

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A Theology of Romance for Married Couples**

by

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The traditional Christian understanding of marriage is increasingly abandoned as sexuality continues to proliferate beyond traditional norms. The reactive culture war on the part of evangelicalism has proven to be ineffective at both maintaining the institutional status of marriage as well as increasing an affection for Christian understanding of marriage. Additionally, substantive teaching on a paradigmatic view of Christian marriage is considerably lacking. In regard to marriage, the church is known for what it is against rather than what it is for.

This study was an intervention that measured the changes in knowledge and attitude concerning married romantic love through a series of workshops on a theology of romance for married couples in the Anglican Church in North America. This study had sixteen heterosexual married couples that were surveyed before and after the workshops. A few months after the workshops, three couples participated in a semi-structured interview. The workshops incorporated exegetical teaching on Scripture, systematic theologies of forgiveness, repentance, family systems, the body, and sexuality as well as the cultural narrative concerning romantic love.

The first major finding was that critiquing the cultural narrative of romance helped participants disassociate from those cultural beliefs in favor of the biblical

narrative. The second was that teaching participants to think theologically about marriage increased their affection for Christ as well as for their spouses. The third was that demonstrating an ideal and positive expression of romantic love from the Scriptures, rather than focusing on prohibitions, encouraged and excited participants in their marital relationship.

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by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATURE OF THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

Chapter 1 provides the framework for investigating changes in the knowledge and attitudes of married couples through a series of workshops on a theology of marital romance. This chapter lists the guiding research questions and the key research themes in the literature review.

#### **Personal Introduction**

After only six months, I thought our marriage was over. My wife and I agreed that we did not want to divorce, so we mustered what little motivation we had left to begin marriage counseling. For me, the key factor in my own heart to press on toward reconciliation was the love of Jesus. I read in Romans 5.8 that Jesus loved the church while we were still his enemy. I held this example of sacrificial love in my mind as the motivation and encouragement to make things right in my marriage even when I didn't feel love.

In these early years of ministry, I have encountered couples in similar situations. They were at the tipping point in their marriage where they could decide to reconcile or to divorce. Often, they chose to part ways citing that they no longer felt love and had no hope for restoration.

I do not consider myself in any way shape or form to be a marriage expert, nor am I claiming that my own marriage is perfect. However, I believe in the sacrificial love of Jesus as he gave up his life so that sinners could have life in him. I also believe that the

romance between a husband and wife is fueled by the sacrificial love that is only found in the gospel.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the mainstream culture of the United States, marriage continues to become less relevant as an institution. Additionally, sexuality continues to proliferate beyond traditional values and norms, and romantic love is celebrated in all forms outside of Biblical norms. The response from the church is largely reactive, and, as a result, the church is known for what it is against rather than for. It is reactive insofar as the caricatures of Christians in the media portray Christians as homophobic, prudish, and, with regards to the divorce rate, hypocritical.

Additionally, teaching from within the church on Christian marriage is considerably lacking. For example, within the lectionary of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), there are three possible Sundays in year B for a passage concerning marriage to be prescribed. This of course assumes that the preacher chooses the one of four passages prescribed for those three Sundays in the three-year rotation that deals with marriage. Additionally, the ACNA Catechism does contain a few questions pertaining to marriage in its coverage of the seventh commandment. One question makes it explicit that, “human marriage is meant to reflect the faithful love that unites Christ to his church (ACNA Catechism 120).” The inclusion of this point is certainly something to celebrate. However, most of the questions are concerned with listing prohibited sexual practices over and against a positive expression of Christian marriage. This may be an unfair observation given that the seventh commandment is listed in the negative, although it

does reinforce the notion that the church is known for what it is against rather than what is it for.

Thus, the problem defined is that there is a lack of positive and proactive teaching on Christian marriage from the church that roots the motivation and enablement of marital love in the person and work of Jesus.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the research was to evaluate changes in the attitude and knowledge of married romantic love through a series of workshops on a theology of marital romance among married couples in the Anglican Church of North America.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research Question #1**

What were the participants' knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love before the small group experience?

#### **Research Question #2**

What were the participants' knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love after the small group experience?

#### **Research Question #3**

Which aspects of the small group experience did participants identify as most significant?

### **Rationale for the Project**

First, the family is the foundational unit of society with the marital relationship at its core. The health and stability of the marriage relationship provides the best conditions for the overall health of each spouse (Keller and Keller 25–26). Additionally, a healthy

marriage relationship provides the best environment for raising children to be healthy and functional adults (W. Bradford Wilcox 113).

Secondly, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 2, romantic messages absolutely saturate the entertainment industry in virtually all media. Moreover, these romantic messages are more often than not in direct contrast to the message of Scripture.

Additionally, these messages are predominately aimed at children so by the time they reach marrying age, the cultural narrative concerning romantic love is already embedded within their thinking.

Most importantly, the teaching of Christian marriage is ultimately the depiction of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 2, Scripture provides the marital relationship as one of the primary metaphors for God's relationship to his people. A theological understanding of marriage, therefore, provides a window into the heart of this relationship. In other words, to understand Christian marriage is to understand the heart of Jesus.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In this study, one term or phrase requires specific definition.

#### **Married Romantic Love**

*Married Romantic Love*, or *romance*, pertains to the emotive, physical, and sexual components of the marital relationship between husband and wife that are distinctive to the marital relationship according to God's design.

### **Delimitations**

This study was very generalized given the topic. However, there were certain categories of persons that were excluded from the study. Since this study concerned



married couples, singles were consequently excluded from this research. Additionally, this study was only concerned with heterosexual relationships. The only limitation pertaining to age is that participants were required to be at least eighteen years of age.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

This research was interdisciplinary that required material from various fields. The first field of research that I drew from was biblical and theological. I consulted with a wide array of commentaries throughout the Bible, but one particular scholar was repeatedly consulted among the Old Testament. Tremper Longman has written multiple commentaries on numerous Old Testament books including Song of Songs and Genesis. Moreover, Longman has collaborated with counseling expert Dan Allender on multiple books.

The second field of research that I drew from included counseling literature. Notable authors from this field include Peter Scazzero, James Sells with Mark Yarhouse, and Sue Johnson.

The third field of research that I drew from included cultural and sociological analysis. Kevin Vanhoozer's work on interpreting cultural texts was particularly helpful to this research as it provided a foundation for understanding how values are transmitted through narratives. Archibald Hart's studies on male and female sexuality, although dated, still provided valuable insight. Mark Regnerus provides contemporary research into relationships and sexuality. Lastly, Susan Sprecher and Sandra Metts provide research on universally held romantic beliefs. Their research is widely reference and applied.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Type of Research**

This project was an intervention that utilized mixed-method research. The first two methods included a questionnaire that was administered prior to the intervention and an identical questionnaire after the intervention. This questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The third method included a semi-structured interview to provide qualitative data. The semi-structured interview was administered two months after the workshops.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study totaled thirty-two people. All participants were married totaling sixteen couples, with sixteen men and sixteen women. The couples themselves varied in life stages.

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were used in this research:

1. The pre-intervention questionnaire on married romantic love as designed by the researcher in survey format collected data on participants' knowledge and attitudes toward married romantic love.

2. The post-intervention questionnaire on married romantic love as designed by the researcher in survey format collected data that allowed comparison to the participants' pre-intervention questionnaire scores.

3. The semi-structured interview as designed by the researcher allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns from the participants' experience of the program.

**Data Collection**

The pre-intervention questionnaire was administered through Survey Monkey one week prior to the first workshop. Upon completion of the study, the post-intervention questionnaire was administered through Survey Monkey. Participants were allotted one week after the study to complete the post-intervention questionnaire. Additionally, participants were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis for the quantitative responses for both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire was processed by Survey Monkey. Data was then arranged in figures as seen in Chapter 3. Figures were created to show the data prior to the intervention, and then figures were created with both sets of data to observe changes. Qualitative responses that illumine quantitative responses are included.

The semi-structured interview was transcribed by the research assistant in order to allow document analysis to decipher relevant and reoccurring themes.

**Generalizability**

This study has the ability to be highly generalized as it is rooted in theology and not the particularities of a specific people group. The content of the study consists of Scripture, historic systematic theology, and general cultural research relating to the United States. Therefore, applicability certainly fits within this umbrella. If this study was to be duplicated in an African or Asian context, appropriate cultural research would need to be done to construct the particular narrative concerning romance.

### **Project Overview**

This project outlines a series of workshops on a theology of marital romance for married couples. Chapter Two discusses the Biblical foundations of marriage as well as the research themes of spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness. Chapter Three outlines the methods that I used to investigate the research questions. Chapter Four analyzes the findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data. Chapter Five outlines the major findings with implications for future study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

The goal of this project was to evaluate the changes in the attitude and knowledge of married romantic love through a series of workshops on a theology of romance. Given the breadth of literature written on topics such as the atonement, marriage, and the Song of Songs, selectivity is essential. This chapter begins with an overview of marriage in the Bible followed by a brief analysis of Union with Christ, an examination of emotional oneness, and an examination of physical oneness. This chapter concludes with research that examines the attitude and knowledge of marriage and romance in the study population.

#### Biblical Foundations

##### Marriage in Genesis

Genesis records that marriage is the first social interaction to occur between humans in all of human history where God presides over the joining of Adam and Eve in covenant relationship (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* 179–80). This first marriage is a joining of two equal partners with complimentary genders (Waltke and Fredricks 88). As God sends before Adam the various creatures of the field, Adam does not find a suitable helper for himself (Gen. 2.19-20). Eve proves to be the suitable helper for Adam made evident in Adam's poem (Gen. 2.23). Longman contends that "helper" does not bring with it connotations of inferiority but instead emphasizes equality (Longman, *Genesis* 50). Hamilton provides the insight that of the forty-five instances in which the word "helper" was used in Genesis, all but three of these instances are used to articulate help

from a stronger party (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* 176). In this instance, it is Eve that rescues Adam from his solitude. Waltke proposes the word “helper” suggests that the man has governmental priority although both the man and the woman are mutually dependent on each other (Waltke and Fredricks 88). Thus, the first social interaction in human history was characterized as a perfect harmony between husband and wife in the very presence of God.

The author of Genesis provides for us a summary analysis of the quality of this first marriage by writing, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2.25 ESV). This is particularly striking considering the observation that, with the exception of this passage, nakedness is always connected with humiliation and shame (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* 181). With the absence of sin came perfect harmony, openness, and trust. Moreover, Adam’s poetic outburst in celebration of his wife indicates the presence of passionate love (Longman, *Genesis* 50–51). Additionally, the editorial comment from the author of Genesis in 2.24 communicates that this one flesh union transcends every other relationship (Kaye 48). In the creation account, the ideal for marriage is provided. It is a relationship of the utmost trust, acceptance, loyalty, and love.

However, this perfection was lost once sin entered the world. Immediately following the disobedience of Adam and Eve comes the knowledge that they were naked and subsequent shame at their nakedness (Gen. 3.7). The perfect relationship that they once shared was shattered as the curse of sin frustrates their marriage. As God pronounces the curse after their disobedience, a description is given for how marriage shall be in the cursed world. Whereas the marriage relationship was once characterized

with openness and trust, it is now characterized with shame and struggle. Adam and Eve hide their nakedness from one another, and they struggle against one another for power.

God pronounces that the woman's desire shall be for her husband, and he shall rule over her (Gen. 2.15). The description of the woman's desire in this passage is vague. However, if paired with the unambiguous context of the use of this phrase in Genesis 4.7, the meaning emerges that it is the woman's desire to dominate her husband (Waltke and Fredricks 94). This translation is strengthened when coupled with the parallel curse pronouncement that the husband will be a tyrant over his wife (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* 201–02). The coupling of man and woman in marriage continues to be normative for all humanity; however, it is marred by the curse of sin.

### **Marriage in the Prophets**

Marriage in the Prophets is largely in the metaphorical context of God's covenant relationship with Israel. The prophet Ezekiel utilizes the marriage metaphor in describing God as a gracious and loving husband (Ezek. 16.8-15). Israel on the other hand is described numerous times as whoring against God, their faithful husband (Ezek. 16.16-29). As if these remarks were not explicit enough, Israel is further condemned as being worse than a whore, as Israel did not seek payment for their devotions but instead gave freely their devotion to other gods (Ezek. 16.30-34). However, in the same breath of judgment God promises to atone for the wickedness of Israel and establish and everlasting covenant with his faithless wife (Ezek. 16.59-63).

This metaphor of marriage between God and Israel is most explicitly stated through the prophet Hosea. God's instruction to Hosea to take a prostitute for a wife is an enacted parable to demonstrate the status of the covenant relationship between God and

Israel (Hos. 1.2). The love imagery that God uses in reference to the people of Israel is meant to highlight the special relationship and the yearning that God has for his people (Bullock 118). The stark language of the whoring of Israel juxtaposed with the love of God for his people is certainly meant to shock the readers into understanding the gravity of Israel's sin. Hosea, taking the prostitute Gomer as his wife and subsequently having children with her, is designed to personalize the jealousy of God for Israel. As the reader considers what it would be like to be married to an unfaithful spouse, the reader is given a glimpse at God's perspective to watch Israel participate in the worship of the Baal's (Hos. 2.13). As the drama unfolds, God, as the frustrated spouse,<sup>7</sup> accuses and threatens to punish Israel for her unfaithfulness. However, the drama concludes with God revealing his loving nature by deciding to renew the covenant and continue with Israel as his spouse (Salinas 64).

Taking back faithless Israel is not without its risks especially within the context of an honor and shame society. Moon points out that since God chooses to retain faithless Israel as his spouse, because of the shameful way in which Israel has behaved, God is in turn taking on the shame of Israel (349). God goes far beyond the base requirements of the Old Testament Law about marital infidelity (Deut. 22.22). Instead, God demonstrates unconditional love and acceptance for his unfaithful spouse Israel and owns her shame. A theme that also is present in the prophet Isaiah's writings concerning the New Covenant is that God will take away the shame of his spouse Israel (Isa. 54.4)

The didactic force for marriage is both multi-faceted and ironic in Hosea. The irony arises as the worship of Baal necessarily required the act of prostitution (Beasley 129). As the Israelite went to worship Baal through sexual union with a temple prostitute,



not only is the Israelite committing adultery with his own spouse but also spiritual adultery against God. Thus, not only does the book of Hosea reinforce covenant fidelity and guarding against adultery as marital ideals, it does so by placing God as the paradigmatic spouse to be emulated.

### **Marriage in the Wisdom Literature**

The subject of marriage in Proverbs is dispersed throughout the book and is addressed by describing the interconnectedness of husband and wife, the warning against adultery, and the enjoyment of love between spouses. For example, Proverbs 12.4 states, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.” This verse stands on the established truth from Genesis that the wife is the helper of the husband, and she exercises tremendous power over her husband depending on the quality of her help.

Additionally, Proverbs contains sharp warnings against adultery. In chapter five, the teacher speaks as a father to a son affirming how easily it is to enter into the presence of a seductive woman due to the smoothness of her words and lips (Prov. 5.3). However, the teacher abruptly cuts to the chase and diagnoses the sultry call of the adulteress as leading to death (Prov. 5.1-5). Whereas the punishment for being caught in adultery was death, the Law refers to adultery with as being with another man’s wife (Deut. 22.22). In this context of adultery with a prostitute, it is God who delivers the judgment (Waltke 310). The teacher goes on in chapter six to describe the dangers of adultery alluding to adultery as walking on hot coals expecting not to be scorched (Prov. 6.28). To commit adultery is to destroy one’s life and to live in utter disgrace (Prov. 32-33).

How then does the teacher prescribe the avoidance of adultery? Personal responsibility and discipline are certainly part of the remedy as the teacher makes very clear (Prov. 6.23-24). The teacher warns the listener not to live in regret at the end of his life (Prov. 12). The son is to maintain self-control by refusing to desire the evil woman (Prov. 6.25). However, mere self-control is not the entirety of the message. Waltke notes that the innate biological drive is in conflict with the expectations to marital fidelity resulting in the need to channel those desires in the correct form (311).

This leads the teacher to counsel the listener to “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well” (Prov. 5.15). Waltke explains that the metaphor of drinking water refers to sexually enjoying one’s own spouse (317). On this metaphor Fox writes, “The image suggests cool, limpid refreshment for hot desires, which are slaked by ‘drinking,’ that is, lovemaking” (199). Waltke goes on to say that the admonition from the teacher that the son enjoy this water, “at all times,” means that the sexual union should be frequent and satisfying (322). The provocative language from the teacher says that the son should be “intoxicated” with the love of his wife (Prov. 5.19). Fox writes that it, “...connotes no disapproval here, but perhaps it bears a slightly ‘naughty’ overtone by suggestions of ‘straying’ deliciously dazed in the ecstasies of lovemaking” (322).

The teacher refers to the wife of the listener as, “the wife of your youth” (Prov. 5.18). Waltke notes that this could also be translated, “your youthful wife,” and carries with it an explicitly monogamous message (321). Thus, the expectation is that throughout the life of the marriage, a vibrant sexuality continues between husband and wife. Carder, in his book concerning building an adultery proof marriage, argues that one of the key

elements necessary for the strengthening of a marriage is an adolescent sexuality which he explains as, “chaotic, unplanned, spontaneous... lustful, passionate, and totally caught up in the moment” (83).

The language on the part of the teacher is striking because it is clearly practical advice, it mirrors the explicit imagery of the Song of Songs, and it is not allegorical. Kidner states, “...it is highly important to see sexual delight in marriage as God-given; and history confirms that when marriage is viewed chiefly as a business arrangement, not only is God’s bounty misunderstood, but human passion seeks other outlets” (67). Furthermore, Waltke rightly identifies that the enjoyment of sex is the theme in this passage, not procreation (317). In other words, sexuality between husband and wife is a preventative against adultery and may be enjoyed beyond the procreative function. This is extremely important to the understanding of married romantic love. Not only is marriage a covenant indicative of loyalty, trust, and acceptance, but it also contains passion of a sexual nature.

### **Interpretive Issues in the Song of Songs**

Due to the wide range of interpretive approaches toward the Song of Songs in history, analyzing the issues before the content is a prudent matter. Beginning with authorship, it is widely accepted that the Song was written during the United Monarchy in the Solomonic empire (Garrett et al. 22). Given the content of the Song itself, the author must have had familiarity with wealth and exotic luxuries. This evidence confirms that the Song was written during Solomon’s reign. It is certainly popular to attribute authorship of the Song to Solomon himself, especially considering the attribution to Solomon (Song of Sg. 1.1).

Arguments against Solomon's authorship revolve around the historical record indicating that Solomon had many wives (1 Kings 4.4-6). However, the reality of Solomon's practice of marriage does not detract from his ability to write a paradigm of marriage. The divine blessing of Solomon's wisdom is certainly apparent from the historical record (1 Kings 3.10-12). Longman suggests that reasons to distance from accepting Solomonic authorship include the minimal role that Solomon plays in the song itself and the function of the superscription. Longman posits that the superscription in the Song is similar to the superscription in Proverbs, meaning that in the same way Solomon was not the sole author of Proverbs, he is neither the sole author of the Song of Songs (*Song of Songs* 6-7). Another theory surrounding authorship is that a woman produced the Song. Longman reports that the theory rests on the fact that the Shulamite woman in the song speaks the majority of the verses in the Song (*Song of Songs* 7). Ultimately, the exact authorship is unknown, but the probability is that the author was a poet residing in Solomon's court (Garrett et al. 25).

A second interpretive issue is the matter of whether or not the song should be interpreted as allegory. The allegorical approach is well known in history and is used in the Talmud, by church fathers, in the middle ages, in the reformation, and even in the King James Version headings (Duguid 25-26). Moreover, the allegorical interpretation was the dominant interpretation until the middle of the nineteenth century when the enlightenment shifted ways of thought (Longman, *Song of Songs* 22-23). Longman argues that when thinking shifted from premodern to modern, views of the physical also shifted leading to a more positive view of the material world (*Song of Songs* 36). As the physical world was less and less seen as intrinsically evil, the spiritual world was not

pitted over the physical. Garret echoes this line of thinking by arguing that the allegorical approach is rooted in a neo-platonic worldview that negatively views the material world and especially the body and its appetites (75). Given that the material world, along with the body and sexuality, were created by God and declared by God to be good, any worldview that treats the physical as suspect must be rejected. With the rejection of the negative view of the material world, allegorical interpretations designed to redeem the song from its own content must be rejected.

