisfaction**

Over the duration of my pastoral experience, which is about 17 years, there has been great emphasis placed on marital education programs as a means of addressing marital problems in a non-threatening environment. Weekend seminars, marriage clubs, weeks of marriage emphasis have been planned and executed. Due to a lack of intentional follow-up the efficacy of these programs has never been scientifically reviewed to determine levels of success or failure.

According to, Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, and Fawcett (2008) marriage education programs consist of two major components. The first is an emphasis on assisting couples to develop better communication skills and problems solving skills among others. Usually an instructor guides couples in practicing these skills.
Second, a didactic approach is taken where information on marriage quality is presented. Here while couples learn about these issues they also attempt to make concrete plans towards dealing with these issues.

In studies conducted by Carroll and Doherty (2003) and Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, and Murray (2005), on marital education programs, it has been generally discovered that they are effective in improving marital quality and communication skills. However, according to Hawkins et al. (2008), these and other similar studies are limited in their conclusion. Hawkins et al., conclude that, “moderator variables important to practitioners and policy makers, such as gender differences, ethnic/racial diversity, and economic diversity of participants have not been investigated extensively” (2008, p. 724). When considering the efficacy of marital enrichment programs on marital satisfaction Gottman (2007), addresses his serious concern about the value of theories which he says are espoused by “talented theorists” and suggests that many have long been discredited. Gottman (2007, p. 8) says: “Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that communication-and more specifically, learning to resolve your conflicts-is the royal road to romance and an enduring, happy marriage.” His major concern is that even after marital therapy and counseling relapse rates are significant. When considering the impact of marital counseling and divorce rates Gottman (1999) indicates, that his longitudinal research has revealed positive correlations between being in marital therapy and getting divorced. The various modalities used as a means of enhancing marital satisfaction appear to have differing results for various couples; therefore, it can be concluded that not all couples are helped in the same way.
In conclusion, the sentiments of Hawkins et al. (2008) capture the essence of this discussion. They have concluded that, insofar as the main aim of marital education programs is to improve long term marital quality it is important to be cautious until an adequate body of studies becomes available to adequately address this question.

**Summary and Implications of Literary Findings**

The works presented in this review do not represent a comprehensive review of the subject of marital satisfaction. They are limited to the issue with direct bearing on the scope of my study, namely, the proposal of a seminar for the improvement of marital satisfaction in the New Bethel SDA Church in Antigua/Barbuda. A historical overview has discovered what has been attempted in the last few decades. Theoretical reviews have created a base for the review of marital satisfaction. Various determinants of marital satisfaction have been assessed and examined.

The historical review revealed a progressive development of new approaches to improving marital satisfaction when the limitation of previous approaches became obvious. Researchers were always willing to review, refine, and introduce new approaches from across disciplines in order to improve on previous research. The impact of this historical study is to reveal the progression, on an inclusive level, from psychological factors to personality characteristics to interactional styles between spouses to considerations of cognition and affect. The road has been relatively short but extremely productive.

The theoretical concepts reviewed provided a necessary base for this project that seeks to improve couples marital satisfaction. The body of rules and ideas that
accompany this field are wide and varied; however, the theories examined have a profound influence on the subject area and have significantly influenced my intervention strategy. The companionate theory of marriage, for example although modern, has various weaknesses which, in the preparation of a curriculum for marital enrichment, must be addressed in order to provide more effectiveness. Regardless of the strengths or weaknesses of various theories their consideration proved critical for the review.

The many and varied suggested determinants of marital satisfaction were examined. The traditional determinants, such as communication and financial management were reviewed along with other less traditional determinants, such as marital cohort, immigration issues, and religiosity. Also, the more contemporary Sound Relationship House Theory was examined. Marital satisfaction appears to be impacted at several levels, and it is possible that many could become overwhelmed at the varying determinants of marital satisfaction. In the case of the proposed intervention the most valuable determinants for couples in the New Bethel SDA church were considered.

The use of marital enrichment seminars is not a new phenomenon. The process of marital enrichment appears to be the preferred method of assisting in the strengthening of the marital institution. The review attempted to assess the value of marital enrichment material with a view to determining the overall value they have of enhancing marital satisfaction. Results indicated that programs designed around this material may be less productive than originally thought; however, they do have
significant value for improving various skills which impact significantly on marital satisfaction.

Of the reviewed works considered the following areas were most valuable for this study: First, the historical overview provided valuable direction by highlighting the present direction of marital satisfaction research. Second, among the nine theoretical constructs that were considered, the Interdependence Theory, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, the General Theory of Family Communication, along with reviews on egalitarianism and gender ideology proved to be the most valuable. These theories provided a theoretical base for the main areas that the intervention strategy would address which were, commitment, conflict resolution, and communication. Third, the discussion on religiosity and its impact on marital satisfaction proved useful since the project was developed in the setting of the New Bethel SDA Church. Finally, the discussion on the efficacy of marital education programs was very insightful since this is the same modality that was chosen for this project.

The review of the literature generally provided useful information however; theories such as Modernization Theories, Cultural Value Theories, Life Course Theory, Status Inconsistency Theory, and Companionate Theory of Marriage did not significantly impact this study. Other determinants of marital satisfaction as shared in this review were also of lesser value for this study.

It is clear that more longitudinal studies would be valuable for a more effective analysis of marital satisfaction and what influences it. Also, the content of marital educational programs could be better examined to determine effectiveness.
Finally, researchers need to be more resourceful in order to share ways of enhancing marital satisfaction.

The value of my project will be to add to the body of knowledge on marital satisfaction and marital enrichment. As implied in the review, focusing on and addressing the needs of a specific group may be more valuable than simply providing generic educational programs. My intervention strategy will focus on the specific needs of married couples at the New Bethel SDA Church with a view towards enhancing marital satisfaction.

During the review of literature three concepts were of significant value to me. First, according to the Interdependence Theory (Givertz et al., 2009), there seems to be a correlation between satisfaction and commitment. Second, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) along with considerations in the study of egalitarianism, brings attention to how marital satisfaction is affected by conflict and conflict resolution. Finally, according to the General Theory of Family Communication (Schrodt, 2009), the ability to experience reasonable levels of marital satisfaction can be impacted by levels of communication experienced in the family.

My intervention, which will be a weekend marital enrichment seminar entitled “Committed to my Spouse” will focus on commitment, conflict resolution, and communication. I will attempt to observe what impact enrichment information in these three areas will have on a couples overall marital satisfaction. I believe that information gleaned from this study can be of significant benefit to couples as they attempt to improve their marital satisfaction.
CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

The ministry context in which this study takes place considers my observations, as a pastor, of the marital satisfaction of many couples in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua/Barbuda. After several marriage seminars many couples appeared to have many of the same challenges that were addressed in the seminars and their marital satisfaction appeared to be low. The purpose of this study was to assess levels of marital satisfaction and then provide an intervention aimed at addressing three particular concerns which were: commitment, conflict management, and communication. Once the intervention was complete, then marital satisfaction would be assessed again to determine the impact of the intervention on the couples.

The previous chapters have provided the background of pastoral observations, theological foundations, and a theoretical framework which undergird the development of the seminar. The results from the pre and post assessment will reveal the impact of the intervention on the participants.

Development of Intervention

The intervention chosen was the presentation of a marital enrichment seminar where critical areas of commitment, conflict resolution, and communication would be addressed as noted through my personal observation.

The proposed intervention strategy was informed by the theological construct presented in Chapter 2. There was clear biblical evidence that the basis for marital
satisfaction was found in heterosexual couples who had a consistent Christian experience. As a result the intervention strategy was aimed at Christian heterosexual couples. Each participant had to be a member of the New Bethel SDA Church and the couples were to be heterosexual.

It was clearly determined that spirituality positively impacted marital happiness. This finding led to the search for a respected marital enrichment curriculum that would be structured based on firm biblical principles. The Christian version of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is the program which qualified and met the needs for my intervention strategy. According to Cornelius, Alessi and Shorey (2007), data which evaluated the long term effects of PREP on marriages, which were experiencing distress, implied that couples who were a part of the program showed positive attitudes in areas of communication and problem solving than couples that did not participate in the program.

Out of the PREP the book *A Lasting Promise* was developed. The PREP is based on 20 years of marital research and the Christian version of PREP provides a biblically integrated version (Stanley et al., 1998). This resource along with the *Fighting for your Marriage 4 DVD set* provided an appropriate foundation for my intervention strategy which is a weekend marital enrichment seminar.

These resources were also chosen as the backbone of the presentation, because, although they have a strong scientific approach they also have a strong Christian tradition. This Christian tradition was very important to me because the entire context of marital happiness is established in the Bible.

While seeking to become a certified presenter of the Christian PREP material I ran into a challenge. The administrators of PREP certify their presenters in the United States at certain times which proved impossible for me to attend due to the
fact that I live in Antigua/Barbuda. PREP advised that I could build my seminar (which I did) from material in the book, *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage* and the *Fighting for your Marriage 4 DVD set* (see Appendix A for permission to use this material).

**Research Methodology**

The assessment method used in this research included numerical and qualitative analysis. The pre and post assessment utilized the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale which offered numerical data while the qualitative analysis was completed using focus groups as an assessment tool once the presentations were completed.

**Rationale for ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**

In attempting to assess marital satisfaction I was looking for a resource that had been developed through strong empirical and theoretical analysis. According to Oliver (2008) the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale offers solid theoretical and empirical analysis. The scale identifies ten subscales that measure marital satisfaction (Fowers & Olson, 1993).

**Rationale for Focus Groups**

While considering data collection methods along with empirical analysis I wanted a qualitative approach which would give me an opportunity to hear what people had to say. According to Morgan (1998) focus groups perform best when the interest of the researcher is the same as the participants in the group. This was the case in this research project. Focus groups can be used for a variety of reasons. Morgan indicates four basic uses of focus groups which include: problem identification, research design, data collection, and assessment (1998). As a form of assessment for the material presented focus groups provided an opportunity for lively
discussions which were captured by a note taker and provided valuable insight for the research outcomes.

At the end of the first session two groups were formed consisting of six couples each. These groups remained the same for each of the subsequent sessions. The formation of the group was based on a natural synergy which I observed during the session. The couples that were married longer seemed to share similar experiences while the couples that were married for the shortest period of time seemed to have similar experiences. One group consisted of couples who had been married from three to six years while the other group consisted of couples married for six or more years.

I coordinated the group with the older couples while my wife coordinated the group with the younger couples. Each group was asked to select a moderator from among themselves who would ask the predetermined questions. The moderators were asked to allow the discussions to flow while they (the moderators) could also give input. My wife and I served to guide the discussions when necessary.

Originally, it was determined that a note taker would capture the essence of the discussion; however, at the first session the groups decided it would be best to use a recording device since note taking could potentially slow down the process. This was agreed upon by all. Eventually, my wife was asked to transcribe the recordings. Once the recordings were transcribed they were deleted and once this project is complete the notes will be destroyed. To protect the identity of the respondents’ pseudonyms were utilized.

I designed the focus group questions based on the following principles: Questions should be open ended, clear, brief, and reasonable (Krueger & King, 1998). The authors also suggested that questions should be appropriate for the group and ask
what is intended (1998). The focus group questions were printed on a sheet of paper and handed to the moderator at the beginning of each discussion. The moderator read each question and then waited for group members to respond. A total of 30 minutes was given for group discussion in each session.

In order to manage the discussion and protect privacy, I took the opportunity, in the opening session to use the following statement, “Some of the topics that you’ll be discussing today can be very sensitive and personal. We don’t want you to feel stressed by this discussion. So, if I [we] sense that the discussion is getting too stressful or too personal, I will [we’ll] have us all take a break, relax for a minute, and then start up again at a level where everyone feels comfortable” (Morgan, 1998, p. 93).

How Participants Were Selected

Each participant’s involvement in the study was voluntary. Persons could participate in the study by volunteering through signing up on an individual invitation letter (Appendix B). An announcement was issued at the New Bethel SDA Church that a study would be commencing in the church which would discuss issues related to marital satisfaction and that interested persons could sign up for the sessions. The criteria for inclusion were that persons should have been married for a minimum of three years and should be members of the New Bethel SDA Church. Membership was necessary due to a desire to ensure that both persons were of the same faith since the literature suggests that marital satisfaction is also affected by similarities and differences in couples’ religious beliefs. There were 18 couples that signed up for the study. Of the eighteen couples that signed up, 12 couples fit the criteria for inclusion in the study and attended the sessions.
Preliminaries and Ground Work

The sessions were conducted in an air conditioned room at the South Leeward Mission office. At the first session on August 16, 2013 some preliminary matters were taken care of. Participants were given the informed consent letter (Appendix C) which was quite self-explanatory. There were very few questions at this juncture, and all participants signed the letters. This process was completed successfully.

Pre-assessment Process

Next, the pre-assessment (Appendix D) was administered to participants using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS Scale) instrument. The EMS Scale instrument is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. A numbering system was used to maintain anonymity. Participants selected a number ranging from 0001 – 0030. The numbers were printed on small pieces of paper and placed in a container. Each person selected a number and they were encouraged to store it in an electronic device for easy reference. The number selected became their personal identification number and I did not have access to this number. Participants were instructed to place their personal identification number at the top of the pre-assessment as a part of the process of measuring change.

Committed to my Spouse Marital Seminar

The weekend marital seminar was entitled “Committed to My Spouse” and was conducted on Friday, August 16, 2013 from 7 – 9pm, Saturday August 17, 2013 from 3:30 – 5:30pm and Sunday, August 18, 2013 from 10:00am – 12pm. Each session ran for approximately two hours. The first 90 minutes consisted of the presentation and during the final 30 minutes focus groups were facilitated.
Seminar Format

Presentations began with prayer and then I presented each of the seminars as shared below. The sessions were augmented by power point presentations (see Appendix E) where I highlighted the answers to the participant’s worksheets (see Appendix F). The sessions were also interactive with the participants able to ask questions and share experiences along the way. The sessions were divided into two 40- minute segments with a 10- minute break in between each session. During the sessions participants filled in the work sheet (Appendix F), which I designed, for each seminar and were able to see concepts demonstrated with the use of the Fighting for Your Marriage 4 DVD set. At the end of each section (as seen below) the focus group questions were assigned and discussed (Appendix G). Below the seminars are presented in a relatively brief format as a means of giving an overview of the material presented at each seminar.

The thoughts that were presented in the seminars are adapted from ideas presented in The Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage (1998). Unless otherwise indicated all Bible verses in the seminar are from the New International Version.

Session 1

Commitment

According to the authors, commitment in marital relationships comes in two forms. One is a commitment characterized by strong devotion by the two individuals to maintain and enhance the quality of the relationship so that both parties experience the greatest amount of happiness possible; this can be considered as dedication commitment. The other type of commitment is a form of commitment which feels like negative energy. It can be identified as constraint commitment. This form seems
to inhibit happiness. Here, people seem only to stay together in an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage for reasons such as – money, family pressure, pressure from their religious community, children, and a host of other reasons. On the other hand, other couples see constraint positively and it lends a sense of stability to the relationship.

When dedication is low in a relationship a sense of constraint has the potential to keep the relationship together. Sometimes the forces of constraint are negative, meaning people stay together even though they are unhappy. At other times the forces of constraint are positive, meaning constraint creates a sense of stability.

These two forms of commitment, dedicated and constraint, serve the purpose of carrying the couple through the challenges of the marital experience. They are both dedicated and constrained to remain together.

Moral Constraints

In this area, constraints are directly related to issues of morality. As a pastor I have heard church members say that divorce is morally wrong and thus have reason to believe this view is widely held. A person’s beliefs concerning what moral circumstances makes divorce right or wrong will determine what level of constraint exists.

One type of constraint is meta-commitment. This is a strong belief that a person should finish what they have started. The authors explain that this meta-commitment is really commitment to commitment. Meta-commitment may not necessarily be connected to religious beliefs but may simply form part of an individual’s belief system.

Another constraint that has moral implications is that of concern for children and the other partner in the relationship. Many people simply stay married because
they believe the pain of separation would be too great for the other spouse or for the children involved.

Pragmatic Constraints

Pragmatic constraints refer to the perception of what would be gained or lost if the relationship were to be terminated. If the relationship were to be terminated, things such as property and other physical possessions might be lost. There may also be the loss of a certain status that was enjoyed as a result of the relationship. Another significant influence may be the level of comfort one enjoys as a result of the marriage.

Social pressure may also be brought to bear when considering the concept of constraint. Often, third parties may exert significant amounts of indirect pressure on a couple which is a consideration for their decision to stay together.

The quality of the alternatives serves as a powerful facet of constraint commitment. This addresses the extent to which the couple would be intimidated regarding all of the changes that would occur if the relationship were to be ended: friends, job, place of abode and such like.

The Commitment of Personal Dedication

The basis for a commitment of personal dedication comes from the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13 which is commonly known as the love chapter. This chapter describes the concept of agape love which is love in action.

Love in action desires love for the long term. This means that persons are desirous of having the relationship last. In this form of commitment, the marital vow is not seen as an encumbrance but as something that is valuable and exciting. This long term desire is a fundamental part of the type of dedication that is necessary for a successful relationship.
The priority of the relationship is the next pillar of a commitment to personal dedication. This priority refers to the value given to the relationship in comparison to everything else. When the relationship comes into competition with other things, persons who are more committed to their relationships are more likely to make decisions that will benefit the relationship.

Satisfaction with sacrifice is another valuable concept which addresses the view that people feel fulfilled and happy when they do things for the sole benefit of their partner. Here, the powerful idea is that there is extreme joy found in giving of one’s self for one’s partner’s pleasure (Philippians 2:3-4; John 15:13).

The Power of Commitment

The combination of dedication and constraint can come together to create an environment of permanence for a couple which is very helpful for the establishment of a long term committed relationship. All couples can benefit positively from sentiments of permanence. When things are not going well in a relationship, the fact that both parties subscribe to the long term view of relationships can be very helpful in getting them through the difficult moments. This concept has biblical support in Hebrews 13:5 where God shares His promise indicating, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

In relationships where the long term view is not present, couples begin to focus on immediate gratification – What they can get out of the relationship. This approach can be very destructive and self-seeking.

Investing in one’s marriage is a key element for its future success. The truth is that no marriage is a road of unending happiness and joy. Marriages have very difficult times also. In this context, couples that come out on top are couples that keep on investing in their marriages, whether things feel good or feel terrible. This is
where commitment is most powerful because commitment focuses on the long term view.

**Investing for the Long Haul**

Making the time to invest in one’s marriage should not happen only when something has gone wrong and should not happen only when a spouse feels good about the relationship. Regular investments in the marriage are critical in order to prevent problems from developing.

The practice of score keeping generally indicates low commitment to the marriage and also suggests that there is a short-term view of the relationship. Score keeping refers to the practice of checking or counting how much one spouse puts into the relationship as against what they perceive they are getting out of it.

The value of trust and commitment cannot be underestimated as a principle which fosters longevity for marriage. Trust is understood as the ability to depend on one’s spouse to be there at all times. There is a solid connection between trust and commitment. A spouse needs the confidence that the other person is planning to be there for the long haul. If one spouse cannot be trusted to be there for the other over the long haul, then the level of commitment will be very low.

Often times, the long term view of marriage that a couple is attempting to establish, is severely threatened by careless sentiments. It is important to remember that people are only comfortable investing regularly in a relationship if they are confident that it will last. The mention of divorce as a weapon in any marriage can be a fatal blow to the idea of trust and commitment.

**Selfishness**

First Corinthians 13 says that “Love is not self-seeking.” True love allows human beings in relationship to give themselves to one another in love. In today’s
consumer driven society selfishness is the order of the day. Selfishness generally brings unhappiness and bitterness to those who practice its principles. The difficulty with selfishness in a consumer driven society is that in marriage, spouses are tempted to treat each other in a disposable way as with consumer products.

How a Spouse can Keep Commitment Alive and Thriving

In reality, a spouse has most control over his or her own behavior and not the actions of the other spouse. Research suggests that in most relationships, positive behavior is eventually reciprocated. With this in mind, the suggestion is that in order to encourage one’s spouse to be more positive, it is important to ensure that one’s self is exhibiting positive actions.

The focus group answered the following questions:

1. How has the presentation on commitment affected your views on this subject?
2. What challenges do you foresee when attempting to keep a long term view of marriage in mind if there are problems in the relationship?

Session 2

Patterns That Destroy Oneness

It is quite clear from research that two people coming together in marriage will bring their own realities into the relationship. Cultures, personalities, upbringing, among many other things, have a profound impact on the way that they will interact. These differences have the potential to create conflict in a marital relationship. Stanley et al. say that developing productive ways to address differences is the most
positive thing that can be done to protect the possibilities for a successful marriage (1998).

In this presentation, we will be addressing negative practices which place marriages at significant risk for failure. The wise man Solomon said, “as dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (Eccl 10:1). Handling conflict poorly through poor communication has the potential to make a bad situation worse.

Four Practices That Should be Avoided

Escalation

Escalation takes place when partners respond back and forth in a negative way to each other; as the conversation continues, the verbal hostility increases. In escalation, comments become increasingly antagonistic, and the partners become more and more frustrated. Once again Solomon advises in Proverbs 12:18, “reckless words pierce like a sword.” Some persons may be thinking that they are alright because they do not fight like “cats and dogs,” but Gottman and Levenson (2002) show that even restrained practices of escalation can lead to divorce in years to come.