Another problem with the allegorical approach is that there are no internal cues within the text (Longman, *Song of Songs* 23). The natural and plain reading of the text itself portrays a celebration of human love and sex (Duguid 26–27). In the one instance in Scripture where an allegorical interpretation takes place, it serves an illustrative purpose and in no way, shape, or form removes the plain reading of the original account of Hagar (Gal. 4.24-25). Moreover, this instance of allegory does not correspond to the typical approaches of allegory to the song that have been seen in history (Goppelt 139–40). With no internal cues and no precedent in Scripture for an allegorical interpretation, attributing allegory to the song is hardly appropriate.

A third problem with the allegorical approach is that the interpreter becomes the deciding factor in the meaning of the text. Ancient Israelite interpretation asserted that the woman's breasts that contained the sachet of myrrh represent either Moses and Aaron or the two tablets of the Law (Garrett et al. 74). Contrast this with Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century who attributed the myrrh as Christ and the two breasts as the Old and New Testaments (Duguid 25–26). Given the problems associated with an allegorical interpretation to the song, it should be abandoned in favor of a plain reading.

Garrett argues that the song is a unified work that consists of thirteen poems from a single author intended to be sung (Garrett et al. 26, 57). Duguid observes that the title, occurring in the singular over and against titles such as Proverbs and Psalms, implies a unified composition (53). The unification of the song bears significant impact on the interpretation of the song. If it is indeed a unified composition, then an overarching narrative will be sought after. Longman, on the other hand, argues that the song is a collection of twenty-three love poems without an overarching narrative (*Song of Songs* 43–44). Thus, there is disagreement regarding the composition of the song.

Understanding the song is further complicated when attempts are made to determine the number of characters and their identity. One hypothesis presents that the characters consist of Solomon and the Shulamite woman whereas another presents Solomon, the Shepherd, and the Shulamite woman (Longman, *Song of Songs* 40–41). Deciding on one theory over the other bears drastic consequences in matters of interpretation. If Solomon and the Shulamite woman are determined to be the characters with the Song being the narrative of their young love, then the narrative contradicts with the historical narrative of Solomon's many wives (1 Kings 11.1-3). However, defaulting to the three-person hypothesis complicates the interpretation of the Song. If the characters are assumed to be Solomon, the Shepherd, and the Shulamite, then Solomon appears to be villainous by attempting to woo the Shulamite woman away from the Shepherd. It is unlikely that this is the case given that the Song bears Solomon's name and was presumably written in Solomon's court. However, as Longman observes in chapter 8 verse 11 of the Song, Solomon is mentioned in the Song as one who buys and sells love (*Song of Songs* 41). Thus, internal evidence suggests that the Song is not

concerned with correcting Solomon's behavior. A three character approach made by Provan suggests that the Shulamite woman is already married to Solomon as an unhappy member of the harem and she longs for the true love of the Shepherd (350–51). In this view, the plot of the Song includes the woman's utter devotion to her beloved over and against all the pressures and temptations to tear her away. Garret dismisses Provan's approach by stating that, "it plays games with the language of the text," and that, "it is forced at every point" (79). Garret's assessment is most likely correct as Provan's hypothesis is weak on many points.

Webb provides an interesting solution that reconciles the problem relating to the number of characters. He argues that Solomon is not actually a participant but an ideal figure to whom the Shepherd is compared (93). As the Shulamite woman dreams of her lover, she beholds him as the glorious figure Solomon which would most certainly have been complimentary (96). In a thorough analysis of the use of pronouns, participles, imperatives, and other syntactical elements, Stewart identifies only one masculine lover and the woman, giving support to the two character hypothesis (65). This lends credence to the two-character hypothesis and satisfies the historical dilemma of Solomon's robust love life.

With the difficulties of identifying characters and agreeing upon a cohesive drama, some commentators fall into the position that the Song is an anthology of love poetry. Longman holds to this position and asserts that it moves the commentator to focus on the meaning of the words and metaphors to bring out the emotions of the poetry (*Song of Songs* 44). This position coincides with Garret's approach that the Song is what it appears to be, namely poems about love between a man and woman (90). Duguid offers

the observation that, in Israel's history, there is no evidence that drama existed as an art form thus eliminating the need for us to seek drama in the Song (53). By viewing the Song as a collection of poems, it liberates the reader from the possible obfuscation that an imposed narrative may have on the meaning of the poetry itself.

### **The Message of the Song of Songs**

First, the Song is a celebration of human love, sex, and marriage (Longman, *Song of Songs* 70). As previously discussed, attempts to allegorize and spiritualize the content to diminish the goodness of love in sex as God created are misguided. Rather, it is a love song that affirms human sexual love (Garrett et al. 100–01).

Secondly, the Song provides an idealized picture of married love in a fallen world (Duguid 37). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked with one another until the entrance of sin and shame in the world drove them to cover their nakedness. Longman argues that in the Song there are specific poems that harken back to the innocence of sexuality in the garden (*Song of Songs* 65–66). Not only does the Song provide a depiction of redeemed sexuality, but it also describes a husband and wife relationship that is not dominated by the curse of sin. Longman writes, “There is no power play between them, no domination of one against the other” (*Song of Songs* 66). Along this line of thinking, Garret asserts that the lovers in the Song, as well as their love, are ideal archetypes designed to draw us into an idealized depiction of human love (40).

Thirdly, the Song presents a yearning for something even greater than human romantic love. Longman teaches that the Song ends with an expression of yearning rather than a satisfying climactic union (*Song of Songs* 61). He goes on to argue that the reason for this is that humans are always wanting more out of our relationships than they can



deliver, and this is especially true of marriage. His argument is that the Song ending with an expression of yearning gives a healthy balance of affirming the goodness of romantic love without expecting more than it can deliver (Longman, *Song of Songs* 62). Duguid affirms the concluding longing in the Song and juxtaposes the presentation of love in the Song with stories that emerge from Hollywood. He compares how Hollywood stories tend to emphasize the excitement of the initial stages of the relationship whereas the Song shows some aspects of the ongoing relationship and ultimate the desire for something more (Duguid 54).

### **Marriage in the Gospels**

Matthew 5.27-30. In the Sermon on the mount, Jesus addresses the subject of marriage by confronting common interpretations of the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20.14, Deut. 5.18). Rather than comment on the interpretations of the day, Jesus succinctly condemns lusting after another and places the responsibility on the beholder. Keener explains that whereas many Jewish sources did warn against lust they often emphasized the women’s seductiveness over and against the male responsibility (58).

With regard to the actual event of looking at a woman, Jesus does clarify that the sin occurs if the looking is with lustful intent (Matt. 5.26). Sherlock distinguishes lust from merely noticing that a woman is attractive. Rather, lusting reduces the subject to that of an object for the pleasure of the beholder (209–10). Lewis elaborates on this point that in the lustful gaze, the beholder does not truly desire the person but instead the pleasure that the person may provide (121). Tennent, concludes that the lustful gaze

denies the status of the subject as an image bearer of God and turns the subject into an idol that is worshiped (Tennent *The Body in Art and Media*).

Jesus then goes on to, at least on the surface, prescribe self-mutilation as a preventative to the lustful gaze. Some commentators argue that the movement from the eye to the hand illustrates the movement from the lustful gaze to the act of adultery (Osborne and Arnold 196). However, some argue that the reference to the hand implies the act of masturbation as the climax of the lustful gaze (Deming 130–41). Carson goes so far as to argue that the right hand, “is a euphemism for the male sexual organ” (Gaebelein 151). When Jesus states that it is better to lose a part of the body than the whole body to be thrown into hell, he is referencing a commonly held belief that a person would be resurrected in the form in which one had died before being made whole (Keener 58). The common English translation, “hell,” also translated as, “Gehenna,” implies the final judgment and eternal torment (Osborne and Arnold 197). Thus, the seriousness of the evil that occurs in the heart in the act of the lustful gaze must not be overlooked or understated.

Matthew 5.31-32 and Luke 16.18. On the heels of the prohibition of the lustful gaze, Jesus then provides a brief comment on divorce. In verse 31, Jesus is referencing Deuteronomy 24.1. At the time of Jesus’ sermon, there were two dominant schools of thought. The school of Shammai taught that only sexual immorality and immodesty were valid reasons for divorce in their interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.1 (Osborne and Arnold 200). Conversely, the school of Hillel taught that that any cause was sufficient from poorly cooked food to a more attractive woman (Meier 143). Jesus escalates the requirements to prohibit divorce except on the grounds of adultery. Keener suggests that

when Jesus speaks of making a divorced woman commit adultery through an invalid divorce that Jesus is actually speaking in hyperbole to accentuate this one legitimate condition for the dissolving of the marriage covenant (58). This legitimate condition, namely adultery, breaks the marriage covenant in God's eyes allowing the innocent party to remarry (Osborne and Arnold 200).

Matthew 19, Mark 10. The question presented to Jesus by the Pharisees revolves around the issue of the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.1. As previously discussed, Shammai understood the meaning to be exclusively sexual immorality whereas Hillel broadened the meaning to be any reason (Osborne and Arnold 703). Rather than engaging in the social controversy of the day, Jesus responds by quoting Genesis 2.24. Jesus' use of the quoted phrase establishes that the creational intent for marriage is its permanence, and divorce is a result of sin in the world (Osborne and Arnold 704). Moreover, in Jesus' response to the Pharisees, he escalates the ownership of the marriage to God himself (Edwards 303). The Pharisaical misappropriation placed the husband as the one in charge, although Jesus' statement, "what therefore God has joined together, let man not separate," rightly establishes God as the authority over the marital covenant (Mark 10.4, Matt. 19.6). The point is that even though divorce is permitted in the Law, it is not part of God's will (Osborne and Arnold 704).

The pharisees then press Jesus as to why Moses commanded that the husband give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. However, by going back to the creation principle, Jesus is arguing that Moses' command is not actually a command but instead permission (Osborne and Arnold 704). In other words, whereas divorce is permitted on these grounds, the marriage does not necessarily have to dissolve.

Keener writes, “Jewish teachers of the law recognized a legal category called ‘concession,’ something that was permitted only because it was better to regulate sin than to relinquish control over it altogether. Given God’s purpose in creation, divorce naturally fell into such a category” (93). Thus, Deuteronomy 24.1-14, in its intent, was permission for divorce, but in the days of the pharisees it became a pretext for divorce. The original intent was not to provide a no-fault divorce law but to limit consequences for women and the preservation of their rights. However, given the abuses of the culture, the pharisaical view of marriage became, “a disposable contractual arrangement” (Edwards 301). Jesus then takes the position of Shammai to the logical conclusion that if a marriage is dissolved without legitimate means, then subsequent marriages are adulterous. Keener suggests that this statement may be hyperbole, but he does assert that it is stated in this way to make a forceful point (93).

The disciples’ response to Jesus’ words concerning the permanence of marriage are rather pessimistic. They rhetorically ask why would anyone marry, presumably based on the fear that anyone could thus be trapped in an unhappy marriage (Osborne and Arnold 706). Davies and Allison take the disciples reaction to mean that they equated Jesus’ view of monogamy to be synonymous with celibacy (19).

In his discourse on eunuchs, Jesus is speaking metaphorically and is no way advocating that Christians castrate themselves as was the case for Origen (Caner 396–415). Rather, Jesus was advocating that celibacy for the sake of dedicating oneself for the work of the Kingdom is a good and righteous endeavor for those with the continence to do so. Singleness, in Jesus eyes, is not the status of a second-class citizen or someone that

is beneath a married person. This view flew in the face of Jewish expectations at the time (Osborne and Arnold 707).

Matthew 22.23-33, Mark 12.18-27, Luke 20.27-40. The Sadducees bring a dilemma to Jesus that involves a woman who marries seven brothers as they subsequently die. This question is meant to demonstrate the absurdity of the resurrection of the dead. However, Jesus' response not only legitimizes the resurrection, it also provides insight into both marriage and life in the resurrected state. The question from the Sadducees is predicated on the predominant opinion that marriage would continue in the next life (Edwards 368). The question reflects the common and commanded practice of Levirate Marriage that was designed to provide economic and social support to widows (Keener 102). The response from Jesus is succinct and effective to silence the Sadducees. He appeals to the patriarchs of the Jewish nation and insists that God's continual reference to them implies that even post-mortem, they are indeed still alive (Matt. 22.32 quoting Exod. 3.6).

The glimpse into life in the resurrected state raises as many questions as it answers. Jesus is saying that in the New Creation, marriage and reproduction will not be included given the different type of life to come. The nature of relationships in the New Creation shall be closer than that of husbands and wives here and now (Osborne and Arnold 817). That is not to say that relationships in the New Creation will be pansexual, rather it appears that relationships will be free from sex. Whereas there is evidence of fallen angels taking human wives and presumably procreating in Genesis 6.1-2, this is clearly the result of sin and not the purpose of angelic beings. By stating that believers will be like the angels in the resurrected state is to indicate that the coming existence is

free from sin and full of glory (Edwards 368). This nevertheless brings sex into question in the resurrected state. Clearly, humanity will continue to be gendered as evident in the resurrected Jesus retaining his male gender. However, despite the apparent lack of sexual union, there will be a level of intimacy among all faithful people the likes of which has never been experienced.

### **Marriage in the New Testament Epistles**

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul provides expectations for how Christians are to live because of the redemption found in Jesus. These good works coincide with God's holiness and are in direct contrast with the effects of the curse of sin. Whereas the effects of sin cause the man to be a tyrant over his wife, Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5.25). The metaphor that Paul uses concerning the head and the body does include leadership connotations, although the emphasis rests on the unconditional love and provision that Jesus gives to the church (Arnold 382). These commands are echoed in Paul's letter to the Colossians with emphasis on love and the addition of not being harsh with wives. These commands distinguish Christian husbands in that outside of the New Testament, household codes never exhorted men to love their wives (Pao 267). Additionally, these commands restore the role of the husband to reflect the marital ideal in Genesis.

Similarly, Paul's command to wives restores and reflects the marital ideal in Genesis. Whereas the result of the curse causes wives to dominate and control her husband, the expectation of the new life in Christ is that wives will submit to their husband (Eph. 5.22). "Submit," does not carry the same meaning as, "obey," and when used in the middle voice suggests that Paul's appeal is that wives make the voluntary

choice to submit (Arnold 380). In other words, the desire for wives to dominate their husbands is to be recognized and denied. This submission, however, does not diminish the dignity and status of the wife as it is Jesus' submission to the Father that inspires wives to submit to their husbands (Pao 262).

Paul's comments on marriage in his first letter to the Corinthians differ from his comments to the Ephesians and Colossians due to the situational items that arose within the church in Corinth. Rampant sexual immorality characterized the Corinthian community on two fronts. The first account of sexual immorality that Paul addresses concerned a number of men that visited prostitutes, using the argument that they had moved to a higher plane of spirituality as expressed in the slogan, "everything is permissible" (Fee 250–51). This inaccurate dualism that some of the Corinthians used to justify the satisfaction of their carnal desires is a popular form of quasi-Platonic thought (Thiselton 462). The Corinthians were justifying their actions based on their incorrect theology. Paul combats this incorrect thought by explaining union with Christ as it relates to atonement and the resurrection of the body.

By this point in his letter, Paul has already told them the good news of their redemption in Jesus. He has told them that it is in Christ Jesus that they have redemption through the crucifixion of Jesus (1 Cor. 1.23). He has told them that they are God's temple with the Spirit dwelling within them (1 Cor. 3.16). He has told them that they have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6.11). These truths culminate when Paul informs the Corinthians that they were bought with a price and that their bodies belong to the Spirit as His temple (1 Cor. 6.19-20). By reminding the Corinthians on multiple occasions that their bodies are also redeemed

alongside their souls, Paul is both raising the value of the body and demolishing their incorrect beliefs. Furthermore, Paul is arguing that the very bodies of the Corinthians are members of Christ, not merely their souls (Fee 258).

Paul continues his case against the incorrect Corinthian assumptions through his articulation of the resurrection of the body. Whereas the Corinthians asserted that God would destroy the body, Paul responds that the Lord will raise the body just as he raised Jesus in bodily form (1 Cor. 6.14). Naturally, Paul's theology of the resurrection informs his understanding of the body belonging to the Lord (Thiselton 463). Thus, with the emergence of an understanding of the body that is holy and redeemed alongside the soul conjoined with an understanding the physical bodies are also part of the body of Christ, Paul's arguments against sexual immorality are complete. Therefore, the image of joining a "member" of Christ's body to that of a prostitute becomes offensive as Paul most certainly intends (Fee 262).

Paul's comments then turn to the second aspect of sexual immorality, namely chastity in marriage. If the norms for sexuality as established in the Old Testament are understood correctly, then chastity is not a virtue unto itself but only outside of the marital relationship. Additionally, sexuality in marriage serves as a safeguard against adultery. This is precisely the line of thinking that Paul follows in his comments to the Corinthians. Continuing in the theme of ownership of the body, he states that the husband and wife have ownership over each other's body but not their own (1 Cor. 7.3). The dual implication implies that they do not have the authority to visit prostitutes nor withhold sex from the other. The phrase, "conjugal rights," in the immediate context does refer to marital sex, although it certainly cannot be reduced to sex at the exclusion of support and



companionship (Thiselton 507). Some have commented that Paul is in the wrong for not commenting on the love between husbands and wives, but this is not surprising since Paul is addressing a specific issue that has arisen with the Corinthians (Garland 247). Moreover, the love that Paul speaks of in chapter 13 most assuredly applies to the marital relationship, and the careful reader will make the connection.

Paul does provide guidelines for specific seasons of abstinence in marriage with very careful instructions. However, these seasons of abstinence are not required and appear to be more of a concession based on when Paul says, “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time...” (1 Cor. 7.5a) The conditions for these seasons, if they arise at all, require both agreement and limitation. The purpose of both these conditions is to protect the husband and wife from being tempted to satisfy their sexuality without their spouse (Garland 247). Thus, Paul’s comments for husbands and wives regarding marriage correspond to the themes found in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, specifically that sexuality is for mutual enjoyment and protection of the married couple.

Peter’s comments concerning marriage differ from Paul’s but are certainly complimentary. Whereas Paul’s links the husband’s actions to the actions of Jesus, Peter links the actions of the wife to that of Jesus. Peter provides the example of Jesus’ submission to the Father as the paradigm for the submission of the wife to her husband (1 Pet. 2.21-3.2). The mentioning of Sarah as the example of a holy women to emulate does provide some exegetical challenges. Specifically, what text is Peter referencing when he refers to Sarah’s actions? Jobes notes that the LXX does not use any verb with the meaning obey in reference to Sarah and Abraham, and Peter’s exhortation is that the wife

is to submit not to all men in general but to her own husband (203–05). Jobes goes on to rightly assert that specific expressions of submission are culturally defined within the context of these household codes (212). This compliments Paul's exhortation to wives and is in contrast with the effects of the curse from Genesis 3.15.

Peter's comments towards husbands, like Paul's, turn the culturally accepted household codes upside down. By saving husbands for last, Peter is affirming the authority of the husband, but he also affirms the status of the wife as a coheir of grace alongside her husband (Jobes 207). In other words, Peter demolishes the notion that women are of an inferior status without negating the leadership of the husband. Moreover, Peter offers a stark warning to husbands that would misuse their authority to the mistreatment of their wives with the threat that their prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3.7). Grammatically, this phrase is an adverbial infinitive of purpose demonstrating that the actions of the husband result in judgment from God (Wallace 592). Schreiner contends that God is the agent of the hindering because of the wickedness of the husband (161). Thus, Peter's commands to the husband compliment Paul's commands to the husband as it relates to the reversal of the curse as found in Genesis 3.15.