It is important to avoid patterns of escalation at all costs. Many couples do experience escalation but the successful ones learn how to break the practice early. Once one partner notices the pattern of escalation developing that partner needs to back off in order to de-escalate. “Softening your tone of voice and acknowledging your partner’s point of view are simple but powerful tools you can employ to diffuse tension and end escalation” (Stanley et al., 1998).
Invalidation

Invalidation is a practice where one partner almost imperceptibly or indirectly puts down the feelings, thoughts or character of his or her spouse. Often times, in the practice of invalidation, the speaker does not necessarily show overt contempt.

In order to avoid invalidation it is imperative to always respect the other person’s point of view. “By validation, we simply mean that the one raising the concern is respected and heard. You don't have to agree with your partner to validate his or her feelings” (Stanley et al., 1998).

Negative Interpretations

Negative interpretations generally take place when one party believes that the intentions of the other are negative, and conversations are interpreted with a negative slant. When this is the case, an environment of discouragement pervades.

It has been suggested that one of the outgrowths of negative interpretations is mind reading. Stanley et al. suggest that mind reading takes place when one make the assumption that he or she knows what the other partner is thinking or why he or she did something (1998). This practice is filled with problems. Luke 6: 41-42 says, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. It is never a good thing to judge the intentions of another person particularly one’s spouse.

Withdrawal and Avoidance

Withdrawal refers to the practice of a person showing little or no desire to be involved in important discussions. One spouse may choose to leave the room entirely
while another may “shut down” or “turn off” during the discussion. In some cases, the withdrawer may look away, get quiet, or agree quickly in order to exit the discussion. At times, there is a “dance” between the pursuer and the withdrawer. The pursuer is the one who generally attempts to bring up issues while the withdrawer attempts to stay away from the discussion or withdraw during the discussion.

The importance of communication within the family structure and particularly in the marital relationship has been established for many years. The general theory of family communication, which focuses on the organized knowledge structures that family members use to communicate and exchange ideas, is useful for examining the extent to which family communication enhances family strength and satisfaction (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Studies in the field have resulted in documentation which indicates that family communication has significant influence on conflict management styles (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b), interpersonal skill in romantic relationships (Koesten, 2004), cognitive flexibility (Koesten et al., 2009), and resiliency behaviors (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). The belief that early family interaction or the lack thereof impacts the ability of individuals to function well and have reasonable levels of satisfaction in marital relationships is supported by Schrodt (2009) who suggests that these lines of research confirm Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s (2002a) assertion that the ways that families communicate have significant implications for the social development of family members.

Five Types of Filters

James 1:19 states: “everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” According to Stanley et al. (1998), there are five types of filters that can affect a couple’s ability to experience clear communication, and since communication is a determinant of marital satisfaction, an examination of these filters
should prove beneficial. The filters are: inattention, emotional states, beliefs and expectations, differences in style and self-protection.

**Inattention**

Inattention has to do with whether or not one party has the other person’s full attention. Both internal and external factors affect attention. According to Carl Rogers there is a perception that listening is a passive task. On the contrary listening should be done actively with sensitivity, empathy and attention (Nawroth, 2010). The key is to make sure that each has the other’s attention when it is most important. It is important not to make the assumption that one’s partner is ready to listen simply because the other is ready to talk. Craig (2004) suggests some signs of a good listener or someone who is paying attention: Maintains good eye contact, responds with a nod or smile, does not interrupt the flow of information, maintains an open, accepting attitude and posture, is empathetic, remains poised and emotionally controlled, does not change the topic and connects with the speakers feeling by reflecting back the thoughts and feelings of the speaker by utilizing paraphrases of what is said.

**Emotional States**

Emotional states or moods can create challenges when attempting to communicate. Conelius, Allessi, and Shorey, (2007) make reference to sentiment override, a term established by (Weiss, 1980) meaning “a global dimension of affection or disaffection for the partner and the marriage.” Based on this theoretical construct researchers have found that, “spouses in unhappy marriages perceive their partner’s behavior in a more negative light, accentuate negative events, and minimize positive events more than happy couples, even in the face of behavior change.” (Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). In simple terms conversations seem to go
better when people are in a good mood rather than a bad one. When a person is in a bad mood, it is more likely that things will be perceived negatively.

Beliefs and Expectations

Hawkins, Carrère, and Gottman (2002) suggest that people tend to see what they expect in others. It was suggested that husbands and wives who were distressed anticipated more negative and less positive behaviors than husbands and wives who were not distressed. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) suggest that compared to couples that were happy, the exchanges between distressed couples were marked by high levels of negative reciprocity or an heightened likelihood of negative behavior following the negative behavior of the spouse. With the filter of beliefs and expectations negative appraisals of a situation can lead to more negativity while positive appraisals my lead to more positive outcomes. This practice tends to color what we see and distort communication.

Differences in Style

According to de Vries et al., (2009) communication style refers to the characteristic way that a person sends verbal and non-verbal signals in social interactions. Persons possess different styles while communicating. These styles of communication are determined by things such as culture and gender.

Men and women acquire different beliefs, learn different rules, are socialized into different roles because they are seen as growing up in very different cultures (Noller, 1993). Noller (1993) contends that because men and women have differing experiences and function in different settings they develop different genres of speech and different verbal skills.

By way of gender, Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, (2005) suggest that non-verbal communication differences become very pronounced in cross-sex interactions.
Women, when compared to men, generally smile more, express a wider range of emotions through eye contact and maintain greater eye contact with those with whom they interact. Male styles of communication tend towards positions of dominance while female styles tend more toward subordination. Strong et al. (2005) comment that there appears to be significant differences when considering male to female communication in marriage.

It is important to note that gender differences in personality have important practical applications in the area of interpersonal relationships. Perceived gender differences may have an impact on the experiences that males and females have and the way that they are treated in the social environments (Löckenhoff et al., 2014). These perceived gender differences are often not as significant as may be suggested. According to Fisk (2010) the thought that women are often more agreeable and tender minded whereas men are more tough-minded is a stereotypical sentiment. She points out that 80% of published gender differences are not big.

Being more aware of the differing styles of communication can assist in safeguarding against misunderstandings. Differences in gender and culture have the potential to create misunderstandings; however, care must be taken to guard against inappropriately stereotyping certain styles.

**Self-protection**

This refers to the fear of being rejected. When considering self-protection, we do not share our true sentiments for fear of being rejected.

The filters mentioned above are indicative of obstacles to good communication. Often, couples who are unaware of these filters continue down a path of weak communication which has the potential to destroy the entire relationship.
“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment” (1 John 4:18). Satisfying marital relationships often develop in an environment where both persons are able to comfortably share their beliefs, preferences and concerns without fear of reprisal.

The Speaker-Listener Technique

In order to be able to deal with issues constructively, it is necessary to utilize an agreed upon set of rules to help with challenging conversations. Stanley et al recommend the Speaker-Listener technique (1998). The biblical foundation for this technique is the following, “Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (Jas 1:19, 20).

Rules for Both Spouses

1. The Speaker has the floor.
2. Share the floor.
3. No problem solving at this juncture.

Rules for the speaker

1. Speak for yourself.
2. Talk in small chunks.
3. Stop and let the listener paraphrase.

Rules for the listener

1. Paraphrase what you hear.
2. Don’t rebut. Focus on the Speaker’s message.

These rules were demonstrated using sections of disk #2 of the Fighting for your Marriage 4 DVD set.

Focus group questions for this section were:
1. What are some of your thoughts regarding the pattern of escalation that can destroy oneness?

2. How effective do you think that the Speaker-Listener technique can be in assisting in developing oneness in marriage and why?

Session 3

Problem Solving

Solving problems in relationships is a desirable thing since couples do not enjoy the kind of emotional and sometimes physical separation that problems can create. Solving problems is often challenging because the couple may not take the time to understand the complexity of the situation. Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.” As we address this issue, we will consider two foundational points. First, all couples have problems. Research suggests that during the first year of marriage, problems with communication and sex are among the first to be reported. All couples seem to struggle on the question of money management at some point. It is important to note that regardless of what the problem may be the key issue is not the problem, but how the problem is handled.

Secondly, rushed solutions are poor solutions. Proverbs 19:2 says, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.” Hasty solutions can prove more detrimental and can increase feelings of frustration. Poor solutions are conceived due to the fact that couples are often pressured for time or are attempting to avoid further conflict.

Steps for Handling Conflict

In order to handle conflict well, it is imperative to have some form of structure. The authors recommend a specific set of steps which, although simple,
should not be ignored. These steps will assist any couple through any type of conflict and has the potential to significantly increase satisfaction in the marriage once both parties are willing to be respectful and cooperative.

Problem discussion

The first step in handling conflict is the problem discussion. Each person should share and discuss their significant concerns about the issue and ensure that each person has seen and understood the other person's point of view clearly, whether they agree or not. Use of the speaker-listener technique will be valuable here (Stanley et al., 1998).

Problem solution

According to Stanley et al., (1998) there are four steps during this period. Setting the agenda is the first step of the problem solution stage. It is important to determine exactly what problem is to be solved. Identify or focus on the one issue that needs to be addressed at present. Some issues may have several subsets. In this case, after identifying the various areas, focus on areas that are most manageable first and then move on to more challenging areas. The second step is brainstorming. All ideas suggested should be written down. Nothing should be discarded at this time. Creativity is the key here and a good sense of humor can lighten the moment. The third step is agreement and compromise. Here, the idea is to come up with a specific solution or set of solutions that are agreed upon by both parties. It is important to enter this step with a sense of compromise. The final step is Follow-up. After agreeing and having a trial period for the solution selected follow-up is important.
During the follow-up, solutions can be adjusted for greater efficiency. Also, the follow-up period provides a measure of accountability which is important when managing change.

Some problems are challenging and the solution arrived at does not bring satisfaction to either party. This could become a significant point of departure, and the whole relationship could be damaged as a result. Sometimes living graciously in the absence of a mutually satisfying solution is a marriage saving option and can give the couple the opportunity to see the best days of their marriage ahead. Paul says in Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Ground Rules for Protecting Marriages From Conflict

As we consider the ground rules for protecting marriages from conflict, some important points must be considered.

First, anticipate problems and stay in control. Unfortunately, some Christians believe that Christian couples should never have a conflict simply because they are Christians. As we consider this challenge, it is important to note that conflict is an inescapable part of relationships and rather than being caught off guard by challenges, anticipate and prepare for them as much as is reasonably possible.

Second, take responsibility for one’s self. As spouses negotiate through various difficulties, it is important that realize that they cannot control their spouse’s behavior but only their own.

Finally, take control of the issues. Do not let issues control the relationship. Issues and problems are things that come and go, but the relationship must be able to stand the test of time. Taking control of issues means putting things in place so that whatever the situation may be there is a system in place to handle it.
Six Ground Rules

The first ground rule is that, when conflict begins to escalate we will call a Time-Out and either try talking again, using the Speaker-Listener technique or agree to talk later at a specified time about the issue, using the Speaker-Listener technique. Second, when we are having trouble communicating, we will engage the Speaker-Listener Technique. The goal here is to make sure that an environment for safe and effective communication is set up. At this juncture both parties are agreeing to put proper structures in place to ensure that there are no misunderstandings. Third, when discussing an important issue, we will completely separate the problem discussion from the problem solution. Fourth, we can bring up an issue at any time, but the listener can say, “This is not a good time.” If the listener does not want to talk at that time he or she takes responsibility for setting up a time to talk in the near future (usually within 24 to 48 hours). Fifth, we will have weekly couple meetings. This is a very important rule and its aim is to keep matters current and sixth, we will make time for the great things of marriage – fun, friendship, sensuality, and spiritual connection. We will agree to protect these times from conflict and the need to deal with issues.

If a spouse agrees to use these simple rules he or she is agreeing to control the difficult issues in the marriage and not allowing them to take control. Remember, “If it is possible, as far as depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18), even one’s spouse.

Focus group questions for this section were:

1. It is suggested that having a structure when handling conflict can assist in protecting your marriage from conflict. What do you think about this?
2. Some people say that presentations on marital enrichment have the potential to improve marital satisfaction. How do you feel about that statement?

**Post-Assessment Process**

Once the seminars were completed the participants were instructed that a post-assessment would take place approximately three months later in the month of November. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale was used once again. This time the participants were contacted individually by phone and arrangements were made to have the assessment forms delivered to them on November 18, 2013.

**Conclusion**

The Committed to My Spouse marital seminar addressed three main areas, commitment, conflict management and communication. Each seminar ran for two hours and consisted of a lecture based on Christian PREP from the same material. The lectures were enhanced by power point presentations which I prepared and also with illustrations from the *Fighting for your Marriage 4 DVD set*. Each presentation concluded with focus group discussions.

This chapter has described the development and implementation of a marital seminar designed to address observed low marital satisfaction among couples in the New Bethel SDA Church. The research methodology utilized the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale and focus groups. Couples who participated in this study volunteered by responding to and signing a recruitment letter that was issued in the New Bethel SDA Church.
CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATIONS

Introduction

Marital satisfaction or having a sense of happiness in a marriage seems to be very important for many married couples although the number of persons who feel happy appears to be low. I have had the opportunity to interact with several married couples due to the fact that I am a pastor. In the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, four marital enrichment seminars addressing general issues were conducted between 2006 and 2010. During these years the marital education material that was shared did not appear to increase the marital satisfaction of the recipients. I was curious to discover if presenting marital enrichment material, that was not just general, but aimed at addressing specific needs, would cause married couples to experience greater, lesser, or similar levels of satisfaction when measured three months after the intervention. The areas of commitment, conflict resolution and communication, which I observed to be the major areas of weakness, would be addressed utilizing a lecture based seminar with six hours of presentations over a weekend.

This chapter gives a concise description of the research methodology. A description of the EMS Scale data collection and qualitative collection strategy is shared. I will also interpret the data collected and share conclusions.
The criterion for participation was that individuals had to be married for a minimum of three years and both spouses had to be attending members of the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church. Participants were required to read and sign my personal recruitment letter (Appendix A). Fifty (50) recruitment letters were distributed, and as a result of this process, 12 couples qualified and voluntarily signed up for the study. Before the study began, each individual was required to sign an informed consent letter (Appendix B).

**Data Collection**

In order to collect data, the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale was used (Appendix D). Fowers and Olson (1993) state that the EMS Scale:

Offers an important alternative to researchers who require a brief but, nevertheless, valid and reliable measure of marital quality. It provides a means to obtain both dyadic and individual satisfaction scores. Ten of the scale's items survey 10 domains of marital quality.

The ten domains of marital quality are: conflict resolution, communication, equalitarian roles, personality issues, leisure activities, financial management, sexual relations, children and parenting, family and friends, and religious orientation.

**Choice of Measurement Scale**

The choice of the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale was due to the fact that it is simple but also scientific (see ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale in Appendix D).

Respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement to the statements by placing a number between one and five which represented their responses. Fowers and Olsen (1989) describe how these responses are to be scored. Add all the positive
items (1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10). Next, items 2, 4, 6 and 8 are negative questions and the responses should be reverse-scored. The 1 becomes a 5, a 2 becomes a 4, a 4 becomes a 2, and a 5 becomes a 1 and the response of 3 is left unchanged. Once reversed, add these four items. Finally, the total score is the sum of the positive and negative items. The range of scores is from 10-50. Satisfaction is measured as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Marital Satisfaction: Interpretation Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage and Levels</th>
<th>Marital Satisfaction</th>
<th>Marital Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raw</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>You are very satisfied and really enjoy most aspects of your couple relationship.</td>
<td>46-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td>44-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-100</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>You are satisfied with most aspects of your couple relationship.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-80</td>
<td></td>
<td>38-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>You are somewhat satisfied and enjoy some aspects of your couple relationship</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-60</td>
<td></td>
<td>33-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>You are somewhat dissatisfied and have some concerns about your couple relationship</td>
<td>27-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-35</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>You are very dissatisfied and are concerned about your couple relationship</td>
<td>21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-15</td>
<td></td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>10-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of the EMS Scale in the pre and post seminar assessment provided an opportunity for numerical analysis of marital satisfaction. The pre-assessment was conducted using the EMS scale instrument on the same day the enrichment seminar began. A numbering system was used to maintain anonymity. Each participant selected a number ranging from 0001 – 0030. The numbers were printed on small pieces of paper and placed in a container. Each couple selected a number which they were encouraged to store on an electronic device for easy reference. The number selected became their personal identification number and was not kept or recorded by the researcher. Participants were instructed to place their personal identification number at the top of both the pre-assessment and the post assessment as a means of measuring change. The weekend enrichment seminar was then conducted and a post-assessment using the EMS scale was again administered three months after the seminar was completed.

Responses Using EMS Scale

In this section data collected before the interventions will be compared with data collected three months after the intervention.

Pre-test Results

According to the raw scores, the grand total before the interventions is shared in Table 2. Table 2 shows that the raw scores range from 16 – 45 which according to the EMS scale represents marital satisfaction ranging from very low to very high. Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents’ marital satisfaction ranged between moderate to very high while 25% of respondents reported low to very low satisfaction with their marriages.
Table 2

**Pre-test Raw Score Grand Total**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<td>37.5</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>54.2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>70.8</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 is the satisfaction rating and represents data collected immediately before the first presentation of the intervention using the EMS scale. It shows that prior to the intervention 16.7% of respondents considered themselves to be very satisfied with their marriages, 29.2% considered themselves to be highly satisfied with their marriages. The largest group of 33.3% considered themselves to be moderately satisfied with their marital relationship while 12.5% of the respondents considered their satisfaction rate as low and 8.3% considered their satisfaction rate as very low.
The intervention addressed commitment, patterns that destroy oneness, and problem solving. Commitment was the only presentation that did not directly correspond to one of the questions on the EMS scale. The presentation on problem solving corresponded with question number one on the EMS scale: I am happy with how we make decisions and resolve conflict. The presentation on patterns that destroy oneness corresponded with question two on the EMS scale: I am unhappy with our communication and feel my partner does not understand me.

**Post-test Results**

Three months after the seminar was completed, the EMS Scale was administered and the respondents were asked the same set of questions to determine if any significant change could be reported. Due to one couple’s failure to locate their personal identification number, the second group represents 22 persons or 11 couples while the previous group had 24 persons or 12 couples.
Table 4

Post-test raw Score Grand Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 represents the grand totals for the batch of post-tests that were conducted. Raw scores three months after the intervention range from 21– 42. This means that 77.3% recognize their marriages as ranging from moderately satisfying to very satisfying while 22.7% see their marital satisfaction as low and very low.

The satisfaction rating from post-tests completed three months after the intervention as shown in Table 5 highlights the following: Of 22 valid respondents 18.2% represent their satisfaction as very high, while 36.4% said that their satisfaction was high. Twenty-two point seven percent (22.7%) expressed their marital satisfaction as moderate and 13.6% indicated low marital satisfaction. Finally, 9.1% said that marital satisfaction was very low.
Table 5

*Post-test Satisfaction Rating*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very high (85-100%)</td>
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<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (65-80%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (40-60%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (20-35%)</td>
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<td>13.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very low (0-15%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the before and after satisfaction ratings shows that those who were very satisfied increased by 1.5% while those who were highly satisfied increased by 7.2%. Considering that communication and conflict resolution were two of the variables addressed in the seminar it is possible that increased proficiency in these areas could have led to increased satisfaction three months later. It is documented that good communication, or a lack of it, does impact marital satisfaction (Schrodt, 2009). Also, Family communication styles impact conflict management styles (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). The increased skills learned at the seminar may have been responsible for better management of conflicts thus resulting in increased marital satisfaction.

The satisfaction rating for those who reported having low satisfaction and very low satisfaction before the seminar declined further, by 1.1% and 0.8% respectively, three months later.
The greatest measure of change was observed for those who reported being moderately satisfied prior to the seminar. Three months after the seminar a 10.6% decline was seen among those who had previously stated that they were moderately satisfied. There was an 8.2% shift from moderately satisfied to high or very high marital satisfaction and a 1.9% shift from moderate satisfaction to low or very low satisfaction. It may be concluded that, while the material presented at the seminar may have caused some participants to experience greater marital satisfaction, others may have felt that their relationship was beyond repair thus; their levels of satisfaction may have slightly declined.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

**Focus Group Strategy**

In order to enhance the picture of the data that was collected, focus groups were used at the end of each of the seminar sessions as a form of group interview to discuss the topic that had been presented. Each of the two focus groups consisted of 12 persons and the groups were asked two questions after each seminar. A total of six questions were asked (Appendix C), and the groups were given 30 minutes to respond to the two questions. The groups of 12 consisted of six married couples each so that each group eventually consisted of six men and six women.

During each group interview, a moderator, who was selected by the group, asked participants to respond to a predetermined number of open ended questions, which I provided as the facilitator, and then listened to hear what the persons had to say. The group interviews were primarily about my listening and also about being non-judgmental with the information people had to share. In order to maintain
confidentiality during the discussions, participants were identified by pseudonyms.

Although not originally intended, the discussions were captured on a recording device and then transcribed verbatim by my wife. The recordings were deleted once the transcription was completed and the notes will be destroyed once the study is complete. Other respondents were instructed to maintain confidentiality.

Qualitative Responses From Focus Groups

The focus groups which were conducted at the end of each presentation give further insight into the impact of the intervention at the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Liberta, Antigua/Barbuda.