In Revelation, marriage is exclusively about the wedding between the Jesus and the Church. These passages are relevant to this discussion because of the themes that emerge because of the relationship. There is some conversation as to whether or not the actual marriage between Jesus and the Church occurs in the midst of John's vision, although the point of the vision is to demonstrate that the pure and lovely church enjoys the intimacy of her husband (Mounce 389). The Church itself is described as the Holy City of Jerusalem in direct contrast to the whore of Babylon. The purpose of the

juxtaposition is to highlight not only the status of the saints but also to demonstrate the beauty of the saints as they are presented to Jesus (Beale 477). This harkens back to the first marriage in Genesis when God presents Eve to her husband Adam. The bride is accepted and celebrated.

### **Theological Foundations**

#### **Spiritual Oneness**

The author of Genesis recounts again and again that God frequently paused over the course of creation to survey the goodness of all that he had made (Gen. 1.10, 12, 18, 25, 31). The world was in perfect harmony with God, and the world was in perfect harmony with one another. Plantinga describes the atmosphere of creation with the word *shalom*, and he defines it as, “universal flourishing, wholeness and delight” (10). The *shalom* of creation included, as Plantinga argues, “patterns of distinction and union and patterns of distinction-within-union” (29). In other words, some things are logically separated from one another such as light and day, sea and land. Others are logically united across distinctions, such as man and women in marriage (Plantinga 29). Before sin entered the world, the distinctions that God designed remained distinct, and the unions that God designed remained harmonious.

However, sin entered creation with the disobedience of Adam and Eve resulting in God pronouncing a curse upon creation (Gen. 3.14-19). The world was no longer in the state of *shalom*. Instead distinctions became blurred and unions became divided (Plantinga 29). This is especially evident in Paul’s assessment of the effects of sin in his letter to the Romans. Paul recounts that humanity worships created things instead of the creator, engaged in sexuality beyond the marriage covenant, and engaged in sexuality

with same-sex partners in addition to a whole host of other wicked acts (Rom. 1.23-32). Paul writes that the due punishment for wicked acts is death (Rom. 6.23)

God, in his abundant love for his creation, provided a solution to the problem of the curse of sin. That solution is the person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3.13-14). The work of Jesus includes but is not limited to his incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and his second coming. It is in the person and work of Jesus that the curse is undone, and God's creation begins to be reordered to its former glory. The saving work of Jesus realized through the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is known as Union with Christ (Hoekema 54).

Billings argues that Union with Christ is, "theological shorthand for the gospel itself" (1). In other words, it describes the central identity of the Christian, informs life in the Spirit, and provides a glimpse at the future of the Christian. Within Union with Christ, an entire narrative takes shape. This narrative has its roots in eternity past with God's election (Eph. 1.3-4). The Reformed view is that God elects believers without condition solely on the basis of God's pleasure (Peterson 278). On the other hand, the Arminian view is that Jesus is the one primarily chosen, with the humans that would believe in Christ chosen secondarily (Walls and Dongell 76). Given that Union with Christ contains with it all aspects of soteriology, a complete analysis of the differences between the Reformed and Arminian view is outside the scope of this review. However, points of agreement are certainly relevant. Within the already mentioned disagreement on election, there are aspects that all agree on.

The first point of agreement is God's initiative act as made evident in the aforementioned point of election. No matter if the mechanism of election is correct, both

views agree that God is the initiator. Other points of agreement include the removal of sin, new birth, sanctification, and the hope of the resurrected life. These central elements are indicative of the Reformed view (Hoekema 55–65). Additionally, these elements are guarded in the Arminian view (Fesko 212). Laboring the points of agreement on the doctrine of Union with Christ between the Reformed and Arminian traditions is relevant to the conversation on marriage because of its implications on Christian marriage.

First, in Union with Christ the Christian gains a new identity. Under the curse of sin, every person is by nature an enemy of God as a child of wrath (Eph. 2.3). As a result of this separation from God, the worship of things other than God ensues (Rom. 1.22-23). The consequence of worshiping a created thing is that it strips the humanity of a person and captures their central identity (Ps. 115.4-8). Through Union with Christ, however, the believer is cleansed from their idols and transformed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36.25-27). Additionally, the status of the believer is transitioned from a child of wrath to being seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2.7). The believer is no longer condemned before God but is instead adopted into God's family (Rom. 8.1, 15-17). Through Union with Christ, the central identity of the believer changes from child of wrath to child of God.

Secondly, in Union with Christ the Christian gains a new narrative. Before Union with Christ, the narrative began with the curse of sin, continues in slavery to sin, and concludes with death (Gal. 4.8; Rom. 6.23). Through Union with Christ, the narrative begins with God's gift of grace to redeem from slavery to sin (Eph. 2.8-9). The narrative continues as one alive in Christ with the Spirit of God dwelling within (Rom. 8.9-11). The narrative finds its culmination in the promised hope of eternal life free from all

effects of the curse of sin (Rev. 21.1-4). Through Union with Christ, the very way that the believer understands the world and their place in it fundamentally changes.

Lastly, in Union with Christ, the Christian gains a new community. The effects of the curse of sin is isolation and shame. However, through Union with Christ the believer is also united to all other believers throughout time and space (Eph. 2.19-21). This includes receiving the chosen nation of Israel as the “familial” history (Rom. 9.6-8). It also includes believers that have already died (1 Thess. 5.14-17). Most poignantly, Union with Christ unites believers across cultural divisions such as race, gender, class, and so on (Gal. 3.38). Isolation and shame are no longer the indicative marks of the community but instead acceptance and celebration (Eph. 2.14).

Union with Christ is essential to marriage because it provides both the foundation and the enablement for marriage according to God’s design. Union with Christ provides the “reset” that allows for the individual to be properly united to the other in marriage. To borrow the words from Plantinga, Union with Christ enables for the proper distinction-within-union to be established between husband and wife. The husband and wife bring to the covenant of marriage a common identity in Christ, a common narrative, and are already united in the agape love of the Christian community. It is through Union with Christ that the husband and wife are prepared to begin the covenant of marriage, enjoying the blessing of marital romance according to God’s design.

### **Emotional Oneness**

The experience of emotions is part of bearing God’s image (Scazzero, sec.725). Additionally, it is a necessary experience in matters of love and marriage. However, given that all areas of life are frustrated by the curse of sin including emotions, it

logically follows that the emotional experience in marriage is in jeopardy. Instead of experiencing emotional oneness, the curse of sin drives spouses apart. Therefore, in order to achieve emotional oneness in marriage, both husband and wife must strive toward emotional health. Scazzero asserts that emotional health, “concerns itself primarily with loving others well” (sec.486), and “[e]motional health powerfully anchors me in the love of God by affirming that I am worthy of feeling, worthy of being alive, and lovable” (sec. 568). From a Christian perspective, emotional health includes an identity secure in Jesus and the putting off of unhealthy patterns from the family of origin.

The notion of generational patterns is well established in the Ten Commandments. The second commandment forbids the creation of images with the intent of bowing down and worshiping them (Exod. 20.4-5a). To the original hearers, idols would have been carved representations. However, within the Biblical worldview, an idol can be anything that takes the primary place of worship in one’s life over and against God himself (Adeyemo et al. 111). Remarkable in God’s reaction to the idolatry of Israel is his jealousy which is the same as the jealousy of a spouse that is invoked over adultery (Hamilton, *Exodus* 332). Following the prohibition of idols is the promise that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children down to the fourth generation (Exod. 20.5).

Hamilton suggests that the central place of worship bears significant impact on other areas of life (*Exodus* 334). This is certainly the case as Paul provides a strong link between idolatry and immoral behavior in his letter to the Romans. Paul argues that it is because of idolatry that God handed humanity over to sinful passions (Rom. 1.23-25). Kruse posits that this handing over to sinful passions is God allowing humanity to become held captive by their sin (98). All these elements together form the generational

pattern of parents passing down the iniquities of idolatry and the corresponding sinful behavior to their children. Scazzero makes the connection that discipleship is the process of putting off the patterns of our family of origin and learning to do life God's way (Scazzero, sec. 1001).

Sells and Yarhouse provide the explanation of how emotions, idolatry, and familial patterns coalesce to drive an emotional wedge between husband and wife by demonstrating that a marital conflict is three fights in one. These three variables include the presenting problem, the history with the conflict theme, and conflict tradition from the family of origin that carries with it learned coping mechanisms (30–34). Scazzero asserts that the family of origin patterns are active in relationships without our being aware of them (sec.1016). Nevertheless, learned patterns of behavior are powerful influencers on relationships. Scazzero writes,

My family, like all families, had invisible, unspoken rules that we expected to be obeyed. These included, for example, gender roles, how and when to express anger, views of race and other cultures, the definition of success, how authority was to be treated, sexuality for men versus women, marriage expectations, and views of the church. (secs.1059–1060)

The remedy then is personal differentiation. Differentiation is defined as, “the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them” (Herrington et al. 18). Scazzero pushes the definition further by saying, “Differentiation involves the ability to hold on to who you are and who you are not” (sec.854). In other words, it is steadfastness in one's own identity while rejecting false identifications imposed by others. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor argue that the transformative process of self-differentiation occurs in a threefold process including personal obedience to Jesus, reflective living, and living in a



community of grace and truth (7). This change includes becoming emotionally independent from the baggage associated with one's family of origin. Scazzero writes, "Jesus was direct and clear in calling people to a first loyalty to himself over their biological families, saying, 'Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me'" (secs.1092–1093). By differentiating oneself from the emotional pull of the family of origin, spouses can fulfill the vision for marital oneness given at creation. The author of Genesis writes, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2.24).

Emotional oneness in marriage includes more than the capacity to bond by putting off family of origin issues; it includes the continued act of building trust and connection. Johnson, the developer of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, made the discovery that merely assisting couples with communication was not enough for resolving conflict. Instead, she focused on the emotions felt during conflict to help couples connect on the emotional level. Regarding significant conflict, she wrote, "When we slowed down the 'spin' of these circular dances, softer emotions, like sadness, fear, embarrassment, and shame, always appeared" (43). The emotions that she highlights here are reflected in the actions of Adam and Eve after their rebellion against God (Gen. 3.7-10). This is significant because it demonstrates common core emotions that hinder emotional connection as a result of sin. Tennent confirms this assertion as he argues that from the first sin emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame are primary drivers in human relationships (Tennent *Let's Go Back to the Beginning*). Thus, we see the negative emotions associated with sin in the Garden of Eden continuing to drive spouses apart.

Johnson observed that the heightened emotional state of spouses in moments of relational crises were the result of the brain being moved to, “a primal panic response” (46). She explains that the reason why spouses fight with one another in these moments of emotional crisis is because neither party wants to lose the loving connection. The prospect of isolation and loss triggers the confrontational response.

Johnson asserts that moments of reconciliation occur in moments of secure bonding. She writes, “In these moments of safe attunement and connection, both partners can hear each other’s attachment cry and respond with soothing care, forging a bond that can withstand differences, wounds, and the test of time” (47–48). In other words, couples were taught to engage the emotions of their spouse for the purpose of bonding. This emotional bonding eases that primal instinct to fight in the face of potential loss. Additionally, it satiates the natural human desire for security in relationship (Regnerus and Uecker 151). Once again, the theme of oneness in the covenant of marriage emerges.

One such example of spouses bonding emotionally emerges early in the Song of Songs. The bride confesses that she is lovely while at the same time revealing her insecurity over the darkness of her skin from working in the fields. Additionally, her working in the fields was the result of angry brothers that forced her labor (Song of Sg. 1.5-6). Longman argues that the phrase, “mother’s sons,” over and against, “my brothers,” is a poetic device to distance herself from her brothers (*Song of Songs* 98).” Furthermore, with the absence of a father to protect the bride, there is a Cinderella motif as the bride feels oppressed in her home (Duguid 84). In these verses, we can determine that the bride possesses self-discontent that stems from an unhealthy family of origin. This self-discontent presents itself in the through the bride’s rejection of her dark skin.

Longman articulates that her dark skin is due to sun exposure and was probably not a desirable trait given its association with the working class (*Song of Songs* 97). Her admonitions of insecurity, “express an underlying fear that she will not attain love because she does not measure up to its standards of feminine beauty” (Garrett et al. 131). In addition to her skin, Duguid argues that the imagery of the bride not keeping her vineyard is representative of her entire body (85). Longman argues that the imagery is pointed directly toward her sexuality as the plowing of a vineyard is often an image of sexual intercourse (*Song of Songs* 98). Whatever the case may be, it is evident that due to emotional turmoil in the family of origin the bride carries with her wounds that impact her relationship with her husband.

The response from her lover directly addresses her insecurity with the invitation to relationship. After admitting her insecurity, she asks where he pastures his flock and lays down (*Song of Sg.* 1.7). He responds with a playful teasing tone that she only needs to follow the trail which is an invitation to relationship (Duguid 86–87). This invitation to relationship is reminiscent to the context of the emotional bonding previously discussed. In addition to the bonding, her lover comments on his vision of her, specifically that she is the, “most beautiful among women” (*Song of Sg.* 1.8). Duguid notes that this comment from the shepherd occurs before she is decorated with jewelry and that she is the most beautiful in his eyes just as she is (86). The insecurity persists as she describes herself as a common field flower and nothing spectacular (91). His response turns the imagery that she provides upside down. He tells his beloved that she is beautiful as a lily would be set among the brambles (*Song of Sg.* 2.2). Brambles are not merely unattractive but are a sign of a curse (Duguid 92). Longmans translates the juxtaposed image as “thorns” and

suggests that thorns “invite anything but intimacy” (*Song of Songs* 111). On the surface, it appears that the shepherd is only addressing the presenting issue, namely the women’s self-discontent with her body. However, the shepherd is magnificently using the presenting issue to communicate to her on a deep emotional level. In addition to easing her insecurity, “[h]is declaration also has monogamous implications; she is the only flower and he loves only her” (Garrett et al. 149). Whereas in her family of origin she experienced disdain resulting in wounds, in her lover she finds the healing comfort of a secure relationship. Through this exchange of the presenting issue of her bodily discontent, emotional oneness forms in the shepherd’s utter devotion to her.

This discussion over the emotional bonding between spouses must go deeper in light of the human problem, namely sin. James writes in his letter, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (Jas. 4.1). Whereas desire itself may not be wrong, it can lead to evil if we use evil means to satisfy that desire (Wintle 1736). Keener, however, likens the passions at war in this passage explicitly with evil desire (679). Earlier in James’ letter he writes, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (Jas. 1.14-15). Thus, the problem in human conflict is sin and it must be considered in the realm of emotional bonding. The solution is forgiveness.

Thomas, on the subject of forgiveness, writes this:

Sin in marriage (on the part of both spouses) is a daily reality, an ongoing struggle that threatens to hold us back. You will never find a spouse who is without sin. The person you decide to marry will eventually hurt you – sometimes even intentionally so, making forgiveness an essential spiritual discipline. (167)

On this subject Thomas also writes, “Someone else’s action can’t dictate our response. God sent his Son into a world that hated him. If God had waited for the world to be ‘worthy’ to receive him, his Son would never have come” (166-167). Thomas’ comments reveal the relationship between emotions and nature of forgiveness. The first is that forgiveness is obviously an emotional experience as the party that offers forgiveness has been wounded in some way. The second is that forgiveness is a highly differentiated experience as it requires the party that offers forgiveness to act in such a way that is not a natural reaction to the offense. Forgiveness then is the perfect example of the definition of differentiation offered in the beginning of this section. Whereas the natural response to harm is revenge, forgiveness is the differentiated response that is not prompted by the offence.

The ability to forgive one’s spouse completely is not found within each person but instead within the person and work of Jesus (Chapell and Chapell 196–97). Keller echoes this sentiment in his discussion of Ephesians 5 when he writes, “...marriage only ‘works’ to the degree that approximates the pattern of God’s self-giving love in Christ” (46). Thus, forgiveness is not only a spiritual discipline in relation to Christ, but it is also an emotional experience in relation to one’s spouse.

### **Physical Oneness**

In addition to spiritual and emotional oneness, husband and wife are to be one in the physical act of sex. In the same way that spiritual and emotional oneness is both an event and a lifelong journey, so is the sexual relationship between husband and wife. However, as will be discussed in the section for cultural knowledge and attitude, there is

much confusion about the nature of the body and the physical act of sex between husband and wife. The theological foundations for the body and sex will be presented here.

### **Goodness of the Body**

Lewis possesses at worst a negative and at best indifferent view of the body when he likens the use of a body to that of a donkey. He describes the body as a mere necessity that moves us about (129–30). Contrast this with Pope John Paul II's assertion that the body is the primordial sacrament of the image of God (Pablo and Waldstein 202–04). Tennent also agrees with this view of the body ( Tennent *Let's Go Back to the Beginning*).

The negative view of the body, the Pope argues, stems from Manichaeism. Namely, that the source of evil is in matter and especially the body thus naturally resulting in the condemnation of all that is bodily (305). Tennent argues that there is indeed a resurgence of Manichaeism in our culture, both within and outside the church (Tennent *Man and Woman as Subject*). The impact of this negative view of the body is that it colors perceptions of the body. For example, in a study on female sexuality, married women reported that what they like least about sex is the messiness, specifically bodily fluids associated with the physical act of sex (Hart et al. 55). Whereas theological views of the body were outside the scope of the study, there is certainly a connection between the view of the body and one's perception of bodily functions.

This invasive and problematic view is in contrast with the teachings of Scripture. Through the creation account we learn that humanity was created in God's image to bear his image to the world (Gen. 1.27). God placing humans bearing his image in the garden invokes the Mesopotamian custom of kings setting up images of themselves to establish

their authority (Walton et al. 29). This lends credence to the Pope's description of the body as the primordial sacrament.

Additionally, it is not sufficient to separate the physical from the spiritual and think that we can exist in one of those plains (Adeyemo et al. 11). Bavinck et al. write, "The human soul, all the human faculties, the virtues of knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and even the human body images God" (530). Sherlock not only affirms the body as central to our being but also affirms the renewed status of the whole person in the resurrection of the dead (Sherlock 219).

However, one can affirm the existence of the body as being essential to bearing God's image and still have an indifferent view as was the case with Lewis. On the goodness of the body, Bavinck et al. write, "The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul" (559).

### **Goodness of Sex**

With the goodness of the body as affirmed in creation comes the goodness of sex according to its purposes in creation. As stated previously, sexuality existed before sin entered the world and is thus part of God's good creation. Additionally, sex serves a purpose beyond that of procreation. Humans are distinct creatures in that most female mammals only have sex when they are fertile and cease all sex once they are past the age of fertility (Hrdy 45). With this in mind, it appears that God has designed sexuality to be more than a procreative but for the enjoyment of spouses (McMinn 130).

However, given that we live in a broken world, often the lens of sin skews the creational goodness of sexuality. For example, Sherlock argues that the Church has in

some cases taken the danger of lust to such a degree that sexuality itself is questioned (210). Additionally, when sexuality is already suspect and the element of shame is combined, it creates an innate negative view of sexuality as a whole. Shame between spouses is, John Paul II describes, both immanent and relative insofar as shame manifests itself in the human interior and in relation to the other (Pablo and Waldstein 242). It is a double-edge sword that drives humanity into isolation with both an internal and external impulse. John Paul II makes the connection that shame has an explicitly sexual nature given that Adam and Eve sewed loincloths for themselves to cover their sexual organs (243). However, it is imperative to remember that shame is the result of the fall and not from the initial sexual impulse (Bavinck et al. 537).