Session 1 Responses

After the presentation on commitment, the focus group was asked to respond to two questions. The first was, “How has the presentation affected your views on commitment?” The names used here are not the real names of the persons who responded.

Althea said, “I think [the material presented] reflect concepts we were aware of but just never had names for. It brought some more academic aspects to things that we experience on a daily basis.” This response seems to suggest that the ideas and sentiments expressed by the facilitator were well known and accepted as best practice but are not necessarily being practiced in some marriages.

One of the key concepts expressed in the presentation on commitment was the value of prioritizing the marriage relationship. Martha relates to this by stating, “Priority, priority is on my mind [while] living in a relationship, but how much do we
play it out for each other and realize that our relationship is a priority and should be
for each one of us?” In response to this Carl posits:

I agree with what you’re saying, but at the same time I think we should be balanced. I know of circumstances where people use priority as a club. I don’t think that in a marriage relationship we should go down that road so as to let priority be so high on the agenda that it takes control of everything else or everyone else. I think we need to strike a balance.

The discussion on prioritizing the relationship seemed to indicate that it was an area of concern for many in the group. It was obviously something that had received some attention by most of the couples. Althea continues the discussion by stating:

I think a lot of times too, when people have to highlight to you that I should be a priority that that should be a red flag, because I should not have to say to you, why are you spending 5 hours [away from home]? This is a Sunday, you get up, eat your breakfast and you leave the house by 11 o’clock and may stay some place until 3 or 4 o’clock. It’s a whole day wasted or you are home doing nothing or out helping someone else. I mean, at the same time no one should have to highlight to you that I [Althea] am priority or I should be your priority. If you have to say that, it means that that’s because there’s something that maybe isn’t happening or there’s something that’s recurring that should not be recurring and putting a strain on the relationship causing the person to feel like I’m not as important as I should be to you.

Carl rounds out the thought with the following, “If we pay attention to the word respect that’s a very important word. If we respect our partner we would prioritize them, but what happens is we tend to take them for granted.” Many of the other respondents agreed that prioritizing the relationship was important; however they admitted that consistently being respectful and creating balance in the arena of marriage was often challenging.

Next, the group members were asked, “What challenges do you foresee when attempting to keep a long term view of marriage in mind if there are problems in the relationship?” Joseph gets the ball rolling in response to this question by suggesting:
One challenge could be true forgiveness because in resolving conflict sometimes we kind of move on [in order] to keep the peace, so to speak, but in the back of our minds, we still hold on and sooner or later you can be sure that it’s going to raise its ugly head again. True forgiveness is about moving on because you love the person and how are you going to hold whatever it is against them? I think that is a challenge.

Althea responds to Joseph’s concern with the following:

Hearing the explanations the facilitator gave about commitment and being committed for the long term not thinking that if he [the husband] picks up and leaves I need to have a back-up of $20,000.00 that he doesn’t know about, just in case. Sometimes the problems already exist where people may have already expressed before I’m not happy, I’m not happy, I’m not going to live with 25 years of unhappiness, are you crazy? Twenty-five years of unhappiness when this can be finished in 2 years, no! I’m not going to do that to myself. I deserve to be happy. You deserve to be happy. Why put ourselves through this? So it’s always the question of really being committed beyond those things, knowing that every day is not the same. Everyday might not be like, I’m riding on a cloud, but being committed enough to know that the reasons that the facilitator gave, choice, moral reasons, all these other reasons, and sometimes some of the reasons that people might think, are there. But, for some people they don’t register as high, and that’s just the reality. Some people are like, honestly, I don’t care what people think. I care about me and how I feel. So, I think it’s more like staying committed to the relationship and that would mean putting in the time and effort and making a priority of your relationship to keep it going. I’ve heard of situations where people are married for two years and somebody picks up and walks away.

The path to commitment is definitely being consistent and as Althea suggested, having the ability to recognize that every day will not be “like, I’m riding on a cloud.”

There will be difficult days but difficult days should not be the end of commitment.

The information on commitment to marriage is highlighted as a part of the marriage vow “for better for worse;” however, several marriages, even after enrichment programs, still fall apart.

Session 2 Responses

The next seminar dealt with patterns that destroy oneness or communication.

Once again, two questions were asked to the focus groups. The first was, “What are
some of your thoughts regarding the pattern of escalation that can destroy oneness?”

Marcia offers her sentiments to this question and shares, “I guess I may not really
have anything against the back and forth but may be more affected by the tone in the
exchange so I guess tone of voice. The person may not mean anything really but tone
of voice and body language make it more difficult.” Carl shares a view which
balances the discussion somewhat when he says:

Outside of tone, because the tone could be soft but very violent; also, body
language could be positive but choice of words could be negative. The words that
I use could be destroying oneness. Language could be calm and body language
could be positive, but I could be saying something that is tearing her up inside.
The choice of words that we use can destroy oneness.

Dwight says in a moment of self-revelation, “Sometimes my wife says things that
make sense, but it’s how she says it that can throw me off and you take offence to
what she says. It’s not what she says but how she says it.” The ability of both
partners to consistently maintain healthy practices which will enhance marital
satisfaction over the long term appears to be a challenge.

The second question in this segment was, “How effective do you think the
speaker-listener technique can be in assisting to develop oneness in the marriage and
why”? Dwight is anxious to speak to this matter and states:

We need to be honest and open when we use this technique. It doesn’t make
sense trying to nice up something. It doesn’t have to be said in an angry mood but
you have to say how you feel and be straight forward and the other person should
be mature enough to understand that it’s not because he hates me why he just told
me that. I want to know how my wife feels. Don’t smile at me and say, oh
honey, I love you and at the back of your mind you’re vex with me. In the
technique, we should be honest.
Dwight, although married for several years, acknowledges that although both he and his wife are aware of the value of good tone and body language in conversation in order to avoid escalation and in order to benefit from the speaker-listener technique it is clear that being consistent in this practice proves to be a challenge. This lack of consistency in beneficial practices may have been a cause for a negligible positive change in marital satisfaction after this marital enrichment seminar.

**Session 3 Responses**

The final seminar addressed problem solving or conflict resolution. In this seminar, skills were taught regarding how to manage and resolve conflict in marriage. At the end of this seminar, the first question was, “It is suggested that having a structure when handling conflict can assist in protecting your marriage from conflict. What do you think about this?” In response to this question, Martha responds with the following, “I believe that structure can really help me because I can get really outrageous when I’m dealing with conflict.” Now this comment must be understood in the context of the fact that Martha has attended seminars previously which would have dealt with issues of conflict resolution. Although there is an awareness of the value of enrichment material, the point is reiterated that married couples appear to have a difficulty with being committed to carrying out principles that are proven to have a positive effect on marital satisfaction.

Melissa, who is a very mature woman and has been married for several years, makes a very valuable contribution when she states:

Having a structure in place, especially for a young marriage, is necessary because it would help to keep a balance. With structure, it does not mean that your marriage becomes a professional thing that it’s an ‘ABC’ situation, but you work
with a framework which will take you somewhere because if you aim at nothing you will achieve nothing. It helps the couple to strike a balance. With a conflict, it can begin as a very simple thing but can end up really disastrous; but with a structure, you’d be able to pull things back into shape before it gets out of hand.

Bobby says, “A structure is good because whenever you and your wife discuss certain things or have something to do and one slips up, you can say, remember what the structure says. It serves as a reminder.” It is quite evident from the above that there appears to be value in structure that can serve to reduce marital friction which in turn may lead to a greater sense of marital satisfaction.

The final question states, “Some people say that presentations on marital enrichment have the potential to improve marital satisfaction. How do you feel about that statement?” The responses to this question speak to the matter of consistency and a willingness to actually practice the principles that are shared in enrichment seminars. For example Kevin says, “In order for all this information to be effective, we must be consistent. Within two months after trying, we forget and get back into the same old mold. We have to continually remember these things so that it becomes practice and not just trying.” The emphasis here parallels the results from the EMS Scale suggesting that information alone does not impact marital satisfaction. In support of this notion, Dwight reveals the following:

There have been quite a number of marriage seminars and people have spoken to me and said they’re not going back to any because, for maybe about one or two month afterwards things are a bit better and then after that things are back to the way they were. In adding structure, it can be helpful because when a problem does arise there is a plan to deal with it rather than going off of the top of your head or how you feel at the moment. There is a plan in place that even if I’m hot tempered, this is the plan we are going to follow. Being consistent is a key with respect to all the information we have received.
This qualitative material adds a voice to the numerical data and supports the findings which generally state that after the intervention and a three-month break, respondents suggested that any change, whether positive or negative, in marital satisfaction was not significant. Marital satisfaction tended to remain the same after the intervention.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to discover and discuss factors affecting marital satisfaction for married couples in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Liberta, Antigua and to determine if skills gathered at this seminar will assist couples in experiencing greater marital satisfaction. Between 2006 and 2010, the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua and Barbuda has had four marriage enrichment seminars; however, based on my observations, the marital satisfaction of those who attended did not appear to improve as a result of these seminars. During my tenure as pastor in this district, I have received several complaints about many marital issues.

The numerical data and focus group results suggest that marital satisfaction did not improve in a very significant way after the intervention. When the results of the EMS Scale pre-test and post-test were compared, there was no major evidence of improvement or deterioration of marital satisfaction. The focus groups which presented qualitative results seemed to conclude that marital enrichment programs have the potential to have a positive impact on marital satisfaction only if the married couples are willing to implement the skills learned in a structured and systematic way. The impact of the intervention on the participants may show varied results due to other factors which will now be explored.
The development of this intervention was aimed at addressing issues of low marital satisfaction in the New Bethel SDA Church. Upon reflection although my pastoral observations were critical to the process and design of the intervention strategy it is plausible to suggest that, in the future, some form of survey could be carried out to determine the felt needs of potential participants. It is possible that perceived needs could differ significantly from actual needs.

In the development process of the intervention more could have been done to assess satisfaction levels between male and female. There was no provision for comparative analysis between males and females. The original design only attempted to review the overall satisfaction of couples before and after a marital seminar. Upon review it would have been useful to also assess the differences in satisfaction levels between males and females since literature suggests that levels of marital satisfaction appears to differ between genders based of varying factors (Corra et al., 2009).

I am of the opinion that educational value could have been enhanced by the use of take home assignments which would have served to solidify concepts taught during the seminar.

With 12 being a relatively small number of respondents, and the possibility of measuring change among only 11 couples it may be suggested that the results, although providing valuable information in the field, cannot be applied broadly as the sample size is not truly representative of the larger population of SDA
couples in Antigua/Barbuda. In the future a larger sample would be useful in providing results that are more representative.

The follow-up assessment was done three months after the intervention strategy due to the time limitations of the program. A longer period may have rendered different results.