As previously discussed, the body and the sexual impulse, if rightly acted upon, is a good and righteous thing. This was seen especially in the discussion of the Song of Songs. Specifically, referring to Song of Songs 5.14, Allender and Longman write, “This is a prelude to their love-making. There is no shy, shamed, mechanical movement under the sheets. Rather, the two stand before each other, aroused, feeling no shame, but only joy in each other’s sexuality” (254).. This table highlights a few examples of the lovers in the Song of Songs delighting in the physical body of the other:

<b>Table 2.1 The Lovers Celebrate One Another’s Body (attributes listed according to frequency and order of appearance)</b>	
<b>She Celebrates His...</b>	<b>He Celebrates Her...</b>
Voice – 2.8, 2.10-15	Beauty – 1.8, 1.15, 2.10, 2.13, 4.1, 4.7, 4.10, 6.4
Embrace of her – 2.6, 8.3	Eyes – 1.15, 4.1, 4.9, 6.5, 7.4
Overall Appearance – 5.10, 5.15	Breasts – 4.5, 7.3, 7.7, 7.8
Love – 1.2	Cheeks – 1.10, 4.3, 6.7
Beauty – 1.16	Neck – 1.10, 4.4, 7.4
Gaze – 2.9	Voice – 2.14
Head – 5.10	Face – 2.14
Hair – 5.11	Hair – 4.1



Eyes – 5.12	Love – 4.10
Cheeks – 5.13	Fragrance – 4.10
Lips – 5.13	Tongue – 4.11
Arms – 5.14	Feet – 7.1
Sexual Organ/Body/Member – 5.14 (Longman, <i>Song of Songs</i> 173)	Thighs – 7.1
Legs – 5.15	Navel/Vulva – 7.2 (Longman, <i>Song of Songs</i> 195)
Mouth 5.16	Belly/Womb– 7.2
	Nose – 7.4
	Head – 7.5
	Stature – 7.7
	Scent of Breath – 7.9

Thus, not only does Scripture affirm the goodness of the body in creation but also the sexual union between husband and wife.

The sexual union between husband and wife is more than a procreative act, and it is more than mere pleasure. The sexual union is a vehicle for the oneness of husband and wife. First mentioned in poetic form in Genesis 2.24, the sexual relationship enhances and builds the intimacy of the spouses. In the garden, Adam and Eve are introduced to one another by God in a state of nakedness for the purpose of demonstrating their complete openness to one another (Adeyemo et al. 14). Moreover, the consummation of the marriage through sexual union, “is associated here with the idea of the couple becoming one flesh again, just as Adam and Eve come from one body” (Walton et al. 31). The outward and visible sign of the nakedness is reflective of the inward nakedness with one another.

This bonding between spouses in the sexual act also has physical characteristics.

Regnerus writes,

The hormone oxytocin is released during orgasm in both sexes; inside the brain, oxytocin is involved in social recognition and bonding, and it may also contribute to the formation of trust between people... Mutually pleasurable sexual

relationships generate more orgasms, more oxytocin, and more bonding sentiments, intentions, and emotions (152).

This is also seen evident in the phenomenon of lovers kissing and holding hands. Both forms of physical intimacy provide the brain with a rich sensory experience as the lips and tongue occupy a disproportionately large amount of sensory and motor parts of the brain (Haseltine 39–40). Additionally, in a study on female sexuality, respondents overwhelmingly stated that what they liked the most about sex is the physical closeness with emotional closeness as the close second (Hart et al. 43). This seems to fly in the face of conventional wisdom about female intimacy (Phillips and Lewis 136). Nevertheless, even though some women in the study reported sex as a low priority, a clear link between physical affection and intimacy emerged. This demonstrates that physical affection, whether sexual or not, is a vehicle for oneness. Thus, in physical acts of intimacy the body “reinforces” intimacy within itself.

Another study done comparing women whose partners used a condom vs women whose partners do not suggests that there may be a connection between the absorption of semen and better emotional health in young female adults (Gallup et al. 289–93). However, according to Regnerus, the study did not explore the content of the sexual relationships. Regnerus does report that semen contains mood-altering chemicals including testosterone, estrogen, follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinizing hormone (LH), prolactin, and prostaglandins (156). If this theory can be proven, it strengthens the argument that physical intimacy strengthens the bonding of spouses.

Regarding the frequency of sex, especially in light of the previous discussion on Proverbs and 1 Corinthians, a study on female sexuality demonstrated that sexual satisfaction increased with the frequency of sex. In other words, if a couple wants to

improve the quality of their sexual relationship they should increase the number of times per week that they engage in sex (Hart et al. 166). Regnerus argues that the frequency of sex in a committed relationship lowers depression and raises satisfaction in life (143). The authors of the study were clear to point out that the increase in frequency should coincide with open and affirming communication about the sexual relationship. Hart writes, “Both partners need to express what they like and don’t like sexually, what satisfies them, and how frequently they desire sex in order to enhance their physical and emotional intimacy” (Hart et al. 170).

This open discussion demonstrates that physical oneness is one avenue to intimacy and cannot be compartmentalized from the others. Warren writes,

While it seems clear that a mutually satisfying sexual relationship enhances every marriage, it is equally clear that great marriages can often be fashioned without great sex. But there is little doubt that if great sex for both partners can be obtained, it will contribute substantially to the management of marital stress and the attainment of marital goals. (130)

It is clearly evident that a frequent and fulfilling sexual relationship dramatically strengthens the bond between husband and wife. However, the mere act of sex is not sufficient to bring about a fulfilling sexual relationship. It must be built upon trust in open communication.

### **Guarding against adultery**

An additional theme that must not be overlooked with regards to physical oneness pertains to guarding against adultery. The remedies from Scripture already discussed include frequent and fulfilling sexual encounters with one’s spouse. By examining hormonal releases in the body, we can understand why sexual union between husband and wife is the best preventative. In the film *There’s Something about Mary*, the main

character attempts to relieve sexual angst by masturbating before his date (*There's Something About Mary*). The implication is that masturbation is sufficient to relieve sexual frustration. However, Regnerus notes that the research into orgasms shows that the hormone that both diminishes arousal and provides sexual satisfaction, prolactin, is released during intercourse at five times the amount in comparison to masturbation (Regnerus and Uecker 312). Additionally, whereas masturbation may offer at least some kind of outlet for sexual tension, the climax does not involve any other person beyond the subject's own fantasy (Smedes 160–64). In other words, the act defeats the purpose of God's intent for sexuality, namely oneness with the spouse.

### **Cultural Trends in Marriage: Knowledge and Attitude**

#### **Romance Defined**

Sprecher and Metts assert that romance is, “a relatively coherent individual orientation toward love, and may function as a cognitive schema for organizing and evaluating one's own behavior and the behavior of a potential or actual romantic partner” (388). In other words, it is a collective way of thinking that informs one's attitude and action towards coupling. Sprecher and Metts identify four universal elements in culture's understanding of romance. First, the belief in the idealization that the partner and the relationship will be perfect. Second, the belief that there is love at first sight. Third, the belief in “soul mates,” meaning that there is one and only true and perfect partner. Fourth, the belief that love finds a way to conquer all obstacles (Anderson 524). These elements collectively provide the framework for the narrative of cultural texts, and these elements provide the criteria by which relationships are evaluated.

## Sources of Knowledge

As the analysis moves toward the population's knowledge of married romantic love, the issue of the source of knowledge comes into view. The first, and arguable most important, source of knowledge comes from the family of origin. Each person's experience of their parent's marriage, or lack thereof, bears the greatest impact on the establishing of normative married behavior. Since the family unit is foundational for how each person understands and participates in relationships, it is not surprising that one's experience of married romantic love comes from the home (Galindo et al. 1–2).

Beyond the family of origin, the surrounding culture is the second most prominent source of knowledge concerning romantic love. Vanhoozer writes, "Given culture's ability to orient us and reproduce itself, we must acknowledge culture itself as means of spiritual formation, a process that shapes our spirits, or 'hearts'" (31). Thus, whether we are aware of it or not, the culture that we reside in is always educating, forming, and shaping the way we think and what we value. The formation of culture occurs subtly by means of what Vanhoozer calls cultural texts. Vanhoozer defines these texts as being, "produced by some person or group," and they, "embody the worldviews of their makers" (49). The subtlety of these texts is attributed to the form of the texts. Rather than appearing as clear propositions of truth, Vanhoozer asserts that, "The world-view-of-the-text is often not demonstrated by logic, but displayed in the products and practices that comprise our everyday life" (51). Thus, cultural formation is found through cultural text such as books, movies, songs, magazines, television, and so on. This position is also supported by cultivation theory (Lippman et al. 129). Giddens asserts that even the scientific inquiry to define norms creates a cycle of establishing norms. As research

publications are distributed they serve to reinforce and influence cultural patterns (Giddens 29).

All these various forms of media teach a lesson about romance that is either normative or idealistic. Soap operas for example, provide a never-ending cycle of serial monogamy among the main characters. The popularity of the soap opera genre has been attributed to the correlation of serial monogamy among the culture (Shumway 216). Additionally, one study reported that of the men and women that were heavily exposed to romantic media genres, both genders reported high levels of romantic belief endorsement (Lippman et al. 133).

Beyond the soap opera genre, one analysis indicated that in the 2001/2002 television season, nearly 64 percent of shows contained sexual content (Kunkel et al. 605). This same study demonstrated that scripted television provides behavioral learning opportunities and expectations concerning societal norms relating to sex and relationships (616). However, the romantic content of scripted television has been dwarfed by the explosive popularity of romantically themed reality television. The amount of sexual programs during prime-time increased to 41 percent (Vandenbosch and Eggermont 575). The Bachelor, for example, has eighteen franchises in different countries, and, while on the air, its twitter handle tops national trends lists (Alice 102). Upon the introduction of romantically themed reality shows such as The Bachelor, one study demonstrated that such shows became popular with adolescents, particularly with adolescent girls (Vandenbosch and Eggermont 576). The same study indicated that viewing romantically themed reality television is a significant predictor of sexual conversations among girls

and perceptions of sexual experience levels among boys (Vandenbosch and Eggermont 578).

Not only does romantically themed television increase the sexuality among adolescents, but one author argues that it has changed the culture of dating. Romantically themed television finds its real life equivalent through dating apps that turn finding a mate into a game (Alice 104). The impact of romantically themed television on dating demonstrates that consumers not only seek out this form of media to learn, but they also emulate what they observe (Zurbruggen and Morgan 1–17). This also leads to a viewership that watches romantically themed television to reinforce their already existing beliefs. This was demonstrated to be true in a study observing motivations for watching the recent royal wedding (Hefner *Tuning into Fantasy* 314). The study demonstrated that all four characteristics of romance articulated by Sprecher and Metts were evident in the portrayal of the royal wedding (Hefner *Tuning into Fantasy* 309–14). Along these lines, viewers that already hold to the aforementioned romantic beliefs seek out romantically themed television to become enraptured in a love story with a fairytale ending (Giorgio). Thus, not only does romantically themed television educate the viewership on behavioral norms, but it also reinforces already held beliefs.

The media of film has the same trend as television and may have a stronger impact on the viewer over and against other forms of media. Movies, in contrast to something like a television episode, are a complete narrative that portrays the beginning, the challenges, and the concluding direction of a relationship (Hefner and Wilson 152). This is especially true of romantic comedies where the aforementioned romantic ideals are celebrated among the couple. Even in movies that seem to break the mold of the

traditional romantic comedy through the use of counter messages, the four romantic ideals are more often than not reinforced (Hefner and Wilson 161). One study on the messages of romantic comedies showed that the most prominent of romantic ideals was the idealization of the partner as the viewers were more likely to endorse this belief after viewing a romantic comedy (Hefner and Wilson 171). This same study found a correlation between viewers that sought to learn about relationships were more likely to endorse all romantic beliefs (171). Hefner and Wilson note that beyond the romantic comedy genre, romance sub-plots are embedded within a majority of films including the highest grossing movie of all time (170).

Also important in the discussion of romantic ideals in movies are films aimed toward children. One study showed that children are learning about relationships and sex from their parents less and less, and as a result are turning to media for education (Junn). This gives media companies that target children significant influence on upcoming generations. A study of the presence of romantic ideals identified by Sprecher and Metts within the Disney princess films identified the presence of at least one ideal in each film with an average of 15.7 expressions of that ideal per film (Hefner et al. 520). Another study of twenty-three Disney movies showed that the most prominent ideal was love at first sight which set the stage for the remaining three ideals to be expressed according to the elements of each respective plot (Tanner et al. 364). In the recent development of movies that appear to be shifting away from romantic ideals, the romantic ideals are still reinforced in the plot drama. Hefner's study pointed out that if an ideal was expressed by one of the characters it was rewarded or confirmed, whereas if the ideal was challenged it



was often met with punishment (Hefner et al. 530). Therefore, despite the appearance of shifts in romantic ideals, the ideals themselves are still rewarded and reinforced.

Another source of romantic media is the romance novel. According to the Romance Writers of America, the romance is a billion-dollar industry that accounts for 23 percent of the overall US fiction market second to general fiction. This association defines the romance genre as including the following two elements. The first is a central love story where the main plot is driven by, “individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work” (Romance Writers of America). The second is an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. The happy ending intrinsic to this genre reinforces the belief that love conquers all. They go on to declare that the consumers of the romance genre is predominantly women accounting for 82 percent of the readership (Romance Writers of America). Of the readership, half of the frequent readers are below thirty-four years of age with the younger readers consuming the young adult, erotic, and paranormal romance as subgenres. Thus, the same romantic ideals that are present in visual media also saturate written media.

A third source of knowledge and attitude concerning romance is one’s own personal experience. The formation of personal perceptions of love, Sternberg posits, takes the form of a personal fiction (5). In other words, perceptions of love and romance do not exist as a catalogue of characteristics but instead weave together to form a cohesive narrative. He goes on to suggest that persons live into their own narrative and interpret the actions of others through the lens of their love narrative. This explains, as he says, why individuals continue in dysfunctional relationships despite personal harm. The reason is that they are living in a love narrative that is harmful because the harm is an

integral aspect of the narrative (Sternberg 221). Sternberg elaborates on the theory of narrative by arguing that people have a hierarchy of stories that can be drawn from at any given time (225). As previously demonstrated, consumers of romantic media learn norms concerning relationships, often in the context of stories, from what they view. It logically follows, therefore, that individuals attempt to play out the four romantic ideals within the context of their own life narrative.

### **Marriage Defined**

There is an interesting generational shift in the definition of marriage. When asked if marriage is defined as a covenant before God between a man and a woman, 42 percent of Millennials agreed with the Biblical definition over and against 61 percent of Elders (“How Do You Define Marriage?”). On the surface, this may seem like marriage is losing its influence as an important institution within culture. However, marriage continues to be considered an important life goal among teenagers in 80 percent of girls and 72 percent of boys (*The State of Our Unions 2012*). Rather than reflecting on the loss of value, this shift reflects a loss of understanding of marriage. In one survey, love emerged as the number one reason to be married at 88 percent, lifelong commitment as the second reason to be married at 81 percent, and companionship coming in behind at 76 percent (Livingston and Caumont). In the same survey, respondents said that the most important aspects that helps people stay married include shared interests—64 percent, a satisfying sexual relationship—61 percent, and sharing household chores—56 percent. The data supports Tennent’s claim that the cultural understanding of marriage is largely utilitarian for emotional happiness, sexual fulfillment, and economic stability (Tennent *The Echo of the Trinity*).

## **Marriage Rate**

Despite the desire for love and marriage, the actual marriage rate hovers at 50 percent according to data taken in 2016 (Parker and Stepler). According to this data, the median age for a first marriage was 27.4 for women and 29.5 for men. Compare this with data from 1960, where the median age for a first marriage was 20.3 for women and 22.8 for men. Additionally, this study noted that the share of Americans who have never married has been rising steadily. However, among these adults, 58 percent say they would like to get married.

Numerous factors are at play to explain the discrepancy between the desire for love and marriage with the statistics on marriage itself. These include the postponement of the markers of adulthood, the rise in higher education, the desire for financial stability, and no longer seeing marriage as the gateway to parenthood (Cohn). In fact, the combination of contraception and artificial conception has made sexuality fully autonomous (Giddens 27). Thus, parenthood is entirely possible outside any relationship.

In addition to a delay in the age that people are marrying, there is a rise in unpartnered young adults. One study revealed that roughly 65 percent of young adults, compared to 56 percent ten years ago, are now living without a spouse or partner (Fry). This does not mean that these young adults are without a romantic relationship, just that they are not cohabitating. On the other hand, cohabitation is on the rise among individuals aged fifty and older coinciding with rising divorce rates in this group (Stepler). This study also demonstrated that this age group is less likely to remarry after divorce.

Another element to consider is the impact of online dating on marriage. Whereas online dating may be an efficient way to find a mate, Regnerus argues that more often it allows for the treatment of others to be similar to commodities (70). His logic stems from the fact that online dating services make it so easy for persons to be matched with others that there is an abundance of choice. This discourages deep commitment and actually encourages moving on to another easy match for the slightest reason (Bauman 21). Slater posits that the process of being matched with another person is becoming so efficient and enjoyable that marriage will become obsolete (121). Regnerus pushes this further and argues that online dating actually encourages throwing away a potential relationship in favor of a new one by the very design of the online dating process. He argues that online dating companies want their clients to keep dating because it ensures the viability of the industry. These companies, Regnerus argues, are training its clientele to think of persons and sex as commodities (71).

### **Marriage, Sex, and Romance**

The data demonstrates that romantic love and sexuality are no longer seen as exclusive to the marriage covenant. This shift in thinking about marriage among generations comes into focus especially with the matter of sexuality. In a Barna study concerning American belief about sex, 59 percent of Elders agreed with the statement, “choosing not to have sex outside of marriage is healthy.” Compare this with 53 percent of Boomers, 49 percent of Gen-Xers, and 43 percent of Millennials (“What Americans Believe About Sex”). Whereas more than half of all generations surveyed agreed that the purpose of sex is to, “express intimacy between two people who love each other” (“What Americans Believe About Sex”), Millennials are much more likely to state that the

purpose of sex is for self-expression and personal fulfillment. This reflects a dramatic shift toward the self over and against the other generations surveyed.

This shift toward the self is undoubtedly the result of prolific use of pornography. One Barna study found that 54 percent of adults age twenty-five and older said that viewing pornography is wrong, compared to only 32 percent of thirteen to twenty-four year olds ("Porn in the Digital Age"). This study noted that the shift in attitude toward pornography is the result of a culture that makes porn more acceptable and accessible. Additionally, teenagers and young adults are not only users of pornography but are increasingly becoming producers of pornography. A 2016 study revealed that among teens and young adults in dating relationships, 62 percent say they have received a nude image, and 40 percent have sent a nude image ("Porn 2.0"). This "sexting crisis," as described in the study, is the result of emulating behavior of the broader society. As celebrities continue to push this type of behavior as normative through social media, it is naturally imitated by young adults.

On the other side of the spectrum, the romance genre of books and cinema has created a distorted expectation of romantic needs impossible to maintain in a long-term relationship. In a study on female sexuality, the study reported that after their spouses, the most common sources that women sought to satiate their romantic needs included, but were not limited to, movies, daydreaming, and novels (Hart et al. 48). The vast scope of the romantic literature industry has already been mentioned, so its reach and impact must not go unnoticed. One author argues that the effect of the romance genre of written and visual media is similar to the effects of pornography. She writes,

Just as sexual pornography twists an understanding for men about real women's bodies and sexual appetites, so romantic pornography twists the perception for

woman about real men and how they 'ought' to behave toward women, which tends to amount, to, well, behaving like a woman. (Hart).

She goes on to argue that both pornography and romantic media make the corresponding gender unidimensional for the sake of the fantasy, and, in turn, creates unrealistic expectations for each gender.

The effects of frequent and low commitment relationships of a sexual nature wreak havoc on emotional stability. One study demonstrated that emerging adults that had more sexual relationships of a brief nature possessed less self-esteem and more guilt than those who were abstinent or only sexually active in a sustained relationship (Paul et al. 76–88). The data continues to show that persons who engage in sexual relationships that are frequent and brief with different partners experience depression and poor emotional health, especially among women (Regnerus and Uecker 139). The data is more complicated in relation to men as some men demonstrated less depression with the greater number of casual partners (162). However, this data does not take into account other ways of expressing emotional disappointment. Regnerus clarifies that even though the men in the aforementioned study reported low depression, they did experience other destructive patterns such as drinking, minor violence, and slumping grades for those in college (162). Thus, with diminished relational commitment and the increase of brief numerous sexual relationships, it logically follows that emotional unhealth will be proportionally on the rise.

### **Research Design Literature**

The goal of this study was to measure the changes in knowledge and attitude of married romantic love through a series of three workshops. As such, this study falls into the intervention model of analysis with both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative method of research involved a pre-intervention questionnaire and a post-intervention questionnaire sent out through electronic mail. Sensing defines a survey (questionnaire) as a lengthy set of questions with fixed responses (115). E-mail was chosen as the means for the survey due to the potentially sensitive nature of the material. The survey was written with Ammerman's suggestions taken into account (101). A week before the first of the three workshops, the pre-intervention questionnaire was sent out with instructions. At the conclusion of the final workshop, the post-intervention questionnaire was waiting for the participants in their inbox.

The qualitative method of research included a voluntary semi-structured interview. At the conclusion of the final workshop, participants were asked to sign up for the semi-structured interview that took place two months later. The interviewer was a trained research assistant who was familiar with Sensing's material on group interviews including facilitating conversation, drawing out quiet persons, redirecting talkative persons, and familiarity with the interview questions (120–22). Additionally, the group was briefed on the ground rules described by Mack, and Macqueen (61). These rules include maintaining confidentiality of the discussion and the participants' identity, speaking one at a time, and treating other participants with respect (61).

### **Summary of Literature**

The paradigmatic picture of marriage in creation is oneness between husband and wife and perfect relationship with God. This oneness is shattered with the introduction of sin into the world leading to isolation and shame between husband and wife.

However, God's redemptive purposes aim to reverse the effects of sin. In God's calling of Israel to be his people, he seeks to rebuild his relationship to humanity with

Israel as his agent in the world. Throughout the Old Testament, the relationship between God and Israel is often compared to that of husband and wife with God functioning as the perfect spouse in pursuit of an adulterous spouse. In the New Testament, Jesus is compared to the spouse of the church who presents his bride perfectly redeemed and spotless at the eschatological marriage. It is the redemption from sin found in God that enables the reversal of the effects of sin and the removal of shame between husband and wife. Thus, oneness between husband and wife necessarily depends on oneness with God.

In addition to spiritual oneness, husband and wife are to be one emotionally. In the creation account, the author provides the comment, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2.24). Whereas this signifies the formation of a new family unit, it also includes the influence of the family of origin. It means the breaking of generational patterns of idolatry and emotional unhealth. As the husband and wife live together and discover one another’s emotional wounds, they share and grow closer in their spiritual nakedness.

The third aspect of oneness discussed is physical oneness expressed in a frequent and vibrant sexual relationship. Both the Old and New Testaments prescribe utter devotion between husband and wife as well as the free giving of one to the other for sexual union. Moreover, the paradigmatic depiction of the sexual relationship between husband and wife is that of young love enraptured and intoxicated with the other. It is both celebratory and idealized. Additionally, it serves not only as a vehicle for the bonding of husband and wife, but, in both Testaments, it is highlighted as a guard against adultery and temptation.



The status of the cultural knowledge and attitudes moves in the opposite direction of the paradigmatic view from Scripture. Whereas the view of marriage in Scripture is covenantal devotion to the other for the purpose of oneness, the cultural trajectory is utilitarian use of the other to satisfy one's own needs. Marriage is becoming less and less understood as a covenant, and relationships are increasingly treated as commodities valued on their usefulness. The competing cultural narrative about love is that it is easy, quick, and the highest form of love. As a result, it leads to disappointment, disillusionment, and depression.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter covers the research methodology used to evaluate the changes in the knowledge of and attitude toward romantic love among married couples. The context, participants, and instruments are described. The chapter concludes with how the data was collected and analyzed.

#### **Nature and Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the research was to evaluate changes in the attitude and knowledge of married romantic love through a series of workshops on a theology of marital romance among married couples in the Anglican Church of North America.

As already demonstrated in Chapter 2, the traditional understanding of marriage is losing its status within society. The average age that people are getting married is becoming older, and romantic relationships are becoming more dissociated from the institution of marriage. The perception of married romantic love from the lens of the culture is often painted as backward and bigoted. The church is known for what it is against rather than a positive expression of married romantic love. The nature of this project was to provide a paradigmatic image of married romantic love from the pages of Scripture through a series of workshops. The goal was to educate and strengthen love between couples while at the same time providing a critique of the cultural narrative concerning romantic love.

## Research Questions

The following three research questions were answered by using three research instruments. These instruments include a pre-intervention questionnaire, a post-intervention questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview that was conducted after the workshops.

### Research Question #1

The first research question was: what were the participants' knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love before the small group experience? This question was answered by means of the pre-intervention questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent through email via a third-party service.

The majority of questions were designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative aspect of the questions was measured using the Likert scale, and the qualitative aspect was measured by the inclusion of a prompt such as, "Please explain," or, "Why? Or why not?" All the questions, with the exception of Q5, used the scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree with a qualitative prompt. Q5 was measured with the Likert Scale of Always, Usually, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. The first two questions were related to informed consent and the categorizing of responses as follows:

- Q1 Do you agree to participate in this study? Yes, No
- Q2 Are you taking this survey before, or after the workshops? Before, After

All other questions relating to the four research theme categories are as follows.

The first research theme was the participants' knowledge and attitude concerning the definition of marriage. The questions that addressed this theme included the following:

- Q3 The whole point of marriage is to live a happy life with the one you love.
- Q4 I am absolutely convinced that my spouse is the one- and only-person God intended for me to marry.
- Q8 I believe that true love guarantees that my marriage will have a happy ending.
- Q11 If I no longer "feel" love for my spouse, the marriage is dead.
- Q12 If someone is truly unhappy in marriage, divorce is a legitimate option.
- Q14 If I ever fall, "out of love," with my spouse it must mean that they weren't my soulmate.

The second research theme was the participants' knowledge and attitude concerning spiritual oneness. The questions that addressed this theme included the following:

- Q5 When it is difficult to love my spouse, I often think about God's love for me as a model for the way I am to love my spouse.
- Q13 My relationship with God and my relationship with my spouse are separate aspects of my life.

The third research theme was the participants knowledge and attitude concerning emotional oneness. The questions that addressed this theme included the following.

- Q6 Before getting married, I thought it was important to understand my spouse's family and their relationship patterns.
- Q7 I think past hurts should be left in the past so that they don't impact my marriage.
- Q15 I should not dwell on what happened in my family of origin, but instead I should focus solely on my spouse for a happy life.
- Q16 Spouses who were meant to be together naturally have less conflict than those who were not meant to be together.

The fourth research theme was the participants' knowledge and attitude concerning physical oneness. The questions that addressed this theme included the following:

- Q9 Sex in marriage is exciting at first, but eventually the passion fades.
- Q10 Sex is designed solely for the purpose of having children.
- Q17 Sex is permitted in the Bible, but the Bible mostly speaks about physical love negatively.
- Q18 I want to have a fulfilling physical relationship with my spouse, but I am sometimes embarrassed or uncomfortable with my body.
- Q19 My spouse and I are partly responsible for each other's sexual holiness.

An additional open-ended question was added at the conclusion of the questionnaire as follows:

- Q20 Is there anything else you would like to share?

Participants were emailed the questionnaire through a third-party service one week prior to the first workshop. The collector for responses was closed immediately before the first workshop.

### **Research Question #2**

The second research question was: what were the participants' knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love after the small group experience? This question was answered using the exact same questionnaire that was administered prior to the workshops. The questionnaire was distributed by email through a third-party service after the last workshop. The collector for responses was closed one week after the last workshop.

### **Research Question #3**

The third research question was: which aspects of the small group experience did participants identify as most significant? This question was answered through the semi-

structured interview that was conducted one month after the last workshop. The questions for the semi-structured interview included the following:

- Q1 What stood out as the most memorable portion of the workshops?
- Q2 What was the most uncomfortable portion of the workshop?
- Q3 What had the most meaningful impact on your own marriage?
- Q4 What from the workshop do you think others should hear the most?
- Q5 How has the workshops impacted your relationship with Jesus?
- Q6 Is there anything else that you would like to share?

### **Ministry Context**

The ministry context was Prince of Peace Anglican Church in Melbourne, FL. In 2003, 80 percent of the congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church in Melbourne voted to leave the Episcopal Church and form Prince of Peace Anglican Church. The decision to leave was motivated by theological differences on various topics including the authority of Scripture, definition of marriage, and matters of sexuality. The specific issue that served as the flashpoint was the consecration of an openly homosexual Bishop that was in a homosexual relationship at the time. The theological stance of the members of Prince of Peace is that marriage was designed by God to be a union between one man and one woman. At the time of its departure from the Episcopal Church, Prince of Peace affiliated with the Anglican Mission in America. In 2018, Prince of Peace affiliated with the Gulf Atlantic Diocese of the Anglican Church in North America.

The people that make up Prince of Peace Anglican Church are theologically and politically conservative. Many of the congregants have been Christians for the majority of their life. Whereas the majority of the membership of Prince of Peace church finds its origins from the St. John's community, the church has become an interdenominational melting pot. There are significant pockets within Prince of Peace that are former Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, non-denominational, or have no church background. At the time of this

study, the population of Prince of Peace was predominately Caucasian and upper-middle class. Also, at the time of this study, the age demographic is about 60 percent of the congregation being fifty-five years of age or older.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

The criteria for selection included the following. First, participants were required to be at least eighteen years of age or older. Secondly, participants were required to be married with both the husband and wife participating. Lastly, participants were required to be in a heterosexual marriage.

In order to be compliant with IRB standards, I did not directly recruit participants. Instead, I provided an open selection process where the members of Prince of Peace could self-select. This process included the following elements. The first was formal announcements during Sunday morning worship. Either the senior pastor or I provided a short description of the study during the announcement time with an invitation to sign up in the lobby; these announcements ran for three Sundays prior to the first workshop. The second element included both a written description of the study and a video of myself describing the study in the weekly electronic newsletter for the church. The newsletter promotion prompted participants to sign up in the lobby of the church and it ran for three weeks prior to the first workshop.

At the conclusion of the three weeks for sign up, I took the list of participants and emailed them the weblink to the questionnaire through the Survey Monkey platform. Participants were given one week to complete the pre-workshop questionnaire.

### **Description of Participants**

Participants were gathered from the population of Prince of Peace through voluntary sign up. They were equal ratio of male and female. For more information on participants, see “Participants” in chapter 4.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants gave their informed consent digitally through the questionnaire before and after the workshops. Confidentiality was preserved through the use of Survey Monkey as outlined in their privacy policy (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy-policy/>). Additionally, the six participants in the semi-structured interview gave their written informed consent before the interview. Each of the participants was assigned a code to preserve the anonymity of their names. The interview was conducted by a research assistant, and the interview itself was recorded on a password protected iPhone and then transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed interview and recordings were stored in a locked office that only the researcher had access to.

### **Instrumentation**

There were three instruments used to collect data for this study. These instruments included a questionnaire that was administered before and after the workshops, and a semi-structured interview that was administered two months after the last workshop. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative elements as most questions allowed for an open-ended response. The semi-structured interview provided qualitative data (Sensing Chapter 4).



### **Expert Review**

The instruments were researcher-designed, and three experts were consulted to review the instruments prior to use. Each expert was sent an explanation of the nature and purpose of the project, the research questions, the research themes, and the instruments themselves. The comments from the experts were then used to edit and modify the instruments. The experts were then consulted again with the final draft of the instruments. All three experts affirmed the final draft of the instruments.

### **Reliability & Validity of Project Design**

The questionnaire was designed to force participants to align with either the cultural narrative of romance or to align with the norms put forth in Scripture. The open-ended responses allowed the quantitative data gathered from the questions to be informed by qualitative data. Each question was careful to align with one of the research themes that were addressed in the workshops. Additionally, the questions were designed using best practices as indicated by Sensing (118–20).

The semi-structured interview was conducted by a capable research assistant that was coached on the best practices for conducting an interview (Sensing 120–21). The questions themselves were open ended allowing for the participants to provide their own thoughts without being led in any direction. Additionally, all three instruments were vetted by experts relating to their reliability and validity.

### **Data Collection**

This project was an intervention that collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Prior to the first workshop, I had open signups for the population of Prince of Peace. The sign-up period lasted for four weeks before the start of the first workshop. I collected

the email addresses of all the participants and sent each participant the questionnaire through a particular collector within the Survey Monkey platform one week prior to the first workshop. This questionnaire collected both quantitative and qualitative data concerning the participants knowledge and attitude on the topic prior to the workshop experience (Sensing 118–20).

At the conclusion of the last workshop, the same questionnaire was emailed to the participants through a different collector within the Survey Monkey platform.

Participants were given one week from the conclusion of the last workshop to complete the post-intervention questionnaire. Utilizing two different collectors through Survey Monkey allowed me to easily sort the before and after responses for comparison. This was accomplished by adding Q2 to the questionnaire that stated. “Are you taking this questionnaire before or after the workshops?” The possible responses were “before” and “after.”

The third instrument chosen was a semi-structured interview due to its being a hybrid between a focus group and a formal interview (Berg 145). In the last workshop, all of the participants were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview although only three to four couples would be chosen at random for participation. Of the total participants, three couples volunteered to participate and were selected by default (Creswell 217).

The semi-structured interview was conducted by a capable research assistant that was trained and who fulfilled IRB requirements. The interview was conducted in a private room that was comfortable for all participants and lasted about forty-five minutes in length. The interview was recorded and transcribed by the research assistant, taking

appropriate measures for confidentiality. Each couple that participated in the semi-structured interview was mailed a thank you card.

### **Data Analysis**

The questionnaire that we sent via Survey Monkey was analyzed by Survey Monkey. The data was then taken from Survey Monkey and placed in tables in Chapter 4. Data from the questionnaire before the workshops was coded in yellow, and data from the questionnaire after the workshops was coded in teal. Relevant comments that illumine their respective questions are included and colored accordingly.

For the semi-structured interview, the participants were coded as follows.

- M1 and F1
- M2 and F2
- M3 and F3

The “M” indicates that the participant is male and the “F” indicates that the participant is female. The numerical value indicates the order that the participant spoke in the interview. The matching numerical value indicates the marital relationship. This system of coding the participants allowed me to keep track of the married couples as one spouse would elaborate or build off of another spouses’ comment.

With regard to analyzing the data in the semi-structured interview, themes and patterns were categorized according to the four research themes already mentioned. This analysis was done through document analysis of the transcribed interview (Sensing 196–97).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

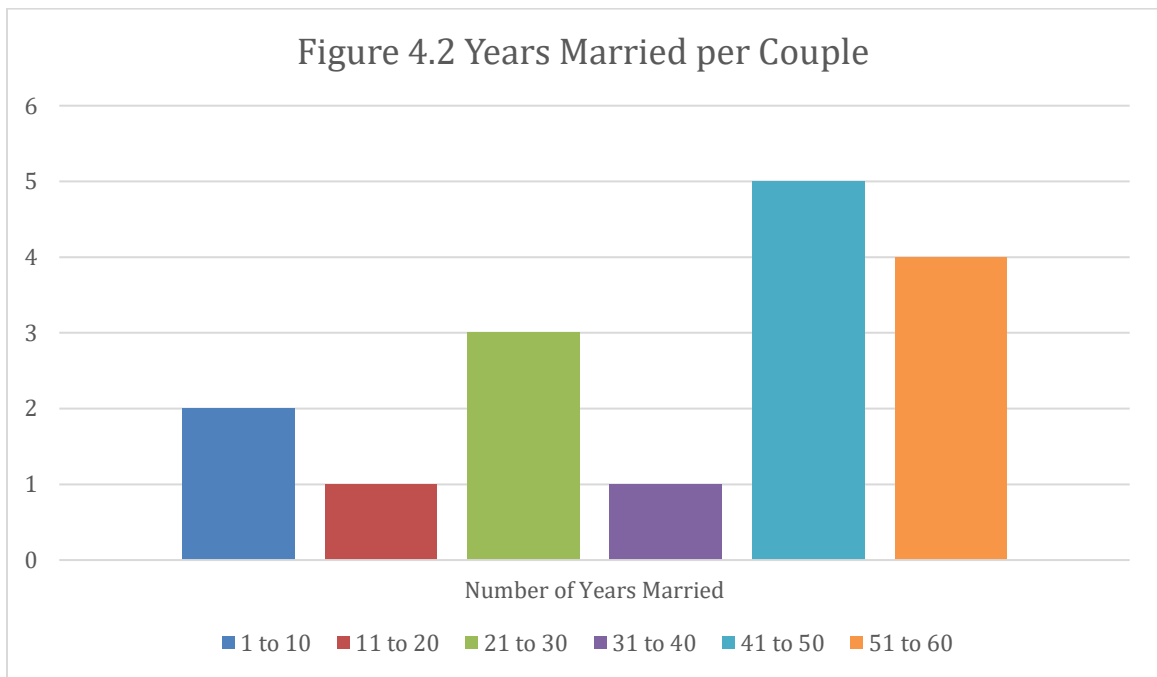
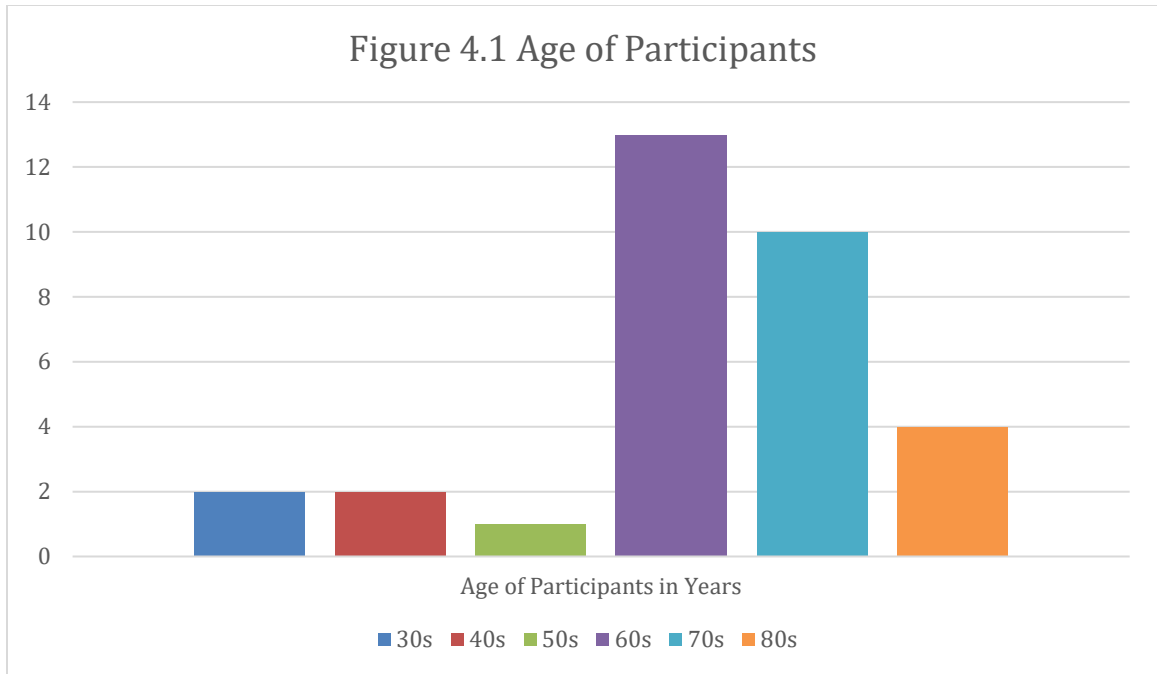
#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the changes in knowledge and attitude concerning a theology of romance for married couples. The research themes included the definition of marriage, spiritual oneness, emotional oneness, and physical oneness. The cultural narrative as outlined at the conclusion of Chapter 2 was presented at the beginning of the first workshop. Against this backdrop, a theology of romance was presented in the remainder of the workshops.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the participants of the study, the quantitative and qualitative data from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire, and the qualitative data from the semi-structured interview. It concludes with the major findings gathered from the data.

#### **Participants**

The pool of participants was gathered from the membership of Prince of Peace Anglican Church. There was a total of thirty-two participants in the study. Since marital status was a limitation to the study, there were an equal number of men and women resulting in sixteen couples. The demographics collected on the participants include the age of the participant and the number of years married as shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.