The collection of data for the post assessment proved quite challenging as several respondents misplaced their assessment forms and also had challenges locating their identification numbers. Although the respondents eventually located identification numbers and returned the assessment forms the process was tedious and frustrating at times. Subsequent collection strategies may consider having a seminar overview session called at some point latter where all couples are asked to come together at one time and at one place where the post-assessment would be administered. This would address the challenge of late responses but may not address the issue of misplacement of identification numbers. In large populations where the number of respondents may also be large this suggestion may not prove practical.

All forms had their identification numbers attached; however, one couple appeared to have used numbers that were not issued on the post-assessment evaluation. Unfortunately, this did not allow us to measure change for these respondents but I was able to measure change for eleven couples who participated. Future studies may wish to utilize a more reliable system for identification number storage.

As I consider these results, I believe that I was overly optimistic about the results of a marital seminar, of this design, aimed at addressing issues of low marital
satisfaction. I was of the opinion that the seminar would have caused couples to experience a reasonable increase in their marital satisfaction subsequent to the seminar. It is therefore my desire to examine a lot more literature to determine if this is a common occurrence among married couples.

Based on the research just concluded I am of the opinion that the marital enrichment program that was conducted, for the vast majority of attendees, did appear to have, at least, a small but all-too-temporary positive impact on the attending married couple. Although this is my initial opinion, I would recommend that more structured research be conducted, in the pastoral ministry environment, to examine the validity of this. Another suggestion is that a longitudinal study be commissioned to examine the impact on marital satisfaction of couples who implement the skills gleaned at marital enrichment seminars in a consistent and systematic way.

The Committed to my Spouse marital seminar was highly commended by the participants who spent several minutes indicating their profound gratitude for the wealth of information shared. Twelve couples were able to benefit from marital enrichment material which was designed and developed to specifically address issues of commitment, communication and conflict resolution. During the weekend none of the couples dropped out; therefore, there was 100% attendance rate.

In considering the development of future interventions to address marital satisfaction there is a lot of work to be done. Addressing concerns about low marital satisfaction is no trivial matter. Several couples across several congregations have indicated their desire for improved marital satisfaction. The mandate is clear however, due to a lack of human resources, addressing the challenge remains a formidable task. There continues to be a significant need for marital enrichment
programs which are designed for specific congregations based on observations and objective research. These programs should address specific areas of marital satisfaction based on research outcomes. Once programs have been implemented they should then be reviewed to determine effectiveness. Programs that are determined to be productive may continue while programs that are less effective may need to be reviewed.
APPENDIX A

PREP PERMISSION LETTER

August 7, 2012

Permission to use the PREP® “Fighting for you Marriage” DVD Set and “A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage”

Dear Mark Braithwaite,

We are pleased to give you permission to use the PREP® material in your research project to work with couples or families. You may use the materials in presentation format. This is not permission to make copies of any material, but is solely a permission for use. If the material is used, acknowledgements should be given regarding the name and the developers of the material.

In exchange for providing this permission, we would appreciate a copy of any paper, thesis or reports that you complete using the PREP® material. This will help us to stay abreast of the most recent developments and research. We thank you for your cooperation in this effort.

In closing, we hope you find the PREP® material of value in your work with couples and families. We would appreciate hearing from you as you make use of our material.

Sincerely,

Todd Boyd
General Manager
PREP Inc.
720-227-0154
todd@prepinc.com
Dear Couple:

My name is Mark L. Braithwaite, a Doctor of Ministry student at Andrews University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research seminar to improve marital satisfaction among married couples at the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua/Barbuda. You may participate if you have been married for at least three (3) years and are a member of the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As a participant, you will be asked to be available to complete a pre-assessment and post assessment and a weekend seminar which will comprise three two hour sessions which will address the following areas: conflict resolution, communication, and commitment.

Each session will also involve focus group discussions at the end of each presentation. There will be a total of three group interviews. Each focus group will consist of 8 – 10 people. During each group interview, a moderator asks participants to respond to a predetermined number of open ended questions and then listens to hear what people have to say. Group interviews are primarily about listening but also about being non-judgmental and systematic with the information people share. In order to maintain confidentiality during the discussions, participants will be identified by numbers. A note taker will be present to capture the sentiments of the discussion. These notes will be destroyed once the study is complete. Other respondents will be instructed to maintain confidentiality.

There will be no remuneration for participation. By participating, however, you will help the researcher and the Seventh-day Adventist Church arrive at a better understanding of what factors may lead to the enhancement of marital satisfaction.

There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

If you wish to be a part of this study please print your name and contact information below tear off along the dotted line and submit.

The Seminars will take place over the weekend of August 16-18, 2013: Session 1 - Friday August 16, 7:00pm – 9:00pm; Session 2 - Sabbath August 17, 2013 5:00pm – 7:00pm; and Session 3 - Sunday August 18, 10:00am – 12Mid-day.

Sessions will start and finish on time. The venue will be announced shortly.

Sincerely,
Mark L. Braithwaite

Name: ______________________ (Husband) ______________________ (Wife)
Signature: ___________________ (Husband) ______________________ (Wife)
Contact Number ___________ Email: _______________ Date: ______________
Title: Seminar for improving marital satisfaction among married couples at the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antigua/Barbuda.

Venue for Research: The venue for the research will be at the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, Liberta Village, St. Pauls, Antigua. The workshops with the couples will be conducted for two hours each in an air-conditioned room at the church.

Purpose of Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to discover and discuss factors affecting marital satisfaction for couples in the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist church and to determine if skills gathered at this seminar will assist couples in experiencing greater marital satisfaction.

Brief Description of how the Study would be conducted: The researcher will use mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative analysis) in his approach to the study. Quantitative analysis will be used to assess marital satisfaction using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale for a pre and post seminar assessment. Qualitative analysis utilizing focus groups during a weekend seminar will also be utilized. The book A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage along with the Fighting for your Marriage 4 DVD set will be used as a tested method by Christian PREP® to instruct couples on methods to achieve marital satisfaction. The couples will be assessed using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale one week prior to the seminar to determine their levels of marital satisfaction. Names of the participants will not be used during the assessment phase so as not to identify participant responses. Each participant will select a number ranging from 0001 – 0030. The numbers will be printed on small pieces of paper and placed in a container. Each couple will select a number which they will be encouraged to store in an electronic devise for easy reference. The number selected will be their personal identification number and will not be kept or recorded by the researcher. Participants will be instructed to place their personal identification number at the top of both the pre-assessment and the post assessment as a means of measuring change. A weekend seminar will then be conducted focusing on...
enhancing marital satisfaction. Three months after the seminar is conducted another Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale will be conducted. The data will be analyzed over the following two months. The time period for the assessments, seminar, and analysis of data will be approximately six months.

**Inclusion Criteria:** In order to participate, I recognize that I must be married for a minimum of three years, and both I and my spouse must be attending members of the New Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Risks and Discomforts:** I have been informed that there are no physical or emotional risks to my involvement in this study.

**Benefits/Results:** I accept that I will receive no remuneration for my participation, but that by participating, I will help the researcher and the Seventh-day Adventist Church arrive at a better understanding of skills to enhance and maintain marital satisfaction.

**Voluntary Participation:** I understand that my involvement in this survey is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any pressure, embarrassment, or negative impact on me. I also understand that participation is confidential and that neither the researcher nor any assistants will be able to identify my responses to me.

**Contact Information:** In the event that I have any questions or concerns with regard to my participation in this research project, I understand that I may contact either the researcher, Mark L. Braithwaite linc2177@yahoo.com Tel. (268) 785-6075, or his advisor, Dr. Willie Oliver, oliverw@gc.adventist.org Tel: (301) 680-6175. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

_______________________ ___________________ ____________
Subject's Signature    Printed Name   Date

_______________________ ___________________          ____________
Other Signature       Printed Name   Date
(if appropriate)

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature."

Signature of Investigator_____________________________     Date_____________
## APPENDIX D

### ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale

**David H. Olson, Ph.D.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.

___ 1. I am happy with how we make decisions and resolve conflict.

___ 2. I am unhappy with our communication and feel my partner does not understand me.

___ 3. I am happy with how we share our responsibilities in our household.

___ 4. I am unhappy with some of my partner’s personality characteristics or personal habits.

___ 5. I am happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.

___ 6. I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions.

___ 7. I am pleased with how we express affection and relate sexually.

___ 8. I am unhappy with the way we (will) each handle our responsibilities as parents.

___ 9. I am happy with our relationship with my parents, in-laws, and my partner’s friends.

___ 10. I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs and values.

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APPENDIX E

POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS

SLIDE 1

Mark L. Braithwaite, MA, FLE, DMin (Candidate)

Seminar 1

SLIDE 4

Dedication + CONSTRAINT =

- These two forms of commitment, dedication and constraint, serve the purpose of carrying the couple through the challenges of the marital experience. They are both dedicated and constrained to remain together.

SLIDE 2

Commitment brings Intimacy

COMMITMENT

SLIDE 5

What motivates constraint?

INTERNAL FACTORS

MORAL CONSTRAINTS
- It is generally felt by many that there is a certain immorality with respect to divorce.

META-COMMITMENT
- This is a strong belief that a person should finish what they have started.

CONCERN FOR OTHERS
- Many people simply stay married because they believe the pain of separation would be too great for the other spouse or for the children involved.

SLIDE 3

COMMITMENT

DEDICATION COMMITMENT
- Characterized by strong devotion by the two individuals to maintain and enhance the quality of the relationship so that both parties experience the greatest amount of happiness possible.

CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT
- People seem only to stay together, in an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage for reasons such as – money, family pressure, pressure from their religious community, children and a host of other reasons.

SLIDE 6

What motivates constraint?

(Why do people stay together?)

EXTERNAL FACTORS

PRAGMATIC (PRACTICAL) CONSTRAINTS
- Refers to the perception of what would be gained or lost if the relationship were to be terminated.
  - Social pressure - If the relationship were to be terminated things such as property and other physical possessions might be lost.
  - Third parties - may exert significant amounts of indirect pressure on a couple which is a consideration for their decision to stay together.
SLIDE 7

**What motivates constraint?**  
(Why do people stay together?)

**EXTERNAL FACTORS**

**PRAGMATIC (PRACTICAL) CONSTRAINTS Cont.**

- Termination procedures also produces the constraining effect. The thought of the immediate realities such as legal issues, custody issues, locating a new residence.
- The Quality of Alternatives - The extent to which the couple would be intimidated regarding all of the changes that would occur if the relationship were to be ended: friends, job, place of abode and such like.

SLIDE 10

**Dedication reduces Alternative monitoring**

- Alternative monitoring raises the idea that a person may keep an eye open for, or monitor for alternative partners. If one partner is attracted to other possible partners then it is less probable that they will be dedicated to their present spouse. Studies show that people who are highly dedicated to their partners, mentally, tend to devalue attractive potential partners.