All thirty-two participants were emailed the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire through Survey Monkey. Q2 of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire asked the participant to indicate if they were taking the questionnaire before or after the workshops. This allowed me to separate the responses across the two collectors to

compare the pre- and post-intervention responses. The pre-intervention responses are listed in Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6. The pre- and post-intervention responses are listed alongside each other in Figures 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10.

At the conclusion of the last workshop, all thirty-two participants were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. They were told that only three to four couples would be selected at random. Of the thirty-two participants, three couples volunteered to participate in the interview. Those three couples make up the semi-structured interview that was conducted by a research assistant.

**Research Question #1: Description of Evidence**

The first research question was: what were the participants’ knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love before the small group experience?

<b>Table 4.1 Pre-Intervention Questionnaire</b>					<b>Pre-Intervention Responses</b>			
<b>Definition of Marriage</b>					<b>in Color</b>			
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Q3	The whole point of marriage is to live a happy life with the one you love.	27	40.74%	22.22%	37.04%	0%	1.96	.88
Q4	I am absolutely convinced that my spouse is the one and only-person God intended for me to marry.	27	51.85%	29.63%	18.52%	0%	1.67	.77
Q8	I believe that true love guarantees that my marriage will have a happy ending.	26	15.38%	15.38%	57.69%	11.54%	2.65	.87

Q11	If I no longer “feel” love for my spouse, the marriage is dead.	26	0%	15.38%	57.69%	26.92%	3.12	.64
Q12	If someone is truly unhappy in marriage, divorce is a legitimate option.	27	0%	44.44%	37.04%	14.81%	2.69	.72
Q14	If I ever fall, “out of love,” with my spouse it must mean that they weren’t my soulmate.	26	3.85%	7.69%	61.54%	26.92%	3.12	.70

The questions in figure 4.3 were designed around the research theme concerning the definition of marriage, specifically, whether or not participants subscribed to the attitude that love is a commodity that may lose value or if love exists within a covenant. Additionally, many of these questions were designed to expose adherence to the four romantic beliefs identified by Sprecher and Metts that were discussed in Chapter 2. The four romantic beliefs include soulmate theory, love at first sight, the idealization of the partner and relationship, and the belief that love conquers all (Anderson 524).

The tension between love as a commodity or as a covenant is certainly evident in the responses of Q3 and Q12. More than half of the participants agreed that the whole point of marriage is to live a happy life with one’s spouse, and almost half of the participants agreed that divorce is a legitimate option for unhappiness. On Q12 one participant wrote: “If one is truly unhappy and work and effort is put into reviving the romance but to no avail, then divorce may be the only option. I don’t think God intended for us to be miserable with a spouse.” Another participant wrote in response to Q12: “If you were not compatible to begin with, if truths are withheld, if one partner is willing to

work on the marriage and the other is not, I think that divorce is a legitimate option. It is much better than a life of depression or, worst case, suicide.”

Q11 also touches upon the tension between commodity or covenant but from a different angle. Whereas almost 85 percent of participants disagreed with the statement, the qualitative data muddies that disagreement. One participant responded with “my soulmate” which may not reflect a Biblical conviction but instead adherence to soulmate theory. Another participant responded by saying, “This one is difficult; I need an answer ‘I do not know.’” Additionally, whereas Q8 was not intended to measure this tension, one respondent commented, “True love, what is it exactly? People say they are in love and then quickly change their minds and part their ways.”

As previously stated, many of the questions were written to expose adherence to the four romantic elements from Sprecher and Metts. Q4 was written to subversively expose adherence to soulmate theory through the use of the phrase “one and only.” To this statement, just over 80 percent of respondents agreed. One responded with “There is no other for me.” However, other responses indicated that participants were thinking of God’s sovereignty as the unifying agent rather than soulmate theory. One comment included, “Although I know God told me to marry my husband, I don’t believe that he is the only person in the world that God would allow me to marry.” Regarding the soulmate theory, Q14 was the most direct in measuring the belief. Just over 10 percent of participants agreed with the question with one respondent commenting, “Feelings of love come and go even with soul mates.”

The other element from Sprecher and Metts relating to the definition of marriage included the belief that love conquers all. Of the respondents, just over 30 percent agreed



with the statement. One respondent provided verbatim the slogan of this belief by saying, “The old saying, ‘love conquers all’ applies.” On the other hand, almost 60 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement offering comments such as, “it takes much more than love for a marriage to work,” and, “that is too much to expect from love alone.” One respondent clarified, “If true love is equated with romantic love I disagree. True love is all God commands and is described in part in I Corinthians 12.”

Table 4.2 Pre-Intervention Questionnaire					Pre-Intervention Responses in				
Spiritual Oneness					Color				
		N	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Q5	When it is difficult to love my spouse, I often think about God’s love for me as a model for the way I am to love my spouse	27	18.52%	29.63%	37.04%	14.81%	0%	2.48	.96
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
Q13	My relationship with God and my relationship with my spouse are separate aspects of my life.	26	7.69%	11.54%	42.31%	38.46		3.12	.89

This particular set of questions was meant to measure the participants integration of their relationship with Jesus and their spouse. Q5 was meant to measure Christ’s love as the motivation to love one’s spouse. Of the respondents, about 48 percent responded

always and usually whereas about 52 percent responded that they sometimes or rarely do. Q13 was more explicitly worded to measure the integration of faith and marriage. Of the respondents, almost 20 percent strongly agreed or agreed that there was separation between the two relationships.

No qualitative responses were gathered for Q5, but qualitative responses were gathered for Q13. Almost 20 percent of respondents indicated that the relationship between God and their spouse were separate aspects of their life. There were no qualitative responses to explain the reasoning why. On the other hand, one respondent in favor of the relationship commented: “My relationship with God holds my relationship with my spouse together. God teaches me how to love, how to have compassion, how to care for someone. I wish we prayed together more, but God is the glue that holds us together.”

<b>Table 4.3 Pre-Intervention Questionnaire</b>					<b>Pre-Intervention Responses in</b>			
<b>Emotional Oneness</b>					<b>Color</b>			
		<b>N</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Q6</b>	Before getting married, I thought it was important to understand my spouse’s family and their relationship patterns.	<b>27</b>	<b>7.41%</b>	<b>29.63%</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	<b>14.81%</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>.82</b>
<b>Q7</b>	I think past hurts should be left in the past so that they don’t impact my marriage.	<b>26</b>	<b>34.62%</b>	<b>15.38%</b>	<b>30.77%</b>	<b>15.38</b>	<b>2.28</b>	<b>1.11</b>

Q15	I should not dwell on what happened in my family of origin, but instead I should focus solely on my spouse for a happy life.	26	7.69%	38.46%	19.23%	3.85%	2.28	.73
Q16	Spouses who were meant to be together naturally have less conflict than those who were not meant to be together.	27	11.11%	18.52%	62.96%	3.7%	2.62	.74

This set of questions corresponds to the emotional oneness research theme. Q6 was written to expose awareness of the intergenerational patterns and their effect on relationships. On this statement, more than half of respondents disagreed that they thought it was important to think generationally and understand their spouse’s familial patterns. Qualitative responses exposed general lack of awareness including, “never thought about it,” and, “never would have even thought it was important.” One respondent stated, “I was unaware, even when my mother told me she was concerned I might find myself repeating her history with my dad.” Q15 is similar in theme but also incorporates the romantic belief of idealizing one’s spouse for fulfilment. Almost half of respondents agreed with the statement. One respondent commented, “Strongly agree, leave the past in the past.” Another respondent, in disagreeing with Q15, stated: “Whether I call this the unconscious marriage or skeletons in the closet, my family of origin will affect our marriage. I don’t need to dwell on it, yet, it behooves me to address it and get whatever healing is needed for the sake of our marriage.”

Q7 was designed to expose how one’s understanding of past personal trauma plays a role in the marital relationship. The quantitative data shows that respondents were split down the middle in their agreement and disagreement of the statement.

Q16 was designed to show interaction between soulmate theory and conflict in a marital relationship. Of the respondents, about 20 percent agreed with the statement. Of respondents that agreed, one commented, “in our marriage this is true.” Another commented, “Spouses who are meant to be together tolerate and work out conflicts which are present in any close relationship.”

<b>Table 4.4 Pre-Intervention Questionnaire</b>					<b>Pre-Intervention Responses</b>			
<b>Physical Oneness</b>					<b>in Color</b>			
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Q9	Sex in marriage is exciting at first, but eventually the passion fades.	26	7.69%	53.85%	30.77%	7.69%	2.38	.74
Q10	Sex is designed solely for the purpose of having children.	27	0%	3.7%	48.15%	48.15%	3.44	.57
Q17	Sex is permitted in the Bible, but the Bible mostly speaks about physical love negatively.	27	3.7%	7.41%	55.56%	33.33%	3.19	.72
Q18	I want to have a fulfilling physical relationship with my spouse, but I am sometimes embarrassed	27	7.41%	37.04%	40.74%	14.81%	2.63	.82

	or uncomfortable with my body.							
Q19	My spouse and I are partly responsible for each other's sexual holiness.	26	23.08%	65.38%	0%	7.69%	1.92	.74

The questions from Figure 4.6 were designed around the research theme of physical oneness. Q9 was designed to measure attitudes concerning the passion of sexuality in marriage. About sixty percent agreed with the statement. A few respondents commented that age played a significant factor in the diminishing of passion. For example, one commented, “our bodies get less attractive as we get older.” Another commented, “As you age, the desire fades a bit and sometimes you just don’t have the energy.” One respondent’s commented indicated dissatisfaction with their sexual relationship when they stated, “I desire passion and still feel it, but it is not necessarily returned.” On the other hand, about 40 percent disagreed with the statement offering comments such as, “We’ve kept the love and passion alive for many years. It shouldn’t fade if you are truly in love.” Another commented, “I don’t believe that it has to fade. It may take more effort as time goes on to keep the fire burning, but it doesn’t have to go out.”

Q10 and Q17 were written to expose attitudes concerning sexuality between husband and wife as something to be enjoyed. Q10 was overwhelmingly disagreed with, as only one respondent agreed with the statement. Q17 showed that about 10 percent of

respondents agreed with the statement. One respondent commented, “Lots of sexual sin addressed in the Bible.”

Q18 was written to expose attitudes concerning the human body being made in God’s image and thus something to be valued in the sexual relationship between spouses. About 45 percent agreed that they were uncomfortable with their body. Some of the discomfort was indicated to be due to old age as one respondent wrote, “I don’t like my body now that I am old!” Another respondent wrote concerning bodily discomfort, “We are both embarrassed about our bodies because of previous relationships.”

Q19 was designed to measure the respondent’s knowledge concerning each spouse’s sexual responsibility to the other. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed with the statement. However, the qualitative responses show the data to be less clear. One respondent wrote, “Not sure what sexual holiness is.” Along these lines another wrote, “But I don’t know what you mean by sexual holiness.” Another wrote, “The question is not clear.”

The last question, Q20, was an open-ended question asking, “Is there anything else you wish to share?” One respondent commented, “No. I’ve not contemplated these things in some time, or ever.” Another commented, “This was more difficult than I thought.”

### **Research Question #2: Description of Evidence**

The second research question was: what were the participants’ knowledge and attitudes regarding married romantic love after the small group experience? The exact same questionnaire was distributed to the participants after the conclusion of the last workshop. Participants were allowed one week to complete the post-intervention

questionnaire. The data from both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires will be included in the following figures for ease of analysis.

<b>Table 4.5 Comparison of Responses to Pre/Post- Intervention Questionnaire Definition of Marriage</b>					<b>Pre-Intervention Responses in Color Post-Intervention Responses in Color</b>			
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Q3	The whole point of marriage is to live a happy life with the one you love.	27	40.74%	22.22%	37.04%	0%	1.96	.88
		24	16.67%	37.5%	33.33%	12.5%	2.42	.91
Q4	I am absolutely convinced that my spouse is the one and only-person God intended for me to marry.	27	51.85%	29.63%	18.52%	0%	1.67	.77
		24	25%	37.5%	37.5%	0%	2.13	.78
Q8	I believe that true love guarantees that my marriage will have a happy ending.	26	15.38%	15.38%	57.69%	11.54%	2.65	.87
		24	0%	16.67%	58.33%	20.83%	3.04	.62
Q11	If I no longer “feel” love for my spouse, the marriage is dead.	26	0%	15.38%	57.69%	26.92%	3.12	.64

		23	4.35%	8.7%	65.22%	21.74%	3.04	.69
Q12	If someone is truly unhappy in marriage, divorce is a legitimate option.	27	0%	44.44%	37.04%	14.81%	2.69	.72
		24	0%	33.33%	58.33%	8.33%	2.75	.6
Q14	If I ever fall, “out of love,” with my spouse it must mean that they weren’t my soulmate.	26	3.85%	7.69%	61.54%	26.92%	3.12	.70
		24	0%	4.17%	54.17%	41.67%	3.38	.56

The quantitative data shows a significant shift in responses from the pre-intervention questionnaire and the post-intervention questionnaire. Whereas 40.74 percent of respondents strongly agreed with Q3 in the pre-intervention questionnaire, the post-intervention questionnaire showed only 16.76 percent strongly agreeing with the statement. The quantitative responses to Q3 articulate a clarified response such as:

To live a happy life with one another is one point of marriage but not the whole point. It should also serve as a way to help one another grow as people and grow in the love of Christ. It should also serve as the way to grow a healthy family that loves Jesus and follows Him.

Another respondent wrote: “This is not the entire point of marriage. It is an important piece to marriage. God designed marriage to be a paradigm of God’s relationship to the church and a foreshadow of what is to come: Jesus coming for His bride.”



Q12, which is closely related to Q3 in teasing out the tension between love as commodity or covenant, also shows a shift in responses. Whereas 44.44 percent agreed with Q12 in the pre-intervention questionnaire, 33.33 percent agreed with Q12 in the post-intervention questionnaire. One respondent commented:

Marriage is a covenant relationship for the purpose of oneness. Did the couple buy into the idea of romance as a commodity? If this relationship doesn't work out, I can throw it away and get another one. Something drew the couple together that deserves another look. Perhaps, with some counseling and instruction they may find they love one another and may decide to remain married, and commit to a deeper, loving relationship.

Q8 saw a remarkable shift in responses and was designed to expose the cultural romantic belief of love conquers all. About 30 percent of respondents agreed with Q8 in the pre-intervention questionnaire and about 16 percent agreed with Q8 in the post-intervention questionnaire. One respondent stated, "The cultural image of 'true love' is a fairy tale. What guarantees happiness in my marriage is a committed Christ like love."

Q4 and Q 14 were designed to expose adherence to soulmate theory. Both questions saw significant shifts. Q4 saw a decrease by about 39 percent agreeing with the statement, and Q14 saw a decrease by about 6 percent agreeing with the statement. Q4 could have been written in a different way considering that some respondents may have been answering from the perspective of God's sovereignty rather than soulmate theory. However, on Q4 one respondent demonstrated an ability to differentiate between the two when they wrote:

Again, this question can be interpreted and answered in different ways, for this reason: the circumstances surrounding my marriage leaves me no doubt that my spouse and I were meant to be together. However, when considering 'covenant' concept, no, my spouse may NOT have been the only person God intended me to marry. This also 'flies in the face' of the cultural concept of 'soul mate,' 'my only true love,' etc.

A similar sentiment was stated by another responded on Q14 is as follows: “The concept of ‘soulmate’ is a cultural fantasy; life is not a Hallmark movie. If I fall out of love with my spouse, I need to look at myself and my relationship with God. It’s not all about me, I was not created to be worshipped but to worship.”

Whereas Q11 saw an overall decrease in the number of respondents that agreed with the statement, the quantitative data for the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire were of similar spread. However, one respondent commented: “Marriage is a covenant, a commitment. Feelings ebb and flow and marriage is not all about me, it’s about giving to my spouse as Christ gave to the church, as Christ gave to humanity, as Christ gave to me.”

Table 4.6 Comparison of Responses to Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire Spiritual Oneness					Pre-Intervention Responses in Color				
					Post-Intervention Responses in Color				
		N	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Q5	When it is difficult to love my spouse, I often think about God’s love for me as a model for the way I am to love my spouse	27	18.52%	29.63%	37.04%	14.81%	0%	2.48	.96
		24	12.5%	41.67%	37.5%	8.33%	0%	2.42	.81
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
Q13		26	7.69%	11.54%	42.31%	38.46		3.12	.89

My relationship with God and my relationship with my spouse are separate aspects of my life.	24	0%	4.17%	66.67%	29.17%	3.25	.52
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Q5 saw a slight increase in the overall number of respondents agreeing with the statement. No quantitative responses were collected for this question.

Q13 saw a decrease in the number of participants that agreed with the statement. Whereas almost 20 percent of respondents agreed in the pre-intervention questionnaire, only 4.17 percent agreed in the post-intervention questionnaire. On this statement, one respondent wrote, “My relationship with God is the basis of and example of my relationship with my spouse.” Another commented, “Our marriage is to be a sermon, reflecting the love of Christ and oneness with his church.”

Table 4.7 Comparison of Responses to Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire Emotional Oneness					Pre-Intervention Responses in Color			
					Post-Intervention Responses in Color			
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Q6	Before getting married, I thought it was important to understand my spouse’s family and their relationship patterns.	27	7.41%	29.63%	44.44%	14.81%	2.69	.82
		24	8.33%	29.17%	62.5%	0%	2.54	.64

Q7	I think past hurts should be left in the past so that they don't impact my marriage.	26	34.62%	15.38%	30.77%	15.38	2.28	1.11
		24	16.67%	29.17%	29.17%	25%	2.63	1.03
Q15	I should not dwell on what happened in my family of origin, but instead I should focus solely on my spouse for a happy life.	26	7.69%	38.46%	19.23%	3.85%	2.28	.73
		24	16.67%	16.67%	37.5%	29.17%	2.79	1.04
Q16	Spouses who were meant to be together naturally have less conflict than those who were not meant to be together.	27	11.11%	18.52%	62.96%	3.7%	2.62	.74
		24	4.17%	33.33%	45.83%	16.67%	2.75	.78

Q6 saw a similar data spread across both collectors. This may be due to the way that the question was worded. The question focuses around a fixed time in the respondent's life, and, therefore, would not see any change. There may have been quantitative change noted if the question had been stated objectively such as, "Before getting married, it is important to understand your spouse's family and their relationship patterns." Nevertheless, qualitative data shows that respondents had a change in knowledge. One respondent wrote, "Now things have really changed, and I see how much our family of origins have had significant influence on our relationship and how we respond to each other." Another wrote: "I believe this now: however, I was too young age-wise and in my walk with Christ. Now years later after working through my past

hurts and those of others God has brought to me, I know that understanding the relationships of my husband family as well as mine is important before getting married.”

Another respondent demonstrated generational thinking in their response when they wrote, “I didn’t do a lot of note taking in this area, but I believe it is very important and will definitely encourage my children to do this when the time comes.”

Q7 showed differences in responses as 50 percent of respondents overall agreed with the statement in the pre-intervention questionnaire and 45.84 percent agreed in the post-intervention questionnaire. One respondent commented, “I believe past hurts usually enter into a marriage and need to be talked about so that they can be forgiven and prayed for.” Another respondent, referring to the model of conflict presented by Sells and Yarhouse in Chapter 2, wrote: “The model of three fights in one certainly has played out in our marriage! It is helpful to be aware of what we both bring into our marriage, to repent, seek forgiveness, and humbly move forward in Christ’s grace and mercy. Thanks be to God, Christ does redeem and transform us, so change is possible.”

For Q15, 46.15 percent of respondents overall agreed with the statement in the pre-intervention questionnaire and 33.34 percent of respondents overall agreed with the statement in the post-intervention questionnaire. On this shift, one respondent wrote, “I have to deal with, understand what happened in my family of origin, identify what I behave or react as I do, and then build a happy life with my spouse.” Another wrote: “...family of origin issues can affect how we communicate, our ideas of intimacy, what to ‘expect’ in a spouse, etc. Often ‘the sins of the generations’ trickle down into marriage. These issues must be dealt with and healed.”

A concluding comment is worth making on this research theme. The lack of awareness for the self-reflection on familial systems may be representative of the age of the participants. It was not a normative practice for older generation to do psychological study in contrast to climate of younger generations.

<b>Table 4.8 Comparison of Responses to Pre/Post-Intervention Questionnaire Physical Oneness</b>					<b>Pre-Intervention Responses in Color</b>			
					<b>Post-Intervention Responses in Color</b>			
		N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Q9	Sex in marriage is exciting at first, but eventually the passion fades.	26	7.69%	53.85%	30.77%	7.69%	2.38	.74
		24	4.17%	45.83%	41.67%	8.33%	2.54	.71
Q10	Sex is designed solely for the purpose of having children.	27	0%	3.7%	48.15%	48.15%	3.44	.57
		24	0%	0%	41.67%	58.33%	3.58	.49
Q17	Sex is permitted in the Bible, but the Bible mostly speaks about physical love negatively.	27	3.7%	7.41%	55.56%	33.33%	3.19	.72
		24	0%	0%	41.67%	54.17%	3.57	.5

Q18	I want to have a fulfilling physical relationship with my spouse, but I am sometimes embarrassed or uncomfortable with my body.	27	7.41%	37.04%	40.74%	14.81%	2.63	.82
		24	4.17%	41.67%	37.5%	16.67%	2.67	.80
Q19	My spouse and I are partly responsible for each other's sexual holiness.	26	23.08%	65.38%	0%	7.69%	1.92	.74
		24	25%	70.83%	0%	4.17%	1.83	.62

There was a slight decrease to the number of respondents that agreed with the statement of Q9. However, qualitative data shows a change in knowledge as one respondent wrote, “There’s no reason that passion must fade. We need to work at it to maintain the passion.” Another commented, “God’s intent is that the romance and excitement never end. He has designed our bodies this way, we thrive in marriage when the desire does not end.” A third respondent wrote, “Passion between the two marriage partners is a God created delight. It must be attended to as anything between a husband and his wife, as a fire must be stroked/kindled.”

Q10 saw no respondents agree in the post-intervention questionnaire, and an increase of 10 percent strongly disagreeing with the statement in the post-intervention questionnaire. One respondent framed the change in knowledge this way, “Sex is not made solely for having children. Sex is still important beyond the childbearing year. God created sex as an integral part of marriage as a husband and wife give themselves to each other.”

Q17 also showed a marked shift in knowledge where about 10 percent agreed with the statement in the pre-intervention questionnaire, no respondents agreed in the post-intervention questionnaire. One respondent clarifies, “It is only spoken of negatively if it is illicit.” Another respondent added, “Scripture is rich with ‘steamy’ passages about the beauty and appreciation for each other’s bodies and sexual intimacy.” A third respondent wrote, “Physical love is a beautiful thing in the context of marriage God commands it between husband and wife. Song of Solomon proves the physical aspect of marriage to be enjoyed.”

Q18 showed no real change as far as the quantitative data is concerned. However, the qualitative responses showed change in knowledge and attitude concerning the body. One respondent wrote, “This is the body our Lord gave me. With that knowledge why would anyone be negative of it.” Another respondent commented on a change in knowledge, but tension in attitude when they wrote:

I am not comfortable with my body. I know it’s not my own, I know I am the image of God, but I’m not comfortable with myself. That’s something I’ve dealt with most of my life and I work on it. I love that my husband still finds me attractive and desirable. That helps me to be more comfortable in our physical relationship.

Q19 showed similar results in the quantitative analysis, although there was an almost 7 percent increase in the overall respondents that agreed with the statement. However, the qualitative responses articulate a change in knowledge concerning the topic of sexual holiness. One respondent wrote: “Sexual fulfillment in marriage helps guard against sexual immorality, as does devotion to one another, forgiveness, building one another up in love, and growing in oneness with Christ and with one another.” On Q19 another respondent wrote: “We should treat each other with love, compassion, giving and



understanding. Using a physical relationship as a reward or punishment of a spouse is a recipe for disaster. If a couple has a sexual relationship as God intended and for the reasons intended, then it should keep each other in a holy sexual relationship.”

### **Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

The third research question was: which aspects of the small group experience did participants identify as most significant? This question was answered through the semi-structured interview that was conducted two months after the last workshop. The semi-structured interview was conducted by a trained research assistant and a total of three couples who had participated in the workshops. The questions for the semi-structured interview included the following.

- Q1 What stood out as the most memorable portion of the workshops?
- Q2 What was the most uncomfortable portion of the workshop?
- Q3 What had the most meaningful impact on your own marriage?
- Q4 What from the workshop do you think others should hear the most?
- Q5 How has the workshops impacted your relationship with Jesus?
- Q6 Is there anything else that you would like to share?

#### **Q1 What stood out as the most memorable portion of the workshops?**

Three themes emerged from this question including awareness of the cultural romantic narrative, appreciation for marriage as a reflection of Christ and the church, and demonstrating romance from the Scriptures.

When the research assistant posed the first question, the majority of responses centered around the impact of having the cultural romantic narrative illustrated. The terminology presented in the workshops was that of, “cultural schema,” and by, “schema,” I, the researcher, mean an organized system of beliefs and expectations. The

particular cultural schema presented in the workshops is articulated at the conclusion of Chapter 2. In the interview, M1 commented:

I think the thing that keeps coming back to mind is the cultural schema and how we have been influenced by it. You know I guess in a way I knew that, but not realizing, you know, we are where we are today because of that influence, whether it's our family or things we watch or things we have been exposed to.

M1's spouse, F1, elaborated by saying, "And to me it was like putting a face on the enemy." F1 then continued to articulate that they have seen the results of the cultural narrative, specifically referring to, "the isolation, the depression etc., and we see that in our kids..." Referring to the romantic state of their children who are married, F1 diagnosed, "...that's the reason why our kids are where they are in their marriages..." and in reference to F1's unmarried child, "...it is the culture that she is looking for, you know the one true love..."

M2 agreed with M1 and F1 by stating:

Ya, I found that that was the thing that really stayed with me, um, I became so much more aware of that and now I look for that on TV, I'm like, Oh that's not what I thought it was, and uh, that was quite and an awakening and like you said it was kind of there underneath like: Is that really true? And: Am I doing it right? And that was very encouraging to me to see the truth behind it.

M2's spouse F2 elaborated by saying:

What stood out to me was that you know that that was there, the unrealistic expectations or the um, and I, I just see it so much in the Disney movies now, Oh my one true love I saw them across the room, but linking it with well, that is from the devil, that is from Satan, and then being more aware of it to see how subliminally it permeates everything. Um, in our media in our entertainment, even watching commercials now it's like, Oh look.

F1 summarized the discussion on this theme by saying: "...until you see, you know, when you have that picture and you are supposed to look for the different items in the picture, and some of them you don't see until they are pointed out, to me this brought

them out. So, you can see the snake in the grass you know it's been there all along, so pop there it is." Thus, the first major theme that emerged as the most memorable portion of the workshop was the ability to discern and name the cultural narrative concerning romance.

The second theme that emerged as the most memorable portion of the workshop was appreciation for marriage as a reflection of Christ and the Church. This theme was brought out by F3 and was articulated as a compliment to being able to discern and name the cultural narrative. F3 stated:

Absolutely True, I agree with everything and I appreciate, I think the class just encouraged me, it empowered me, it undergirded everything I believe about um, what our relationship in marriage is to the world, it is the church and Christ's relationship and um, it just, I can feel so alone, and after coming out of this class I mean I felt, YES! You know, it really empowered us to march on, to move on, you know and I just felt like we weren't alone and that we were really strengthened by this class and gave us courage to know that when we stand before our children and our culture that we are standing in truth so that really we appreciate it very much.

The third theme that emerged as the most memorable portion of the workshop was illustrating romance from the Scriptures. F2 concurred with F3's aforementioned comments and then elaborated on the theme, expressing appreciation for showing romance from the Scriptures. F2 stated:

I also like the bringing out that the ultimate love, the ultimate relationship is with God, but bringing out the romance in Scripture because I had remembered it from song of songs, and, but to bring that out because God wants you to have romance in your marital relationship, and it's a good thing. So, it was nice to bring that out and highlight that.

## **Q2 What was the most uncomfortable portion of the workshop?**

This question was the least interacted with as F2 jokingly stated that the most uncomfortable portion of the workshop was, "sitting in those chairs." This prompted

laughter from the participants, to which she clarified, “Nothing of the class I found uncomfortable.” F1 did volunteer: “I think for me it was more personal from the standpoint that I was reminded yet again how far I fall short of that which Christ wants for me and that grieves me. So, if anything the discomfort is bringing me to my knees which is a very good place to be...”

### **Q3 What had the most meaningful impact on your own marriage?**

Two themes emerged from this question including viewing the other as redeemed and dying to oneself for the sake of the other. M1 opened the dialogue with the following comment:

I think it's a general, um, just some of the things that were covered opened up a dialogue between (F1) and I to discuss things that maybe we hadn't addressed before, um, can't think of anything specific right off hand, but ya, like (F1) said there are a lot of things we had before and I think even now we are still wrestling with the ideas ok, these are great ideas, concepts and stuff like that, how do we put it into practice, how do we make it work for us, how do we walk it out. To see one another as redeemed. I'd like to do that I'd like to see her as redeemed; I'd like her to see me as redeemed (laughter).

Within M1's comments, the specific comment to see each other as redeemed, especially in the midst of conflict, was a major theme from the workshops. This was furthered by F3 in her comment, “to be purposeful in looking at each other, forgiving one another, knowing that we are transforming one another...” F2 also pushed this theme in her comment, referring to M2: “And I felt that I needed to be more intentional as seeing (M2) as my beloved, and thinking of that phrase you know my beloved, because he is, but I'm very human and I have little patience, and just be more patient and saying no this is my beloved the one I cherish, not get impatient and um, snippety.”

Within F2's aforementioned comment, there is both viewing the redeemed status of her spouse as indicated in the title, "my beloved," but there is also the sentiment of dying to herself. This notion was picked up by her spouse when he stated: "I think it's helped me. I hate to admit that times I can be selfish want something for me and I think that certainly the classes have helped me with that reducing that need and realizing how wrong it really is, and uh being able to put it aside and thinking more of (F2) than myself."

#### **Q4 What from the workshop do you think others should hear the most?**

This question was by far the most interacted with by all the participants and multiple themes emerged and were repeated. Those themes include the cultural narrative, emotional intelligence, positive expression of passion from Scripture, and pre-marital counseling issues. These themes were intermingled and dispersed as the conversation progresses so the responses quoted will not necessarily be given in the order that they were spoken in response to this question.

Beginning with the theme of the cultural narrative, M3 stated, "I think we touched upon earlier that there is a cultural answer that is opposed to God's answer and we can stand up to that." F1 responded by stating, "And the results of the culture, what it is bringing about, the isolation and depression," to which M1 agreed, "Yes, that's big, that's huge." Later in the interview F2 stated: "And I think that the fact that it's, it's God's way and the culture opposes it and how sneaky the culture is at getting, um permeating everything from media to books to bring that way in, it's so hard to hear God's positive message of love and marriage in today's culture and how strengthening it is to hear it."

The second theme that emerged in this question was that of emotional intelligence especially in light of conflict. F1 began her comments by bringing out the, “three fights in one,” referring to the Sells and Yarhouse model articulated in Chapter 2. She goes on in a later comment to refer to the concept of differentiation: “...but what was described in the class was more that I know who I am and that I can remain myself in relationship with others but I don’t need to be influenced or my reactions or responses don’t have to be influenced by others so that I can maintain relationship rather than isolating...”

F1 then relates the concept of emotional intelligence in contrast to the cultural narrative when she says:

...it reminds me more of keeping good boundaries and instead of being codependent being interdependent because I think the culture with all the nonsense of I complete the other and they complete me, I want to gag because it’s not true, only Christ completes me so it helps to reinforce that. We are not leaning tower of Pisa’s leaning against one another...

Later, during the time allotted for Q5, F1 revisited this theme. F1 stated:

I think I would like to go back to, if I may about what others could benefit by, what we learned. Conflict. We have experienced in our relationship the being able to walk through the conflict and draw closer, we have been married 46, um, 47 years, we really do draw closer to one another, we grow stronger, and the idea that culture gives us as disposable, this didn’t work out so I’m go here.

She then goes on to relate how conflict is an opportunity to grow closer to not only one’s spouse, but also to Christ when she says:

I think though, not that I need to look for conflict but that I can embrace it, more or less, um and if I walk through that then I’m not only drawn closer to Christ but also to my spouse. And that’s important because I don’t think the world gives a very good example about conflict, not that I’m seeing on around here in the world. Somehow, we have come a long way from resolving and working through differences if you will and being better people for it. That was emphasized and that was helpful.

On this point, her husband M1 responded, “Spoken from two avoiders of conflict.”

The third theme that emerged in this question was the positive expression of passion from Scripture. F2, remarking on a comment about the cultural narrative stated:

And I think to put it in the positive light that the world, and it comes from Satan, is saying love is all that matters and marriage can be between any... no that's not what God said but the class didn't say no that's wrong it said this is God's ideal so putting it in a positive way, this is what God wants for you this is what God's love represented in marriage is like and this is what he says, his word, but not condemning.

F2's specific comment in the aforementioned block, “putting it in a positive way,” refers to the content concerning the elements of marital love that are more sexual in nature. Consider the following dialogue:

F1: ...by putting the theology of romance together with this class it highlights that wow as you were saying, you know, ok culture is saying this but, in the third class on the Song of Songs and all that God desires I'm thinking, here's what culture gives you, isolation and depression, and this is what God has for you, let me think about it! You know! (laughter) There is no comparison. But again, God has so much, and he is always drawing us to that, and the world is speaking really loudly...

M1: I think louder than the church.

All: Yes...

M1: That's what struck me that the church needs to get that word, that message, the theology of romance however you want to call it, because there are a couple of guys that I get together with on a fairly regular basis and when I mentioned that we just had a class on the theology of romance it was like, Ooo, they peaked (laughter), and they go to solid Christian Bible based churches but we're not hearing that message. I think the world's message is louder.

In this dialogue, not only is the already mentioned theme of the cultural narrative repeated, but the assertion that the positive expression of the more sexualized and passionate elements of marriage needs to be shared.

The fourth theme that emerged in this question was the topic of pre-marital counseling. F3 stated, “I wish somehow, and I don't know how to do it, but I wish we

could hear more of his seminary in um, premarital counseling. I would have loved to have that foundation.” F2 agreed by saying: “I was just thinking that cause years and years ago, going through pre-Cana classes in the Catholic Church and it was four weeks long. None of this was brought up! And I was like, wow that would have been really good!” This prompted the following dialogue among the participants:

F1: We did a course, um, caring for the heart, it’s a counseling service in Colorado, anyway we went through um different trainings if you will, and thinking dear Lord it would have been really lovely to have had this when we got married the list of what God’s design for marriage, and I’m thinking I didn’t have any of that. I mean I don’t remember any of that from our premarital counseling. I remember receiving a Bible (laughter), that’s a good thing...

F3: And that really is a reflection of the culture and the power of the culture. My parents you know, never had any counseling. We had counseling, we were required, but I look back and I think...

M3: But our counseling involved taking a personality test (laughter)...

F3: I know, I know...

Thus, the participants expressed that couples preparing to be married should hear the material expressed in the workshops through their own desire to have heard the material instead of their own premarital counseling experience.

#### **Q5 How has the workshops impacted your relationship with Jesus?**

The two themes for this question included reliance on Jesus, and forgiveness. M1 shared a summary of a conversation with his spouse, F1, “I think we were talking about it in the car coming over here to realize how much more we are dependent upon him because we fall short. In our relationship and other things as well.” M2 echoes a similar sentiment when he stated, “I find myself seeking him much more than I had before. In many things, its expanded beyond the romance.” M3 added, “I think it emphasized to me what I already knew, the Lordship of Christ in every area of Life.”



**Q6 Is there anything else that you would like to share?**

The responses to this question included a wide range of comments. There was a discussion about how small breakout discussion groups could have made the workshops better as well as one respondent wanting to have the information to provide for their adult children. However, most poignant in the responses was the following conversation:

F2: One thing I find, uh, and the class brought it out and brought it home to me but I am not a patient person, and I find myself at times now, you know things going on in our marriage, saying you know, if Christ could suffer on a cross for me surely I can bite my tongue and let this thing go.

M2: (Laughter) Thank you honey.

All: (Laughter)

M1: You have a lot of scars (laughter)

F2: Well I'm opinionated and I'm impatient. But not to hold onto that but to say, Christ did that for me I can do that for my husband.

M1: That's a good perspective. I think that's the walking out of redeemed. Because it was his blood shed for us on the cross.

F1: I am redeemed, and I am being redeemed.

This dialogue exposes two attitudes working in harmony. The first is that the person and work of Christ is the motivation and enablement for love between husband and wife. The second attitude is viewing one's spouse as redeemed.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Whereas there were many things learned across multiple research themes, there were three major findings that unified them all. They are listed here numerically.

1. Naming and critiquing the cultural narrative of romantic love helped participants disassociate from those beliefs and have a greater appreciation for the biblical narrative of romantic love.

2. Teaching participants to think theologically about marriage increased their affection for Christ as well as their spouses.
3. Demonstrating an ideal and positive expression of romantic love from the Scriptures, rather than focusing on prohibitions, encouraged and excited participants in their marital relationship.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the changes in knowledge and attitude concerning a theology of romance for married couples. The research themes included the definition of marriage, spiritual oneness, emotional oneness, and physical oneness. The cultural narrative as outlined at the conclusion of Chapter 2 was presented at the beginning of the first workshop. Against this backdrop, a theology of romance was presented in the remainder of the workshops.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe in more detail the major findings were presented at the conclusion of Chapter 4. The ministry implications are then discussed, followed by a description of the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with unexpected observations, and recommendations for further study.

#### Major Findings

**First Finding—Naming and critiquing the cultural narrative of romantic love helped participants disassociate from those beliefs and have a greater appreciation for the biblical narrative of romantic love.**

As I implemented this ministry transformation project, I was absolutely surprised at the reaction I received in naming and critiquing the cultural narrative of romantic love. In the workshop, I outlined that the underlying value concerning love in our culture is that of a commodity. If the relationship is valuable in satiating my romantic needs, I therefore declare the relationship valuable. If it no longer satiates my needs, it is no longer of value and I dispose of it. I then articulated the essential romantic beliefs from

Sprecher and Metts as stated in the literature review and showed from statistical surveys the rise of anxiety and depression within society as a result of dysfunctional romantic relationships. The overall sentiments that I received from participants, even long after data collection, was how this pattern was right in front of their faces all along, but they were not able to see it until it was named and critiqued.

The other side of this equation was greater appreciation for the biblical narrative of romantic love. As participants became more aware of the cultural narrative concerning romantic love, and especially the wake of destruction that it provides by way of mental health and broken homes, the participants grew in their appreciation for the biblical narrative of romantic love. A few of the participants shared with me after the study that they were originally hesitant to participate in the study but were glad that they did specifically because of the time spent on critiquing the cultural narrative. They commented that it created a burden within to hear the biblical narrative concerning romantic love.

In the literature review, Vanhoozer offered insight into the formative nature of the culture. As stated earlier, Vanhoozer argues that culture is produced and reproduced by means of cultural texts that communicate and embody the worldview of the producer (49). Since the worldview is presented under the guise of a narrative or parable, the underlying value is often received unchallenged. Furthermore, acceptance of the value reveals the invisible nature of cultural norms. They are assumed, understood, and reside under the surface of our worldview. Therefore, it follows that in order to challenge those cultural norms, they must be raised to the surface and critiqued.

There are at least three examples of Scripture offering a critique for the cultural narrative of romance including Proverbs 5, 1 Corinthians 6-7, and the household presented in numerous Epistles. In Proverbs 5, the teacher juxtaposes sexuality with the adulterous woman and the wife of one's youth. The description of sexuality with the adulterous woman is in the form of a critique which highlights the destructive path. As already discussed in Chapter 2, the teacher concedes that whereas the adulterous woman may be enticing, the adulterous affair ultimately leads to death. On the other hand, the image of sexuality with one's wife is celebrated with exhortation of passion, and the relationship is described as leading to life as illustrated in drinking from a well. Thus, the author of Proverbs prepares the reader to appreciate and embrace God's wisdom through a critique of the folly found in the world.

The second example of critiquing the cultural narrative to be discussed is found in 1 Corinthians 6-7. In his letter, Paul utilized similar themes as did the author of Proverbs. He begins his critique by quoting their own theological slogans in order to refute them (1 Cor. 6:12-13). Thus, he constructs before their own eyes the outworking of their incorrect theology of the body. He then provides a true theology of the body, specifically that the body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit and a member of the body of Christ. He then shows the logical conclusion that to unite their bodies to a prostitute is to unite Christ to a prostitute. Thus, his teaching on Christ simultaneously puts forth a positive theology and deconstructs the cultural narrative. This prepares the Corinthians to hear his admonition that husband and wife freely give their bodies to one another in utter devotion.

The third example is found in the presentation of the household codes, especially as found in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter. These codes have already been discussed in Chapter 2, but it is important to mention that these codes do not find their origin with the apostles. Rather, they are a critique and reimagining of the household codes of the culture. They must, therefore, be understood first as a critique of the cultural narrative for marriage in the Greco-Roman world.

**Second Finding—Teaching participants to think theologically about marriage increased their affection for Christ as well as of their spouses.**

The first workshop was broken up into two parts. The first part was naming and critiquing the cultural narrative of romantic. The second part was an exposition of God's redemptive mission through an analysis of the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus. At the core of this exposition was God's desire to be in relationship with his people. Additionally, implications concerning the redeemed status of each spouse was made for further application in later workshops. This important theological bedrock was laid so that the implication of marriage as a reflection of Christ and the church could be made more powerful.

One participant told me after the first workshop that it was the first time that they understood the overarching story of the Bible and the gravity of God's undying love for his people. Additionally, other participants shared with me how it made them more confident of Christ's love for them individually.

With regard to spouses' affection for each other, I observed that some spouses spoke to each other and about each other differently. These differences are noted in Chapter 4, especially referring to spouses as "redeemed" and "my beloved." In the

second workshop, Paul's differentiation between himself as redeemed and his sin nature as described in Romans 7 was described. This concept was utilized to frame how married couples are to handle conflict when it arises. Specifically, to forgive one another as they have been forgiven and to view the other as redeemed in Christ. The narrative of Christ's love for the church was overlapped in the experience of conflict resolution for married couples.

In the literature review, I briefly discussed Sternberg's concept of interpreting one's experience of love through a hierarchy of stories. Sternberg argues that persons interpret their romantic experience through their own personal fiction and that there may be multiple stories within their grid of interpretation (5). In thinking theologically about marriage, there is an overlapping of stories that frames the romantic experience. There is the narrative concerning God's faithful pursuit of his people, and there is the command that husbands and wives love one another in the covenant of marriage. There is the marriage of Christ and the Church, and this love is to be reflected in marriage between husband and wife. In my observation, participants grew in their affection toward Christ and their spouse as the overlapping of these two narratives became more apparent.

The overlapping of these narratives is well established in both the Old and New Testaments. As already discussed in Chapter 2, the prophet Hosea provides the most poignant description of God as the husband of Israel. Additionally, in the New Testament, Paul provides the most poignant description of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Revelation provides that the culminating event in redemptive history is the marriage between the Church and the Lamb. Furthermore, especially in the New Testament letters, the motivation to love one's spouse is driven and enabled by Christ's

love for the church. In my observations of this project, when spouses think theologically about loving their spouse through these overlapping narratives, it leads to greater affection for both Christ and their spouse.

**Third Finding—Demonstrating an ideal and positive expression of romantic love from the Scriptures, rather than focusing on prohibitions, encouraged and excited participants in their marital relationship.**

This was one of the themes that emerged in the semi-structured interview, and it was a common sentiment expressed to me by the participants outside data collection. One of the problems stated in Chapter One is the perception that the church emphasizes what the church is opposed to with regards to romance at the exclusion of a positive expression. In light of this problem, participants were intrigued to hear more about regularly ignored portions of Scripture such as the Song of Songs. In fact, a few participants expressed that the material on the Song of Songs was the motivating factor for their participation in the study. At the conclusion of the workshops, many participants asked for more detailed exposition of the Song of Songs and expressed appreciation for the positive model of love that affirmed and encouraged their own marital relationships.

In the literature review, this notion of providing an ideal and positive expression comes from the discussion of cultural texts as well as romantically themed media. It is well established, as discussed in the literature review, that adherence to romantic beliefs comes from consuming those beliefs within the context of narrative. These narratives are often in the form of an ideal or positive expression, and it is because of the ideal expression that adherence to the romantic belief occurs. One of the goals of the



workshops was to provide a positive expression to combat the narratives expressed by the culture.

Within Scripture, ideal expressions are common. As already discussed, God himself is defined as the supreme ideal for love. Additionally, the love between Christ and the Church is defined as the ideal expression for husband and wife. However, there are particular ideal expressions specific to the love between husband and wife within the Scriptures. Most notably, the Song of Songs provides an ideal expression of romantic love through erotic poetry. The lyrics of the Song of Songs provide a kind of script for husband and wife. Both Duguid and Longman describe the Song as an idealized depiction of love between husband and wife (Duguid 37; Longman, *Song of Songs* 66). Thus, within the pages of Scripture, God himself provides an ideal and positive expression of love between husband and wife.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

The first implication of this research is a new level of engagement with cultural values. It is not enough to enter into a screaming match with the culture, and the days of conservative political influence over cultural morals is long over. Instead, the church must enter into a new level of engagement with cultural values that demonstrates the logical conclusion of those values in a tangible way. As demonstrated in the literature review, the voice of the culture concerning romance absolutely saturates the entertainment industry. The cultural voice must be answered by the church in meaningful and creative ways.

The second implication of this research is a reinvigorated interest and application of systematic theology in relation to the marital relationship. Behind the major research

themes hides a theological doctrine of the church. For example, in the workshop on physical oneness, significant time was spent expounding a theology of the body.

Additionally, in the workshop on emotional oneness, significant time was spent on the doctrines of grace in relation to forgiveness and repentance. The subsequent discussions on sexuality and conflict resolution were merely outworking's of these theological doctrines as they relate to the marital relationship. My research shows that systematic theology does not have to be an abstract academic affair, but instead systematics can and do have tremendous bearing on daily modern life.

The third implication of this research is the establishment of a theological approach to the relationship of marriage. Many of the participants in the study commented that their premarital counseling either largely or exclusively consisted of personality compatibility assessments. If we assume that the majority of conflict in marriage is the result of personality differences, then it logically follows that compatibility tools are the answer. On the other hand, if we assume that the source of conflict in marriage is sin, then it logically follows that the doctrines of grace and repentance are the answer (Jas. 4.1). My point in exposing this is that a significant implication of this research is to question our own assumptions as we approach the relationship of marriage and the tools that we bring. This does not mean that we should adopt a purely theological approach at the expense of personality assessment tools. Rather, I believe a both/and approach is the wise option with the theological approach informing personality studies.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were a few limitations to this study that warrant explanation. The limitations include the age of the participants, scheduling conflicts, and changes measured.

First of all, due to the overall demographics of Prince of Peace Church at the time of the study, the participants predominantly consisted of baby boomers and older generation x. Whereas I am truly grateful for their participation and I in no way would have excluded them, I do believe the study would be strengthened with a greater presence of millennials for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the cohort effect observed in Chapter 4 relating to the awareness of familial patterns. I believe that the data will show difference results with a population that has more sensitivities to psychological science. The second reason has to do with the consumption of romantic media. Millennials grew up with formative stories from the 90s Disney princess movies and are among the largest consumers of romantically themed television as previously discussed in Chapter 2. Whereas the participants in this study demonstrated adherence to cultural romantic beliefs, I believe the adherence among Millennials is stronger.

A second limitation included scheduling conflicts. The mandatory evacuation cause by Hurricane Dorian took place in the week prior to when the first workshop was originally scheduled. Normal life did not resume until after the first workshop was originally planned. This required postponing the workshops to later in the fall where it competed with other programs for space and participants.

The third limitation revolves around the changes that were measured. This study was specifically limited to knowledge and attitudes with behaviors not measured. There

was good data provided on the changes of knowledge and attitude that provided possible insight into changed behavior. However, behavior was not a focus of this study.

### **Unexpected Observations**

There was a common pattern that emerged in the weeks leading up to the first workshop. I was approached by a few women that expressed a strong desire to participate in the study, but their husband strongly objected. Additionally, some couples sheepishly approached me asking for more clarification on the content of the study. Clearly, they were interested; however, they were very hesitant for some reason.

Another common pattern emerged as I introduced my project in conversation. When I stated that my project was a theology of romance for married couples, it was almost always met with a blank stare. Upon explaining the project, I would either be met with further confusion or comments of affirmation. I believe that the reactions of confusion, hesitation, and interest exposes a significant weak spot in the ministry of the church, specifically, that the idea of romance is largely ignored within the cultural climate of Christianity.

### **Recommendations**

Here are a few recommendations for improving this study followed by recommendations for future areas of research.

My first recommendation for improving this study includes the overall length of the workshops. I implemented three workshops corresponding to the three major research themes. In both my late preparation and during the implementation, I was painfully aware that I had enough content to fill 6 to 8 weeks. I believe that slowing down to go deeper with the concepts over an 8-week period would have strengthened the results.

My second recommendation for improving the study involves the format of the workshops. A significant limitation to the study included the space available, which was not conducive to breaking into small groups for discussion. As a result, the discussion time at the conclusion of the workshops was in the context of the large group of thirty-two participants. Participant feedback in the semi-structured interview stated that they would have liked small breakout conversations rather than large group discussion.

My first recommendation for future research includes applications to premarital counseling. Many respondents expressed the regret that they did not have this material before they were married. An area of future application includes premarital workshops and study guides tailored to fit the needs of singles that are considering marriage.

My second recommendation for future research includes divorce recovery. Whereas divorce and remarriage were excluded from this research, I believe that a future area of research includes the incorporation of the research themes presented for individuals recovering from divorce.

My third and perhaps most important recommendation for future research includes age appropriate education for children and teenagers. As stated in the literature review, the cultural narrative of romantic love is embedded in media directly aimed at children and teenagers. Thus, at an early age the cultural script is already deeply embedded within the minds of children. Creative and age appropriate ways of countering that narrative by the incorporation of this research is, I believe, at the utmost importance.

As previously stated in Chapter 1, this study is highly general as it is rooted in the study of theology and not the particularities of a particular people group. Therefore, the applications of this study extend even beyond this particular culture. For example, if this

study was to be implemented in an African context then relevant research for the cultural narrative concerning romance within the African context would replace the North American research in this study.

### **Postscript**

When I first proposed this idea for my research project in casual conversations to friends and relatives, I was initially met with resistance. Some individuals recommended that I choose a different topic that was not so personal or taboo. Others, specifically other pastors, looked at me with resistance and disbelief as if to say, “are you really going to do that?” Under the advice of these individuals, all whom I greatly love and trust, I considered choosing a different topic. However, I felt as if the Lord was truly calling me to be faithful in this journey. Paul’s preaching in the Areopagus in Acts 17 came to mind, specifically his boldness to proclaim the resurrection of the dead as central to Christian belief. In doing so, he pushed against cultural norms and taboos for the sake of Jesus. I used this way of thinking as encouragement to continue in my project, and I am glad that I did. The amount of affirmation and gratitude expressed from participants significantly overshadows the initial resistance shown concerning the topic—a topic that I believe is central to the Christian faith.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A. Ministry Intervention

#### Theology of Romance for Married Couples Session I: Understanding the Cultural Narrative against the Story of Redemption

##### I. The Greatest Thing in the World? – The Cultural Understanding of Romance (Film Clip from The Princess Bride)

A. What is Romance? - Cognitive Schema

B. Where do these beliefs come from?

1. Culture formation–Vanhoozer quote

2. Sources of Cultural formation

C. Constructing the Cultural Understanding of Romance

1. Iceberg Metaphor – Observable actions above the surface, theology below the surface

2. “Escape” by Rupert Holmes – love as commodity

3. Four Universal Elements of Romance – Sprecher and Metts

a. Film Clip – Wedding Crashers

b. Film Clip – The Little Mermaid

4. Underlying Values in Cultural Understanding of Romance

a. Commodity – Online dating practices as defined by Regnerus

b. Primacy of the Self – Prolific use of pornography, gratification of need

c. Sexuality as appetite – Pornography and Romance Genre

5. Consequences of Cultural Understanding of Romance

- a. Serial Monogamy
- b. Greater levels of depression and anxiety

6. Summary

II. The Truly Greatest thing in the World – John 3:16, John 15:13, Ephesians 5:25-33

A. Theology of Romance Overview

1. Iceberg Metaphor

a. Observable actions above the surface – Love between Husband and Wife

b. Theology below the surface

(1). The Story of Christ and the Church

(2). Covenantal Love

(3). Salvation by Grace

(4). Repentance/Forgiveness

(5). Theology of the Body

(6). Theology of Sexuality

C. The Story of Redemption

1. The Exodus

2. The Kings

3. The Prophets

4. The New Covenant

5. The Story of Redemption and Marriage Metaphor

D. Theology of Romance Summary

1. Cultural Narrative



- a. Love as commodity
- b. Primacy of the self
- c. Satisfying the needs of the self
- d. Sexuality as appetite

## 2. Biblical Narrative

- a. Love as covenant
- b. Primacy of Jesus
- c. Satisfying the needs of the other
- d. Sexuality as oneness

## **Theology of Romance for Married Couples Session II: Going Deeper in Conflict**

### **Towards Oneness**

#### I. Summary of Session I

#### II. The Goal and the Problem

- A. The Goal as oneness – Genesis 2.-25
- B. Sin is the problem – Genesis 3:6-11a; James 4:1

#### III. Repentance and Forgiveness Overview

##### A. Saved by Grace

- 1. Ezekiel 36:22-32
- 2. Ephesians 2:4-9

##### B. Future Glorification

- 1. 1 Corinthians 15:21
- 2. Romans 8:18-23, 29-30

##### C. Current Sanctification

1. Romans 6:1-4
2. Philippians 2:12-13
3. Galatians 3:1-6

D. Familial Sin Patterns

1. Exodus 20.4-6
2. Film Clip – Everybody Loves Raymond

IV. Repentance and Forgiveness Applied to Marriage

A. Differentiation

1. Obedience to Jesus
2. Reflective Living
3. Living in a Community of Grace

B. Beholding the Forgiven Spouse

V. Going Deeper in Conflict

- A. History with Conflict Theme
- B. Family of Origin Conflict Tradition
- C. Learned Coping Mechanism

VI. Emotional Accessibility

- A. Example From “Hold Me Tight”
- B. Emotionally Naked and Unashamed

VII. Summary – Genesis 2:21-25

**Theology of Romance for Married Couples Session III: Theology of the Body and Sexuality**

I. Summary of Session I and II

II. Cultural Perceptions of Christian Sexuality

A. Examples

1. Arrested Development
2. Parks and Recreation
3. The Boys

B. Cultural Perceptions Defined

1. All desire/pleasure is wrong
2. Christians are hypocritical and repressive
3. Christians are out of touch with reality
4. Shame

III. Shame and Sexuality in Marriage

- A. Shame from Sin
- B. Shame from the body
- C. Shame from sex

IV. The Goodness of the Body

- A. In Creation
- B. Incarnation (of Jesus)
- C. Redemption
  1. Resurrection of Jesus
  2. Resurrection of the Dead

V. Goodness of Sex

- A. In Creation

B. In Marriage

1. Marriage in Proverbs

2. Marriage in Song of Songs

a. Body Discomfort in Song of Songs

VI. Redeemed Sexuality

A. Self-Control

B. Self-Donation

VII. Sex as Oneness

A. Chemical Bonding from Intimacy

B. Frequency of Sex

C. Emotional and Sexual Accessibility

VIII. Summary of Session III

IX. The Greatest Thing in the World? A Second Look

A. Self-Control of Jesus (Matthew 26:36-39)

B. Self-Donation of Jesus (Matthew 26:26-27)

C. Conclude with the Lord's Supper

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Letters

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

#### *A Theology of Romance*

You are invited to be in a research study about fostering romantic love between husband and wife through a theology of romance being done by **Cameron Scalera** from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a **member of Prince of Peace Church, above the age of 18, and are married.**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire prior to participation in three workshops over the next three weeks. At the conclusion of the workshops you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and may be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. There is no cost to participate and no payment for participating.

All questionnaire responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Because the questionnaire is distributed by a third party, no one will be able to connect you with your responses, including Cameron Scalera.

If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell **Dr. Ellen Marmon** who can be reached at [ellen.marmon@asburyseminary](mailto:ellen.marmon@asburyseminary). You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdrawal from the process at any time.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact **Cameron** at [Cameron.scalera@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Cameron.scalera@asburyseminary.edu).

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

---

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

---

Date Signed

## INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

### *A Theology of Romance*

You are invited to be in a research study about fostering romantic love between husband and wife through a theology of romance being done by **Cameron Scalera** from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a **member of Prince of Peace Church, above the age of 18, and are married.**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. There is no cost to participate and no payment for participating. The interview will last about an hour and will be audio recorded in a private room arranged at your convenience.

The audio recording will be transcribed, and all participants will be assigned a code to protect identities.

The recording and any notes taken will be kept confidential by the primary researcher. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name in the writing up of results for the study.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell **Dr. Ellen Marmon** who can be reached at [ellen.marmon@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:ellen.marmon@asburyseminary.edu). You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdrawal from the process at any time.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact **Cameron** at [Cameron.scalera@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Cameron.scalera@asburyseminary.edu).

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

---

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

---

Date Signed

### Appendix C: Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire

Q1 Do you agree to participate in this study? *Yes, No*

Q2 Are you taking this survey before, or after the workshops? *Before, After*

Q3 The whole point of marriage is to live a happy life with the one you love. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q4 I am absolutely convinced that my spouse is the one- and only-person God intended for me to marry. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q5 When it is difficult to love my spouse, I often think about God's love for me as a model for the way I am to love my spouse. *Always, Usually, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never.*

Q6 Before getting married, I thought it was important to understand my spouse's family and their relationship patterns. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q7 I think past hurts should be left in the past so that they don't impact my marriage. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q8 I believe that true love guarantees that my marriage will have a happy ending. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q9 Sex in marriage is exciting at first, but eventually the passion fades. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q10 Sex is designed solely for the purpose of having children. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q11 If I no longer "feel" love for my spouse, the marriage is dead. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q12 If someone is truly unhappy in marriage, divorce is a legitimate option. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q13 My relationship with God and my relationship with my spouse are separate aspects of my life. *Always, Usually, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. Why? Or why not?*

Q14 If I ever fall, "out of love," with my spouse it must mean that they weren't my soulmate. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q15 I should not dwell on what happened in my family of origin, but instead I should focus solely on my spouse for a happy life. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q16 Spouses who were meant to be together naturally have less conflict than those who were not meant to be together. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q17 Sex is permitted in the Bible, but the Bible mostly speaks about physical love negatively. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q18 I want to have a fulfilling physical relationship with my spouse, but I am sometimes embarrassed or uncomfortable with my body. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q19 My spouse and I are partly responsible for each other's sexual holiness. *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Why? Or why not?*

Q20 Is there anything else you would like to share?



**Appendix D: Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Interview**

Q1 What stood out as the most memorable portion of the workshops?

Q2 What was the most uncomfortable portion of the workshop?

Q3 What had the most meaningful impact on your own marriage?

Q4 What from the workshop do you think others should hear the most?

Q5 How has the workshops impacted your relationship with Jesus?

Q6 Is there anything else that you would like to share?

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