SLIDE 8

**Commitment to personal dedication**

1 Corinthians 13

1. Love in action desires love for the long term. This means that persons are desirous of having the relationship last.

2. The priority of the relationship refers to the value given to the relationship in comparison to everything else.

SLIDE 11

**Important things to consider about dedication**

- The combination of dedication and constraint can come together to create an environment of permanence for a couple which is very helpful for the establishment of a long term committed relationship. (Hebrews 13:5)
- In relationships where the long term view is not present couples begin to focus on immediate gratification – What they can get out of the relationship. This approach can be very destructive and self-seeking.

SLIDE 9

**Commitment to personal dedication**

1 Corinthians 13

3. We-ness refers to how much each individual considers the relationship as a team effort rather than two individuals who are concerned more about what is best for them personally.

4. Satisfaction with sacrifice addresses the view that people feel fulfilled and happy when they do things for the sole benefit of their partner.

SLIDE 12

**Important things to consider about dedication**

- Investing in your marriage is a key element for its future success. The truth is that no marriage is a road of unending happiness and joy. Marriages have very difficult times also.

- When couples look at marriage only with a short term perspective in mind then they only view the benefits on a day-to-day basis.
Investing for the long haul

I. Making the time to invest in your marriage should be a priority.
II. Never take your spouse for granted.
III. Do not practice score-keeping.

IV. The value of trust and commitment cannot be underestimated
V. Refuse to use careless sentiments.

SLIDE 14

A word about selfishness

- 1 Corinthians 13 says that “Love is not self-seeking.” True love allows human beings in relationship to give themselves to one another in love. In today’s self-oriented consumer driven society selfishness is the order of the day. Selfishness generally brings unhappiness and bitterness to those who practice its principles. The difficulty with selfishness in a consumer driven society is that in marriage spouses are tempted to treat each other in a disposable way as with consumer products. Godly love on the other hand works in opposition to the practice of using others selfishly for our own good.

SLIDE 15

How can you keep commitment alive and thriving

- Remember that you have most control over your own behavior and not the behavior of your spouse. Research suggests that in most relationships, positive behavior is eventually reciprocated. With this information the suggestion is that in order to encourage your spouse to be more positive it is important to be positive yourself.

SLIDE 16

FORM INTO GROUPS

SLIDE 17

Focus group questions
30 minutes

1. How has the presentation on commitment affected your views on this subject?
2. What challenges do you foresee when attempting to keep a long term view of marriage in mind if there are problems in the relationship?
Mark L. Braithwaite, MA, FLE, DMin (Candidate)

SEMINAR 2

FOUR PRACTICES THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED
NEGATIVE PRACTICES WHICH PLACE MARRIAGES AT SIGNIFICANT RISK

SLIDE 2

PATTERN THAT DESTROY ONENESS
(Handling Expectations)

SLIDE 5

1. ESCALATION
Escalation takes place when partners respond back and forth in a negative way to each other, as the conversation continues the verbal hostility increases.

SLIDE 3

PATTERNS THAT DESTROY ONENESS

• Stanley et al say that developing productive ways to address differences is the most positive thing that can be done to protect the possibilities for a successful marriage (1998).

SLIDE 6

2. INVALIDATION
Invalidation is a practice where one partner almost imperceptibly or indirectly puts down the feelings, thoughts or character of their spouse.
3. NEGATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Negative interpretations generally take place when one party believes that the intentions of the other are negative and conversations are interpreted with a negative slant. When this is the case an environment of discouragement pervades.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE.

- Communication has significant influence on conflict management styles, interpersonal skill in romantic relationships, cognitive flexibility (ability to adjust thinking), and resiliency behaviors (ability to cope with stress and adversity).

4. WITHDRAWAL & AVOIDANCE

Withdrawal refers to the practice of a person showing little or no desire to be involved in important discussions. One spouse may choose to leave the room entirely while another may “shut down” or “turn off” during the discussion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

James 1:19
EVERYONE SHOULD BE QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK, AND SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY.

4. WITHDRAWAL & AVOIDANCE

One spouse may attempt to avoid the discussion altogether by not making themselves available.

FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

- INATTENTION
- Inattention has to do with whether or not you have the other person’s full attention. Affecting attention are both internal and external factors. The key is to make sure that each has the other’s attention when it is most important. Try not to make the assumption that your partner is ready to listen simply because you are ready to talk.
SLIDE 13

FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

- Emotional States
  Emotional states or moods can create challenges when attempting to communicate. Studies suggest that conversations go better when people are in a good mood than when in a bad one. When a person is in a bad mood it is more likely that things will be perceived negatively.

SLIDE 16

FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

- Self-Protection
  This refers to the fear that we all face of being rejected. When considering self-protection we do not share our true sentiments for fear of being rejected.

SLIDE 14

FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

- Beliefs & Expectations
  Research suggests that people tend to see what they expect in others. We generally tend to pull from others the behavior that we expect from them. This practice tends to color what we see and distort communication.

SLIDE 17

SPEAKER-LISTENER TECHNIQUE

- “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment” (1 John 4:18).

- Satisfying marital relationships often develop in an environment where both persons are able to comfortably share their beliefs, preferences and concerns without fear of revenge.

SLIDE 15

FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

- Differences in Style
  Persons possess different styles while communicating. One person may be soft spoken while the other may be loud and forceful. These styles of communicating are determined by things such as culture, gender, personality, and the way a person was raised. Being more aware of the differing styles of communication can assist in safeguarding against misunderstandings.

SLIDE 18

SPEAKER-LISTENER TECHNIQUE

- In order to be able to deal with issues constructively it is necessary to utilize an agreed upon set of rules to help with challenging conversations. Stanley et al recommend the speaker-listener technique.
- The biblical foundation for this technique is the following, “Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19,20)
SLIDE 19

**SPEAKER-LISTENER TECHNIQUE RULES**

**Rules for Both Spouses**
1. The Speaker has the floor.
2. Share the floor.
3. No problem solving.

**Rules for the speaker**
1. Speak for yourself.
2. Talk in small chunks.
3. Stop and let the listener paraphrase.

SLIDE 20

**SPEAKER-LISTENER TECHNIQUE RULES**

**Rules for the Listener**
1. Paraphrase what you hear.
2. Don’t Rebut. Focus on the Speaker’s message.

**VIEW VIDEO**

SLIDE 21

**FORM INTO GROUPS**

SLIDE 22

**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

• What are some of your thoughts regarding the pattern of escalation that can destroy oneness?

• How effective do you think that the Speaker-Listener technique can be in assisting in developing oneness in marriage and why?
Presentation 3
Mark L. Braithwaite MA, FLE, DMIN
(Candidate)

SLIDE 2
Addressing Expectations

PROBLEM SOLVING

SLIDE 3
Problem Solving
Solving problems is often challenging because couples may not take the time to understand the complexity of the situation.

Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.”

SLIDE 4
1. All couples have problems.

Three foundational points

- Research suggests that during the first year of marriage, problems with communication and sex are among the first to be reported.

SLIDE 5
2. It is best to handle problems as a team.

Three foundational points

- With teamwork the couple will develop a sense that they are working together against the problem as opposed to working against each other.

SLIDE 6
3. Rushed solutions are poor solutions.

Three foundational points

- Hasty solutions can prove more detrimental and can increase feelings of frustration.
- Proverbs 19:2 says, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.”
SLIDE 7

STEPS TO HANDLING CONFLICT

SLIDE 10

3 foundational points
GROUND RULES FOR PROTECTING YOUR MARRIAGE FROM CONFLICT

SLIDE 8

Steps to Handling Conflict

- Problem discussion
- Prayer
- Problem solution
  - Agenda setting
  - Brainstorming
  - Agreement
  - Compromise
- Follow up

- Some problems are challenging and the solution arrived at does not bring satisfaction to either party.

SLIDE 11

Ground Rules for Protecting your Marriage from Conflict

- Anticipate problems and stay in control.
- Take Responsibility for yourself.
- Take control of your issues.

SLIDE 9

Steps to Handling Conflict

- Sometimes living graciously in the absence of a mutually satisfying solution is a marriage saving option and can give the couple the opportunity to see the best days of their marriage ahead.

- Paul says in Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

SLIDE 12

Six Ground Rules

GROUND RULE #1
When conflict begins to escalate, we will call a Time-out, and either try talking again, using the Speaker-Listener Technique, or agree to talk later at a specified time about the issue, using the Speaker-Listener Technique.
SLIDE 13

**Six Ground Rules**

**GROUND RULE #2**
When we are having trouble communicating, we will engage the Speaker-Listener Technique. The goal here is to make sure that an environment for safe and effective communication is set up.

SLIDE 16

**Six Ground Rules**

**GROUND RULE #5**
We will have weekly couple meetings. This is a very important rule and its aim is to keep matters current. One of the greatest challenges to a couple's happiness is the practice of allowing issues and problems to mushroom.

SLIDE 14

**Six Ground Rules**

**GROUND RULE #3**
When discussing an important issue, we will completely separate the problem discussion from the problem solution. When a conflict arises in a marriage, especially in the early years of marriage, there is a rush to find a solution because conflicts are uncomfortable.

SLIDE 17

**Six Ground Rules**

**GROUND RULE #5**
We will have weekly couple meetings. This is a very important rule and its aim is to keep matters current. One of the greatest challenges to a couple's happiness is the practice of allowing issues and problems to mushroom.

SLIDE 15

**Six Ground Rules**

**GROUND RULE #4**
We can bring up an issue at any time, but the listener can say "This is not a good time." If the listener does not want to talk at that time, he or she takes responsibility for setting up a time to talk in the near future (usually within twenty-four to forty-eight hours).

SLIDE 18

**FORM INTO GROUPS**
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

• It is suggested that having a structure when handling conflict can assist in protecting your marriage from conflict. What do you think about this?
• Some people say that presentations on marital enrichment have the potential to improve marital satisfaction. How do you feel about that statement?
APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT’S WORKSHEETS

Commitment
August 16, 2013
Session 1

Dedication & Constraint Commitment

According to the researches it is believed that commitment in marital relationships comes in two forms. One is a commitment characterized by strong devotion by the two individuals to maintain and enhance the quality of the relationship so that both parties experience the greatest amount of happiness possible. This can be considered as dedication commitment. Opposite to this type of commitment is a form of commitment which is recognized by negative energy. It can be identified as constraint commitment. This form seems to inhibit happiness. Here people seem only to stay together, in an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage for reasons such as – money, family pressure, pressure from their religious community, children and a host of other reasons. These two forms of commitment, ____________ and ____________, serve the purpose of carrying the couple through the challenges of the marital experience. They are both dedicated and constrained to remain together.

What Motivates Constraint? Internal Factors

MORAL CONSTRAINTS: It is generally felt by many that there is a certain ______________ with respect to ______________.

META-COMMITMENT: This is a strong belief that a person should ____________ what they have ________________.

CONCERN FOR OTHERS: Many people simply stay ____________ because they believe the ____________ of separation would be too great for the other spouse.

"People only stay together... for reasons such as – money, family pressure, pressure from their religious community, children & a host of other reasons.”

PRESENTED
Mark L. Braithwaite

THINGS THAT WE WILL COVER

- Dedication Commitment
- Constraint Commitment
- What Motivates Constraint
- Important Things to Consider about Dedication
- Investing for the Long Haul

116
What Motivates Constraint? External Factors

SOCIAL PRESSURE: If the relationship were to be ____________
Things such as ____________ and other ____________
____________ might be lost.

THIRD PARTIES: May exert significant amounts of ____________
_____________ on a couple which is a consideration for the
decision to _______ ____________.

TERMINATION PROCEDURES: also produces the constraining
effect. The thought of the immediate realities such as ________
____________, ________________ ________________, and
locating a new ________________.

THE QUALITY OF ALTERNATIVES: The extent to which the couple
would be intimidated regarding all of the changes that would
occur if the ____________ were to be ended: _______,
_________, place of abode.

Commitment to Personal Dedication

- Love in action desires love for the long term.

- The priority of the relationship refers to the value given to
  the relationship in comparison to everything else.

- We-ness refers to how much each individual considers the
  relationship as a team effort rather than two individuals
  who are concerned more about what is best for them
  personally.

- Satisfaction with sacrifice addresses the view that people
  feel fulfilled and happy when they do things for the sole
  benefit of their partner.
Important things to Consider about Dedication

✓ The combination of ___________ and __________________ can come together to create an environment of ____________ for a couple which is very helpful for the establishment of a long term committed relationship.

✓ In relationships where the ____________ view is not present couples begin to focus on ____________ — What they can get out of the relationship. This approach can be very destructive and self-seeking.

✓ ____________ in your marriage is a key element for its future success. The truth is that no marriage is a road of unending happiness and joy. Marriages have very difficult times also.

✓ When couples look at marriage only with a ____________ perspective in mind then they only view the benefits on a day-to-day basis.

Investing for the Long-Haul

I. Making the time to ____________ in your marriage should be a ____________.

II. Never take your spouse for ____________.

III. DO NOT practice ____________ - keeping.

IV. The value of ____________ and commitment cannot be underestimated.

V. ____________ to use careless sentiments.

“Refuse to use careless sentiments.”
A Word about Selfishness

1 Corinthians 13 says that “Love is not self-seeking.” True love allows human beings in relationship to give themselves to one another in love. In today’s self-oriented consumer driven society selfishness is the order of the day. Selfishness generally brings unhappiness and bitterness to those who practice its principles. The difficulty with selfishness in a consumer driven society is that in marriage spouses are tempted to treat each other in a disposable way as with consumer products. Godly love on the other hand works in opposition to the practice of using others selfishly for our own good.

How you can keep Commitment Alive and Thriving

Remember that you have most control over your own behavior and not the behavior of your spouse. Research suggests that in most relationships, positive behavior is eventually reciprocated. With this information the suggestion is that in order to encourage your spouse to be more positive it is important to be positive yourself.

THE END!

THANKS FOR COMING

TOMORROWS SESSION BEGINS AT 5PM

SEE YOU THERE!
PATTERNS THAT DESTROY ONENESS

ESCALATION
Escalation takes place when partners respond back and forth in a __________ way to each other, as the conversation continues the verbal hostility __________.

INVALIDATION
Invalidation is a practice where one partner almost imperceptibly or indirectly puts down the __________, thoughts or character of their spouse.

NEGATIVE INTERPRETATIONS
Negative interpretations generally take place when one party believes that the ______________ of the other are negative and conversations are interpreted with that negative slant. When this is the case an environment of discouragement pervades.

Things that we will Cover
- Negative Practices which Place Marriages at Significant Risk.
- The Importance of Communication within the Family Structure.
- Five Types of Filters that can affect A Couple’s ability to Experience Clear Communication.
- Speaker-Listener Technique.
Withdrawal & Avoidance

Withdrawal refers to the practice of a person showing little or no desire to be involved in __________ discussions. One spouse may choose to leave the room entirely while another may “__________” or “__________” during the discussion.

Withdrawal & Avoidance

One spouse may attempt to __________ the discussion all together by not making themselves __________.

Escalation takes place when partners respond back and forth in a negative way to each other, as the conversation continues the verbal hostility increases.

The Importance of Communication within the Family Structure.

Communication has significant influence on conflict management styles, interpersonal skill in romantic relationships, cognitive flexibility (ability to adjust thinking), and resiliency behaviors (ability to cope with stress and adversity).

Five Types of Filters that can affect a couple’s ability to experience clear communication

Inattention

Inattention has to do with whether or not you have the other person’s __________. There are both internal and external factors that affect attention. The key is to make sure that each has the others attention when it is most important.

Emotional States

Emotional states or moods can create challenges when attempting to communicate. Studies suggest that conversations go better when people are in a __________ mood than when in a bad one.

Beliefs & Expectations

Research suggests that people tend to ________ what they expect in others. We generally tend to pull from others the ____________ that we expect from them.
FIVE TYPES OF FILTERS THAT CAN AFFECT A COUPLE’S ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Differences in style
Persons possess __________ styles while communicating. One person may be soft spoken while the other may be loud and forceful. These styles of communicating are determined by things such as culture, gender, personality, and the way a person was raised.

Self-protection
This refers to the fear that we all face of being ___________. When considering self-protection we do not share our true sentiments for fear of being rejected.

James 1:19

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”
1 John 4:18
“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.”

Rules for Both Spouses
1. The Speaker has the floor.
2. Share the floor.
3. No problem solving

Rules for the Speaker
1. Speak for yourself.
2. Talk in small chunks.
3. Stop and let the listener paraphrase

Rules for the Listener
1. Paraphrase what you hear.
2. Don’t rebut. Focus on the Speaker’s message.

THE END!

THANKS FOR COMING
TOMORROWS SESSION BEGINS AT 10AM
SEE YOU THERE!
Problem Solving

Solving problems is often challenging because couples may not take the time to understand the complexity of the situation.

THREE FOUNDATION POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. All couples have problems:
   Research suggests that during the first year of marriage, problems with ________ and ________ are among the first to be reported.

2. It is best to handle problems as a team:
   With ________, the couple will develop a sense that they are working together against the ________ as opposed to working against each other.

3. Rushed solutions are poor solutions:
   Hasty solutions prove more ________ and can increase feelings of ________.

   “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, not to be hasty and miss the way.”
   Proverbs 19:2

He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.”
   Proverbs 18:13
**Steps to Handling Conflict**

1. Problem discussion
2. Prayer
3. Problemsolution
   a. Agenda setting
   b. Brainstorming
   c. Agreement & compromise
   d. Followup

Some problems are challenging and the solution arrived at does not bring satisfaction to either party.

Sometimes living gracefully in the absence of a mutually satisfying solution is a marriage saving option and can give the couple the opportunity to see the best days of their marriage ahead.

**Ground Rules for Protecting your Marriage from Conflict.**

**Three Foundation Points**

- ___________ problems and stay in control.

- Take ___________ for yourself.

- Take ___________ of your issues.
SIX GROUND RULES

GROUND RULE #1
When conflict begins to __________, we will call a Time-out and either try talking again, using the Speaker-Listener Technique, or agree to talk later at a specified time about the issue, using the Speaker-Listener Technique.

GROUND RULE #2
When we are having trouble communicating, we will engage the Speaker-Listener Technique. The goal here is to make sure that an environment for __________ and effective communication is set up.

GROUND RULE #3
When discussing an important issue, we will __________ __________ the problem discussion from the problem solution. When a conflict arises in a marriage, especially in the early years of marriage, there is a rush to find a solution because conflicts are __________.
SIX GROUND RULES

GROUND RULE #4
We can bring up an issue at any time, but the listener can say “This is not a good time.” If the listener does not want to talk at that time, he or she takes ___________ for ___________ up a time to talk in the near future (usually within twenty-four to forty-eight hours).

GROUND RULE #5
We will have a ___________ couple meeting. This is a very important rule and its aim is to keep matters ___________. One of the greatest challenges to a couple’s happiness is the practice of allowing issues and problems to ___________.

GROUND RULE #6
We will make time for the great things of marriage – fun, friendship, sensuality, and spiritual connection. We will ___________ to ___________ these times from conflict and the need to deal with issues.
Focus group questions

1. How has the presentation on commitment affected your views on this subject?

2. What challenges do you foresee when attempting to keep a long term view of marriage in mind if there are problems in the relationship?

3. What are some of your thoughts regarding the pattern of escalation that can destroy oneness?

4. How effective do you think that the Speaker-Listener technique can be in assisting in developing oneness in marriage and why?

5. It is suggested that having a structure when handling conflict can assist in protecting your marriage from conflict. What do you think about this?

6. Some people say that presentations on marital enrichment have the potential to improve marital satisfaction. How do you feel about that statement?
REFERENCES


Craig, B. (2004). Searching for intimacy in marriage: The role that emotion plays in creating understanding and connectedness in marriage. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.


MARK L. BRAITHWAITE
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EMAIL: mark.braithwaite@slmadventist.org

Personal:

Date of Birth: August 26th 1971
Place of Birth: London, England
Married: December, 1998 to Shereen P.C. D. James

Education:

2010 – Present-Andrews University Doctor of Ministry, Family Ministry Cohort
2003–2007- Inter-American Division Theological Seminary Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology
1993–1997- Caribbean Union College Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theology (Cum Laude) Andrews University Affiliation
1988–1990- Antigua State College Advanced Level Department
1983–1988 Antigua/Barbuda Seventh-day Adventist School

Ordination:

Dec 2002- Ministry Ordained to the S.D.A. Gospel Ministry
### Work Experience:

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td>Senior Pastor, New Bethel SDA Church, Communication and Stewardship Director, South Leeward Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>Senior Pastor- District number two Antigua</td>
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<td>2006-2008</td>
<td>Senior Pastor – District number nine Antigua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2006</td>
<td>Senior Pastor – District number five Antigua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2001</td>
<td>District Pastor – Island of Montserrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2001</td>
<td>Intern Pastor – District number 1 Antigua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Skills:
- Gifted in biblical Preaching
- Premarital Counseling and post-marital education
- Motivational speaker
- Gifted in administration and leadership

### Ministry Experiences, and Memberships:
- Co-host of a popular marital education radio program called Marriage Encounter
- Authorized to administer Prepare/Enrich
- Member of Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals