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COUNSELING DIVORCED MEMBERS FOR SECOND MARRIAGES
AT DONELSON CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DONELSON, TENNESSEE

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COUNSELING DIVORCED MEMBERS FOR SECOND MARRIAGES

AT DONELSON CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DONELSON, TENNESSEE

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For the Church, and the Savior who gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

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PREFACE

There are many people to thank for the completion of this project, because many people made this project possible. Dr. Robert Jones, my doctoral supervisor, has provided invaluable guidance; he has pushed me to think, write, and work more thoroughly and faithfully than I ever have before. Without his help, this project would not have reached a level that could be considered “doctoral.” Dr. Joseph Harrod’s guidance as my coach for Project Methodology was also invaluable, particularly his recommendation to do the project as an interview protocol. I am grateful to my newfound family in Christ at Southern Seminary. From the admissions staff, to the faculty and my dearly loved classmates, every minute at Southern has been a blessing. Many thanks to Cheyenne Haste, as I would still be formatting this project, trying to comply with the style requirements if not for her expertise and skill.

The four pastors who comprised the pastoral panel—Tim Stutler, Jamie Mosley, Jeff DeWees, and Daniel Evans—provided feedback, enthusiasm, and willingness to recruit couples to participate from their own churches; these men not only helped to make the project a blessing, but they made it possible. I hope one day to be able to return the favor!

I am thankful to the men and women, husbands and wives, of Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the greater Nashville Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and those who were part of this project outside the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination. Without this willingness to share their experiences and their souls, this project would not have happened. I am eternally grateful and pray that their vulnerability will further God’s kingdom and the institution of marriage.

I must thank my wife, Britney Anne. Upon completion of this project we will

have been married for eighteen years. It is not enough to say she has been a blessing. She has been God's greatest gift to me outside of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you to all the incredible examples of husbands and wives I have known. Thank you to my mom and dad, Larry and Ilona Bertsch, married for over forty years. Thank you to my in-laws, Evan and Debbie Follas, also married over forty years. Thank you to my grandparents, Bernard and Carol Bertsch (both deceased), and Paul and Connie Luidhardt (Paul now deceased). I still remember celebrating fiftieth wedding anniversaries with my grandparents when I was a high school student.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you Jesus. Without your example, without your sacrifice we would not, could not, know what marriage is. As every husband and wife strives to present the picture of Christ and the Church painted for us in Ephesians 5:22-33, may we always look to you Jesus. First marriage or remarriage, I pray that every husband and wife will strive to follow Jesus and Jesus alone as we live out the gospel in front of the world.

Michael Bertsch

Donelson, Tennessee

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been a part of the human experience from the moment God created mankind. After making human beings male and female, God blessed them, commanded them to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it (Gen 1:27-28). The command to multiply is to be fulfilled in the covenant of marriage, between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24). The marriage covenant is not to be broken until death. Unfortunately, this covenant is often broken by one or both spouses before death. Only one spouse needs to break the wedding vows to potentially end a marriage. When this happens, the faithful spouse becomes the victim of a broken marriage covenant. Men and women who have been victims of a broken covenant and those who break the covenant often remarry. With this project I have developed a working premarital counseling curriculum for Christians, both Covenant Keeping Spouses (CKS) and repentant Offending Spouses (OS), preparing to enter a second marriage.

The ideal taught in the Bible is that there should be no divorce. However, divorce is prevalent and nearly as old as marriage itself, with a prescription to regulate divorce as early as Deuteronomy 24. National statistics show that divorce rates for second marriages are higher than first marriages.¹ Due to the higher rate of divorce in second marriages, the goal of this project was to help Christians navigate second marriages well.

¹ Mark Banschick, "The High Failure Rate of Second and Third Marriages," *Psychology Today*, last modified February 6, 2012, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201202/the-high-failure-rate-second-and-third-marriages>.

Context

This project was conducted at Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church (DCPC) in Donelson, Tennessee, within the larger Nashville Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC), and one church from another denomination. The CPC is a denomination that grew out of the Great Revival in the early nineteenth century.² The CPC stands apart from all other Presbyterian bodies with its own nuances in theology and polity and is generally liturgical and traditional in its worship services.

DCPC was planted on April 6, 1958, in Donelson, Tennessee.³ Donelson is east of Nashville, Tennessee, with a population of approximately 25,500 people; around 39.5 percent of the population is married.⁴ I began my tenure at DCPC in March 2015 and I am currently the only pastoral staff. Over the last few years I have come to know the people of DCPC well. Currently thirty-four individuals and families call DCPC their church home with an average attendance between fifty and sixty people in the worship service on Sundays. DCPC, though a smaller congregation, is a multi-generational church with several families of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren worshipping together. The family atmosphere at DCPC is one of its most attractive qualities. The people who call DCPC their church home function much like a large extended family. While the family nature of DCPC is a great strength, several members have experienced divorce and remarriage. There are at least five couples in second marriages at DCPC. The remarriages are second marriages for one or both spouses. There are at least three members who have been married multiple times but are now single for different reasons.

² Cumberland Presbyterian Church, "About Us," last modified January 7, 2019, http://www.cumberland.org/center/CPC_Home_Page/About_Us.html.

³ The history of DCPC comes from *History of Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee*. This is an unpublished history of the church maintained in house and last compiled by church member David Atkins.

⁴ "Donelson Neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee (TN), 37076, 37210, 37214 Subdivision Profile. Real Estate, Apartments, Condos, Homes, Community, Population, Jobs, Income, Streets," City Data, last modified 2011, <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Donelson-Nashville-TN.html>.

There are currently good second marriages at DCPC with years of experience. With such longevity of second marriages, and similar marriages being sought out within the Nashville Presbytery, DCPC members and other members of CP churches in the Nashville area have much to offer in developing a curriculum to counsel believers considering remarriage. Within the CPC there is no standard of discipline regarding the issues of divorce and remarriage. Few, if any, questions are asked of those who go through a divorce in the CPC or come from another denomination to the CPC after getting divorced. This is not necessarily in accord with the CPC's *Confession of Faith*. Officially the CPC takes a high view of marriage. Section 6.18 of the *Confession of Faith* reads, "As a covenant relationship under God, marriage is a lifetime commitment, and should not be taken lightly."⁵ Regarding remarriage the *Confession of Faith* continues, "The covenant community has the responsibility . . . to counsel divorced persons who are considering remarriage."⁶ While the covenant community is charged with the responsibility of counseling divorced persons who desire to get remarried, there are not enough resources available through the denomination to use for this purpose. The United Committee on Theology and Social Concerns (UCTSC) is the church body charged with providing premarital counseling material to the CPC. Only four resources are available through this committee.⁷ None of the resources listed on the committee's webpage are for counseling persons who are considering remarriage. The list from the UCTSC was published in 2002 and was a response to a request from the General Assembly, the denomination's highest governing body, to provide resources for the denomination to be

⁵ Cumberland Presbyterian Church, *Confession of Faith for Cumberland Presbyterians*, 18, last modified December 3, 2013, http://www.cumberland.org/gao/confession/CNFAITH_2010_printing.pdf.

⁶ CPC, *Confession of Faith*, 18–19.

⁷ Cumberland Presbyterian Church, "UCTSC_Book_Of_Papers.Pdf," United Committee on Theology and Social Concerns, 118, last modified July 12, 2019, http://www.cumberland.org/gao/UCTSC_Papers/UCTSC_Book_Of_Papers.pdf.

used in premarital counseling. The list of four resources was a quick response to the request with more expected to follow.⁸ However, nothing more materialized.

Ministering to men and women preparing for marriage is a constant need for mankind. The need to counsel with men and women preparing to enter a second marriage covenant is also a constant need. The CPC has outlined the responsibility of the covenant community to counsel with people who are preparing for a first marriage and preparing for remarriage. The completed project offers a Bible-based Premarital Counseling Curriculum (PCC) for remarriage to Christians who have been through divorce and are seeking to remarry.⁹ Both inside and outside of the church people get divorced and remarried. This makes sense because human beings were created to exist in community, with marriage being the primary building block of human community (Gen 1:26-28). While people were created to be in relationships, all are marred by sin; some have broken relationships and desire new relationships and, consequently, need biblical counsel.

Rationale

“‘For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel” (Mal 2:16a), so reads the NASB94 and other translations.¹⁰ More recent translations such as the CSB read, “‘If he hates and divorces his wife,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘he covers his garment with

⁸ CPC, “UCTSC_Book_Of_Papers.Pdf,” 118.

⁹ By completing this project, I developed a premarital counseling curriculum to prepare men and women for remarriage within a blended family. I focused primarily, though not exclusively, on interviewing remarried believers who are or were co-parenting with ex-spouses, managing finances where child support and spousal support were involved, and dealing with issues of betrayal and mistrust in remarriage. For those who are widows and widowers, many of the principles may still be applicable, especially if a remarriage in such a case creates a blended family with children living at home. However, should a widow and widower remarry later in life without dependents living at home, they would need different premarital counseling that addresses issues of bereavement and the concerns of their adult children; that would also be a worthwhile curriculum to write.

¹⁰ These include the KJV, NKJV, and NIV84.

injustice,' says the Lord of Armies."¹¹ In agreement with the CSB are the HCSB, ESV, and NIV2011. If one holds to the older translations, God hates divorce because of its sinful source and consequences. If one holds to more recent translations, divorce begins with hate and leads to injustice. One thing is clear: sin, divorce, and the consequences of divorce are hateful and anyone who has been through divorce can attest to suffering the consequences.¹²

Because divorce is so damaging and hotly debated in the church, believers who take their faith seriously need to know they can one day stand in God's presence and present their life choices as faithful to God the Father, and this includes any decision to remarry after divorce. A biblical foundation for remarriage must address Jesus's teaching on divorce in Matthew 5:31-32, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18, and Matthew 19:11-12. Because these teachings are based on Jesus's interpretation of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, as well as Jesus addressing the Pharisees' objection with Moses's regulation of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, these passages also need to be studied. According to Genesis 2:18, the reason God created Eve was because it was not good for Adam to be alone. Paul's teaching on divorce and remarriage from 1 Corinthians 7 must also be studied, as not every believer possesses the same gifts for singleness and marriage. One reason for marriage is companionship. In Matthew 19:11-12, teaching the disciples about divorce, Jesus makes it clear that not everyone is gifted for celibacy. Operating under the assumption that the Scriptures are the authoritative guide for Christian living those same Scriptures must be studied and correctly applied to second marriages.

To develop an understanding of second marriages that is faithful to the Bible Christians must understand marriage theologically according to the New Testament, and

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the Christian Standard Bible.

¹² When a marriage ends because of abuse, the abused find a greater degree of safety; however, they still experience the consequences of divorce.

how the remarried couple loves one another as husband and wife must be based on this theological foundation to be faithful to the New Testament. There needs to be a thorough exploration of Christ as the head of the church and the church as the wife (Eph 5:22-33). Any passage related to marriage in the New Testament is necessary for the teaching and practice of marriage and this includes second marriages. The PCC progresses from a theological understanding, to a covenantal understanding, to a practical understanding of the institution of marriage.

The successful second marriages at DCPC, the Nashville Presbytery, and a church outside the CPC provided a wealth of life experience. Being able to teach a deeper understanding of marriage in the context of helping faithful believers prepare for a second marriage was the goal of this project. To achieve that goal the faithful members who are currently in second marriages offered much life experience. The second marriages within the DCPC congregation and other congregations provided practical advice and guidance for second marriages that is faithful to the Scriptures. The curriculum sought to balance faithfulness to the Bible and faithfulness to life. The goal was not to reinterpret the Bible through the lens of life experience, but to interpret life experience through the lens of the Bible.

The primary motivation behind the project was to offer comfort to those who have been afflicted by divorce. The Bible tells Christians to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom 12:15).¹³ Another intended goal of the curriculum was future-oriented; when, God willing, it is used in the future I hope that those who have broken their marriage vows and are seeking a second marriage would be

¹³ Denominations are not unified on the issues of divorce and remarriage. Some denominations take such a hard stance on divorce they do not allow for remarriage. On the other hand, some denominations, like the CPC, take no stance on the issues of divorce and remarriage. I believe that there can be a middle ground between these two positions. People get divorced and remarried. This is not the ideal, but it would be better for these people to come under the care of the church rather than be ignored.

convicted of their sin, repent, and make amends to whatever extent possible.¹⁴ In practice the CPC does not take a definitive stance on the issue of divorce, but the denomination needs guiding principles regarding the issue—and all of this in God’s grace with the goal of reconciliation in whatever form is most appropriate (2 Cor 5:18).

Purpose

By completing this project, I have written a biblically based Premarital Counseling Curriculum at Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church and within the bounds of the Nashville Presbytery for Christians getting remarried.

Goals

The goal of this project was to develop a Premarital Counseling Curriculum and provide a biblical foundation for Christians getting remarried. The following goals were completed in order to attain the overall goal of developing the PCC and are numerated as such:

1. The first goal was to develop an interview protocol to use with project participants.
2. The second goal was to interview a minimum of thirty participants (fifteen couples) in second marriages.
3. The third goal was to develop, at minimum, an eight-week curriculum, with one session per week and weekly homework assignments for pastors to use counseling Christians considering remarriage.
4. The fourth goal was to submit the Premarital Counseling Curriculum (PCC) to the United Committee on Theology and Social Concerns (UCTSC) of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

These goals were conducted and measured as outlined below in Research Methodology.

¹⁴ CPC, *Confession of Faith*, 8.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to develop an interview protocol.¹⁵ This protocol consisted of a series of questions that were repeated with all interviewees along with additional probing questions. These questions were used to gather data from Christian couples who are remarried. The purpose was to compare the expectations and stress of a first marriage with the expectations and stress of a second marriage. A pastoral panel reviewed the interview protocol and gave feedback.¹⁶ The panel consisted of three Cumberland Presbyterian pastors, other than myself, and one pastor from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The pastor from the SBC helped recruit couples outside the CPC to participate in the project. If any pastor believed questions needed to be added, removed, or revised the interview protocol would have been adjusted accordingly. The pastors evaluated the protocol using a rubric to measure biblical faithfulness and marital scope.¹⁷ Goal 1 was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. After goal 1 was successfully met the interview protocol was used to accomplish goal 2.

The second goal was to gather data from Christians who are currently in second marriages.¹⁸ The Christians interviewed were both those who were the CKS in a first marriage as well as repentant OSs. At least six couples from DCPC were eligible to participate in the interview protocol. Pastors within the Nashville Presbytery and the Southern Baptist pastor on the panel guided the selection of participants outside DCPC. Expanding the interview base allowed me to secure the minimum of fifteen couples.

¹⁵ Two rubrics and an interview protocol were used in this project. These were all in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹⁶ See appendix 1.

¹⁷ See appendix 2.

¹⁸ One exception was if it is the first marriage for one spouse and the second marriage for the other.

Once couples were selected interviews were scheduled. The questionnaire was given to participating couples one week before the interview to allow time for reflection.

Interviews were approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Participants were encouraged to share additional struggles they had with their faith about divorce and remarriage not addressed in the questionnaire. After the interviews follow up was available by phone, email, video chatting, or a second interview if participants wanted to contribute any thoughts post interview.¹⁹ The purpose of the interviews was to identify common fears, anxieties, and stresses in second marriages and how couples have overcome these fears, anxieties, and stresses. Goal 2 was successfully met when a minimum of thirty people (fifteen couples) had been interviewed, recorded, detailed notes written, and responses triangulated. The data gathered in the interviews was then used in writing the PCC for second marriages.

The third goal was to develop an eight-week PCC. Emphasis was placed on issues of forgiveness, fearful expectations of a second marriage, intimacy, parenting in a blended family, finances, and other stresses in second marriages revealed through the interview protocol. The PCC is intended for divorced Christians entering a second marriage and focuses on issues in blended families. Passages on grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation were incorporated into the PCC because of the nature of blended families. Foundational biblical passages on marriage were used in the PCC, and included Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:18-24, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:4-6, Mark 10:1-12, and Ephesians 5:22-33, among others. The pastoral panel reviewed the PCC using a rubric to evaluate faithfulness to the Bible, faithfulness to those who have given input, and faithfulness to life.²⁰ Goal 3 was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the

¹⁹ The PCC will, God-willing, be a living document and once it has been applied in ministry continue to be revised and updated based on life experiences to help believers considering remarriage, therefore, continued communication with the interviewees will be encouraged and appreciated.

²⁰ See appendix 3.

evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The fourth goal was to submit the PCC to the UCTSC to be used as a resource within the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination. This goal was successfully met once the UCTSC office had been contacted and they acknowledged receipt of the PCC with a cover letter.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Second marriage. Within this project, the term *second marriage* refers to marriage between a man and a woman in which one or both spouses were faithful in a previous marriage or have repented of personal sins that led to divorce in their first marriage.

Premarital Counseling Curriculum (PCC). This is a premarital counseling curriculum that was written to counsel with couples entering a second marriage.

Covenant Keeping Spouse (CKS). This term refers to the spouse who was faithful in their first marriage based upon the person's conscience before the Lord and assessment of their pastor. They did not desire to end their marriage though they may have legally filed for divorce due to an unrepentant spouse, and a biblically permissible reason for divorce.

Offending Spouse (OS). This term refers to a believer who broke the covenant vows in a marriage and has repented of his or her sin that led to divorce. The genuineness of the repentance was dependent on the assessment of his or her pastor.

Presbytery. This term refers to a geographic region. All Cumberland Presbyterian churches located within a certain geographical region form the governmental body known as a presbytery. Churches send delegates of ministers and active session elders twice a year to conduct presbyterial business. DCPC is in the Nashville Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Four limitations applied to this project. The primary limitation for this project was participation. The amount of time each pastor was able to commit to evaluating the interview protocol and the curriculum was a limitation. To address this limitation, only pastors who were able to commit two hours to giving input and evaluating the interview protocol participated. Also, pastors committed three hours to reviewing the curriculum. The interview protocol, research materials, and the curriculum were made available to the pastors prior to meeting together as a group. The number of couples able to participate in the interview process was a limiting factor. Because the goal was to meet with a minimum of fifteen couples over the course of several weeks, scheduling was a limitation. To address these limitations interviews were scheduled at times that best fit the couple's schedule. If necessary, to meet the minimum of fifteen couples video conferences were utilized.

In addition, divorce is a painful experience, the depth of soul-searching couples were willing to do, and willing to share, was a limiting factor for this project. The hope of this project was to work with faithful Christians, the Covenant Keeping Spouses (CKS) and repentant Offending Spouses (OS) who are currently in second marriages. Because the Bible is clear that all divorces involve sin, a divorced believer may be hesitant to share his or her experiences from a biblical perspective. To help alleviate this limitation all interviews were confidential, and all contributions, notes, and anecdotes that contributed to the PCC were used anonymously.

Though not a limitation for this project, one aspect of the Premarital Counseling Curriculum that was beyond its scope was measuring its effectiveness in helping couples as they prepare for a second marriage. In other words, will the PCC help prevent a second divorce? However, given the variables of life and people with ever changing values one could ask if it is correct to evaluate any premarital counseling on the success of the marriage. Because all human life is affected by sin it seemed better to evaluate the PCC based on its faithfulness to the Bible and God's unchanging standards.

One delimitation included working with Christians in second marriages who wanted to be faithful to their first marriage covenant or were a repentant believer whose sin ended a marriage.²¹ This limited the pool of potential participants but was intended for remaining faithful to the Bible. The primary delimitation for the project was the time frame. The planned project took place over fifteen weeks. The first two weeks were used to review and evaluate the interview protocol with the pastoral panel. The next six weeks were used to meet with couples and conduct the interviews to gather data, generate notes, review audio recordings if necessary, and begin triangulating data. The final seven weeks were used for writing the PCC, evaluating the PCC with the pastoral panel utilizing a rubric, and submitting the PCC to the UCTSC.

Conclusion

Marriage has been an institution since the creation of human beings, and it is a gift from God. It is a gift that human beings have marred and degraded. Unfortunately, it only takes one spouse to break a marriage covenant and this can leave both spouses broken. For a Christian this presents a dilemma of biblical proportions. Is remarriage biblical? Can it be biblical? If a faithful Christian is not gifted for singleness how can they prepare for remarriage and be faithful to their Lord and Savior in doing so? Providing answers to these questions and equipping faithful Christians for second marriages were the motivations for this project. Hopefully in providing answers through a Premarital Counseling Curriculum Christians who have been afflicted by divorce can be comforted in a second marriage.

²¹ The motivation for this project was pastoral, seeking to minister to those who have suffered divorce. Widows and widowers entering a second marriage that would produce a blended family will find the principles helpful. However, a marriage that ends due to the death of a spouse does not involve sin, whereas divorce always involves sin. Therefore, the interview base focused on spouses who have been through divorce and have chosen to remarry.

CHAPTER 2
CONSIDERING DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE
FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Both inside the church and outside the church people get divorced and remarried. Because divorce and remarriage are hotly debated topics, believers who take their faith seriously need a biblical foundation for divorce and remarriage. They need to know what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage because one day they will stand in God's presence and present their life choices to him. A biblical foundation for divorce and remarriage must address Jesus's teaching on divorce in Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-12, Mark 10:1-12, and Luke 16:18. Jesus's teachings are based on his interpretations of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24; therefore, these verses also need to be studied. In Matthew 19 and Mark 10, Jesus addresses the Pharisees' questions about divorce by reinterpreting the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This passage also needs to be studied.

Operating under the assumption that the Scriptures are the authoritative guide for Christian living, believers must study the Scriptures and correctly apply them to situations of divorce and remarriage. While the ideal is that no marriage will end until the death of a spouse, the sad truth is that one or both spouses sometimes choose to end a marriage prematurely. When considering remarriage, however, believers must not shy away from the Bible. They may realize that they have failed to live up to the Bible's ideals by having a first marriage end in divorce, but this does not mean they can forsake God's ideals going forward. This chapter argues that the Bible provides two valid reasons for divorce and remarriage. In addition, Ephesians 5:22-33 is the model for second marriages just as it is for first marriages; therefore, husbands and wives who enter second

marriages must expand their application of Ephesians 5 to include remarriage and blended families.

In addition to Jesus's teaching on divorce and remarriage, believers need to understand Paul's teaching. According to Genesis 2:18, God created Eve because it was not good for Adam to be alone. Genesis 2:4-25 is the second account of the creation of human beings. The first account is Genesis 1:26-27, in which God converses within himself in the Godhead and then creates humanity male and female in his image. Humanity, therefore, exists in the context of community as God does, with marriage being the primary building block of human community. Therefore, Paul's teaching on divorce, remarriage, and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 needs to be studied because many are gifted for marriage, while fewer, as I will demonstrate below, are gifted for singleness. If marriage is accepted as the primary building block for human community it is understandable that most people pursue marriage after divorce. In addition to Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 7, in Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus makes it clear that not everyone is gifted for celibacy. When God created humanity, he did so with the institution of marriage: "So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen 1:27), and "the man said, 'This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh'; this one will be called 'woman,' for she was taken from man. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:23-24). Because the creation of humanity involved the institution of marriage, and because not everyone is gifted for celibacy, many who have experienced divorce decide to remarry.

Christians who study the Bible and are devoted to living by its standards realize that in every area of life people fall short (Rom 3:23). Divorce and remarriage have been divisive issues in the church, but it does no good to boast and about being more righteous in one area of life than in another, for according to James, to be guilty of breaking one small part of God's law is to be guilty of breaking the entire law (Jas 2:10).

This is also true of marriage; all fall short. Even marriages that do not end until one spouse dies, which is God's ideal, never completely achieve God's ideal of presenting a perfect picture of Christ and the church in an earthly marriage (Eph 5:24-26). Unlike sins of jealousy, envy, and greed, among others, the sins that lead to divorce, and the consequences of divorce, cannot be easily hidden. Therefore, the sin of divorce and the sins that lead to divorce draw more attention and scrutiny from believers than many other sins. Nevertheless, as Donald Hagner teaches, the ideals of God's kingdom cannot be taught as anything less than pursuing God's perfection.¹ D. A. Carson notes that Jesus goes not to the Law when answering the Pharisees' questions about divorce in Matthew 19:1-12; instead, Jesus appeals to God's institution of marriage at creation, before the fall.² However, while human beings do not live in a pre-fall condition they must continue to strive for God's ideal in marriage, even though they live in the reality of a world filled with divorce and remarriage. The tension between God's Word and reality must be held. Believers must study the Bible to determine God's ideal for marriage. At the same time, as Christians study the Bible, they know the reality is people get divorced and remarried for a variety of reasons. The tension is to uphold God's ideals, while at the same time ministering to those who have fallen short, whether they chose to fall short or not. It is helpful to remember, as Jay Adams writes, that the Bible recognizes and regulates the reality of divorce.³

¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 551.

² D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 466.

³ Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (1980; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 23.

Divorce Was Not Intended, but Was Regulated

Evangelical Christianity has two primary views on divorce and remarriage. There are those who teach that the Bible does not allow for any divorce or remarriage, regardless of the situation or sins committed by a spouse. Then, there those who teach that the New Testament allows for divorce and remarriage when, for example, a spouse commits adultery or when a spouse is deserted by an unbeliever. The issue of abuse also comes up when discussing divorce and remarriage, and whether abuse is a biblically valid reason for divorce and remarriage. However, issues of abuse are beyond the scope of this chapter because there are no passages in the Bible that directly address abuse in marriage.

Matthew 19:1-12 is the longest passage in which Jesus teaches about divorce and remarriage. Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, as well as Deuteronomy 24:1-4, are addressed by Jesus in this confrontation with the Pharisees. The Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife on “any grounds” (Matt 19:3). Jesus’s initial response is to appeal to creation and declare that those whom God has joined together must not be separated (Matt 19:4-6). The Pharisees then ask Jesus why Moses commanded husbands to write a certificate of divorce, to which, Jesus responds that any divorce and remarriage except on grounds of sexual immorality results in adultery (Matt 19:7-9). The primary question is, does an exception violate a rule, or is it just that, an exception? The exception clause in Matthew 19:9 does not contradict what Jesus says in 19:4-8, that those whom God has joined together are not to be separated.⁴ In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful to divorce one’s wife on any grounds. In his answer, Jesus addresses the creation account and God’s original institution of marriage. Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, and Hagner suggests that by appealing to the creation account in Genesis, Jesus is establishing God’s will for marriage.⁵ When commenting on Matthew 5:32, Carson

⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 472.

⁵ Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 548.

writes, “The natural way to take the ‘except’ clause is that divorce is wrong because it generates adultery *except* in the case of fornication.”⁶

The Pharisees respond to Jesus’s appeal to creation by citing Mosaic law. They ask Jesus why Moses commanded sending away one’s wife if divorce was not part of God’s intention (Matt 19:7). The Pharisees’ question is in reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Peter Craigie shows that there is only one command in the four verses, namely, that the divorcing husband cannot remarry the wife he divorced after she has been remarried.⁷ He also writes that the passage treats divorce as an existing practice and is not instituting divorce.⁸ R. T. France believes Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is God’s condescension to human failure not His divine command.⁹ This explains Jesus’s answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:8, namely, that divorce was allowed, not commanded, because of hard hearts. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 restricted the practice of divorce, therefore, preventing easy divorces from becoming a legal form of adultery.¹⁰ Because God acted to limit the consequences of divorce in the Law, taking into consideration hard hearts, it is understandable that Jesus both upholds God’s created intent for the permanence of marriage, while at the same time taking human sinfulness into account by allowing for divorce and remarriage in cases of adultery.

Hardness of heart is an issue that has been interpreted and applied to the issues of divorce and remarriage differently. The primary way to interpret hardness of heart is to look at Jesus’s answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:8—that Moses permitted Jewish

⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 186.

⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 304.

⁸ Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 305.

⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 719–20.

¹⁰ Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 305.

men to divorce their wives because of the hardness of the man's heart. Deuteronomy 24:1 says a man can write his wife a certificate of divorce if he finds "something indecent" about her. The exact meaning of "something indecent" is no longer known.¹¹ However, it must refer to some sexually immoral behavior short of adultery, because adultery was punished with the death penalty in ancient Israel.¹² By the New Testament era the Deuteronomy passage had been interpreted by the majority of rabbis as allowing a man to divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever.¹³ Therefore, the hardness of heart should not be applied to a spouse who has been sinned against but refuses to forgive; instead, the hardness of heart Jesus talks about must be applied to the spouse who sins by pursuing divorce for any number of invalid reasons.

John MacArthur interprets Jesus's answer to the Pharisees with another possibility. MacArthur agrees that Jesus's primary reference to hardness of heart involves the person who continues in prolonged sexual immorality and refuses to repent. However, if the immoral person does repent (showing a tender, not hard heart), the spouse should take him or her back and not divorce. If one is unwilling, then he or she is the one who is now manifesting a hardness of heart.¹⁴ The hardness of heart is applied to the spouse who has been sinned against but refuses to forgive a spouse who has repented of adultery. Certainly, the hope would be that when one spouse commits adultery and repents the other spouse would forgive, and the marriage be restored (Matt 18:15). However, it must be kept in mind that because marriage makes a man and woman one flesh, adultery

¹¹ Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 305.

¹² Carson, *Matthew*, 467.

¹³ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58.

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *The Divorce Dilemma: God's Last Word on Lasting Commitment* (Leominster, England: Day One, 2009), 47.

breaks that one-flesh union so concretely that Jesus allows for divorce and remarriage.¹⁵ Jim Newheiser states that Jesus did not command divorce when one spouse commits an act of sexual immorality.¹⁶ On the other hand, Jesus does not forbid divorce either, and he does not expound upon his teaching as to what should happen if an adulterous spouse repents.

Because a marriage is different from any other relationship due to its one-flesh nature, spouses who have had adultery committed against them need to respond with biblical wisdom and discernment. A spouse who has been sinned against must always guard against anger and bitterness. An adulterous spouse can repent, the spouse sinned against can forgive and there can be reconciliation, though this does not necessitate the restoration of the marriage. Victor Hamilton says that before entering a one-flesh relationship a man and a woman are only half-flesh.¹⁷ When a man and woman get married the two halves are put together and make one whole.¹⁸ Two halves coming together and becoming one flesh highlights the seriousness, and blessedness, of the one-flesh relationship. When one spouse commits an act of sexual immorality, he or she breaks the one-flesh union, or perhaps better, adds to the one-flesh union in an ungodly way. When discussing 1 Corinthians 6:16, Hamilton also believes when a person unites with a prostitute there is more than just a temporary one-flesh union.¹⁹ Given the biblical teaching that adultery gives grounds for divorce and remarriage, whether Hamilton is correct that uniting with a prostitute is more than temporary, it is clear that the covenant

¹⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 472.

¹⁶ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 245.

¹⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 181.

¹⁸ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 175.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 184.

of marriage has been broken and the marriage can be ended in divorce. There can be repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation without restoration. The husband and wife can be at peace with one another without being married to one another.

Walter Wessel and Mark Strauss make several comments about Mark 10:1-12, which does not include the exception clause. First, they note the Pharisees are questioning Jesus about divorce, trying to entrap him in Herod's territory. Second, they explain that the Pharisees themselves were not in complete agreement on the issues of divorce and remarriage. Third, they write that all Jews agreed that divorce and remarriage were both allowed.²⁰ Strauss and Wessel also suggest when Jesus declared in Mark 10:11 that a man could commit adultery against his wife it was a radical statement.²¹ Though polygamy was not widely practiced in New Testament times it was still possible, making it virtually impossible to consider a husband as committing adultery against his wife. In his comments on Matthew 19, Carson adds that Mark may assume the exception even though he does not mention it.²² Though the Pharisees in Mark 10:1-12 are questioning Jesus about divorce and remarriage Jesus is not interested in talking about what human beings can get away with. Instead, Jesus is interested in talking about God's intent and design at creation. God's allowance in the Mosaic Law, which the Pharisees appeal to in Mark 10:4, was not a command to get divorced, but rather was God's provision for human weakness intended to limit the consequences of divorce.²³ There will always be debate surrounding the exception clause and its absence in Mark 10 and Luke 16. John

²⁰ Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 856.

²¹ Wessel and Strauss, *Mark*, 858.

²² Carson, *Matthew*, 473.

²³ Wessel and Strauss, *Mark*, 857.

Murray says that rejecting Matthew in favor of Mark and Luke goes against the inspiration of Scripture, nor can Mark and Luke be rejected in favor of Matthew.²⁴

Some have interpreted the exception clause as referring to any sexual activity during the betrothal period. With this interpretation Jesus is teaching that one can divorce one's betrothed if she has been found to have committed adultery. John Piper uses this interpretation to justify Joseph's intent to divorce Mary when she was found to be pregnant with Jesus (Matt 1:19).²⁵ However, Jesus does not qualify his statements in Matthew 19:9 or in Matthew 5:31-32 to be limited to betrothal. In fact, it is clear in Matthew 5 that Jesus is talking about husbands and wives, not fiancées, and in Matthew 19 the Pharisees specifically ask Jesus if a husband can divorce his wife, not his betrothed.²⁶ While the Greek term *πορνεία* in the Matthew passages is often assumed to be adultery, it can and does include all forms of sexual immorality.²⁷ Thomas Edgar writes that given the context of the Matthew passages, adultery committed by a married, not betrothed, spouse is the best interpretation.²⁸

The Spouse Who Sins Is Responsible

One of the main challenges in finding biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage stems from the fact that all four passages in the synoptic Gospels present remarriage as adultery:

²⁴ John Murray, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 47. At this point I am assuming, given the limits of this DMin project, the majority approach of evangelical Bible scholars represented by Carson, Murray, and others.

²⁵ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 174.

²⁶ Thomas R. Edgar, "Divorce and Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. Wayne House (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), 173.

²⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 125.

²⁸ Edgar, "Divorce and Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion," 187.

1. Luke 16:18: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”
2. Mark 10:11-12: “He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’”
3. Matthew 19:9: “I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery.”
4. Matthew 5:32: “But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Hagner believes the reason Jesus does not allow divorce is because remarriage is adultery.²⁹ However, he also says when the Bible talks about divorce remarriage is included.³⁰ The Bible does not give a definitive statement that can be applied to all instances of divorce and remarriage. Every person who goes through divorce and remarriage must allow Scripture to speak to his or her specific situation. Christians must allow Scripture and the Holy Spirit to convict, edify, encourage, heal, and hold them accountable for their decisions. If the wife has committed some sexual immorality and her husband divorces her, he does not cause her to become an adulteress by remarrying because she is already an adulteress. David Turner believes that if there is no sexual infidelity there cannot be a real divorce.³¹ Turner does have an expanded definition of *πορνεία*, noting that it includes any sexual activity that does not exclusively involve one’s spouse.³² The definition of *πορνεία* raises the question of whether one could divorce one’s spouse for sexual activity that does not include adultery, though context would still imply adultery is in view (see above).

²⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 123.

³⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 125.

³¹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 171.

³² Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 171–72.

Mark and Luke do not contain the exception clause, and each gives a slight nuance. In Luke 16:18 Jesus says a man who divorces his wife commits adultery when he remarries, and the person who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. Adultery in each case is charged to the husband. In Mark 10 Jesus says the man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against his former wife. Again, adultery is charged to the husband and the nuance is that the sin is committed against his former wife. The same is then said of the wife in Mark 10, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery, though Jesus does not say specifically against her husband.

Now I return to the Matthew passages with the exception clauses. In Matthew 19:9 Jesus says that a husband who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery. Therefore, the husband who divorces a sexually immoral wife does not commit adultery if he remarries. A woman would likely remarry because it would have been difficult for her to survive in the New Testament era without resorting to prostitution.³³ A husband who divorced his wife did not have the same social and economic pressure to remarry as a woman. In Matthew 5:32, Jesus says that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. A woman would be expected to remarry, and Jesus appears to be making that assumption.³⁴ Adultery is often the assumed offense in the exception clause. However, the Greek word is *πορνεία* and it carries the meanings of fornication, whoredom, concubinage, adultery, incest, lewdness, and uncleanness, to name a few.³⁵ In attempts to eliminate biblically valid grounds for divorce and remarriage some scholars and pastors have tried to limit the

³³ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 125.

³⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 186.

³⁵ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 385.

definition of *πορνεία* to a marriage of incest, thus preventing the possibility of divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery. Incest cannot be the problem because Jews would not have recognized an incestuous marriage as a marriage at all, thus not requiring a divorce.³⁶ Moreover, *πορνεία* would imply that all sexual immorality violates the marriage covenant therefore it cannot be narrowed down to one unlikely definition.³⁷

In Matthew 5:32, the husband who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. The question is, who is responsible for the ensuing adultery in remarriage? Edgar writes that the guilt for any ensuing remarriage rests with either the adulterer or the deserter.³⁸ MacArthur agrees with this position saying that the man who unjustly divorces his wife is responsible for the adultery of the second marriage.³⁹ This rests on the Greek word interpreted “causes her.” The Greek word in Matthew 5:32 is *ποιεω*. In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Herbert Braun says the use of *ποιεω* in Matthew 5:32 refers to the wrong done to, or harm done to, one’s neighbor and that this wrong is forbidden.⁴⁰ Because it is the divorcing husband who causes his wife to commit adultery, and given Braun’s understanding of *ποιεω* when used in a negative sense, it is logical that the sin of adultery in the remarriage of the wife is charged to the divorcing husband’s eternal account. Murray confers with this position, writing that the wrongful spouse is implicated in the adultery of his remarried ex-wife.⁴¹

³⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 186.

³⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 468.

³⁸ Edgar, “Divorce and Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion,” 192.

³⁹ MacArthur, *The Divorce Dilemma*, 20.

⁴⁰ Herbert Braun, “*ποιεω*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:477.

⁴¹ Murray, *Divorce*, 22.

Arguing about words and eternal ledgers does not ease the pain or the consequences of divorce. In addition, Carson writes that approaching the Bible with the intention of defining the do's and don'ts of divorce and remarriage misses God's intent in creating humanity male and female and giving them the institution of marriage.⁴² Larry Richards, who is more liberal in his view of what constitutes biblically valid reasons for divorce and remarriage, suggests today's pastors and scholars have no more right to judge those who are divorced and remarried than the Pharisees did.⁴³ Richards is opposed to becoming legalists like the Pharisees, a fair point. However, one cannot forsake morality for fear of becoming legalistic. Still, it is a caution; those in church cannot impose judgment on people, but at the same time the church must give biblical guidance in the areas of divorce and remarriage. It should be noted the Pharisees are debating with Jesus about the do's and don'ts of divorce, and it is clear from Matthew 19 that Jesus is not conciliatory towards the Pharisees' position. On the other hand, because every divorce and remarriage involve sin, in one way or another, Christians who want to be faithful to God, and have been through a divorce, need a biblical foundation for remarriage.

The Issue of Desertion Considered

Desertion is the second biblically valid reason for divorce and remarriage, and it comes from 1 Corinthians 7. In this verse, Paul is not dealing with adultery; therefore, Paul is addressing a marital issue that Jesus did not.⁴⁴ However, even differences of belief should not dissolve a marriage.⁴⁵ In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 Paul makes clear that believers are never to initiate a divorce, even when married to an unbeliever. Paul also stresses that

⁴² Carson, *Matthew*, 467.

⁴³ Larry Richards, "Divorce and Remarriage under a Variety of Circumstances," in *House, Divorce and Remarriage*, 226.

⁴⁴ Murray, *Divorce*, 57, 63.

⁴⁵ Murray, *Divorce*, 67.

believers are not to divorce one another, and that if they are separated, they are to seek reconciliation (1 Cor 7:10-11). These verses are referenced to support the no divorce no remarriage view: “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.” Paul is saying when two believers have separated but are not divorced, they are to reconcile their marriage, thus pursuing God’s ideal of marriage being permanent until the death of one spouse.

This brings up the issue of separation without divorce. J. Carl Laney believes Paul says nothing about second marriages for deserted spouses.⁴⁶ Gordon Wenham relates that the early church fathers accepted separation, but not divorce and remarriage.⁴⁷ However, William Heth writes that if Paul did not permit remarriage then he ended up saying the opposite of what he meant.⁴⁸ Wenham appeals to the church fathers who did not accept any biblically valid grounds for divorce and remarriage.⁴⁹ Craig Keener argues that appealing to the early church fathers is not a biblical argument.⁵⁰ Heth contends that the early church fathers were ascetics who did not even allow for remarriage after the death of one’s spouse.⁵¹ To say that the debate surrounding divorce and remarriage and 1 Corinthians 7 is contentious would be an understatement.

⁴⁶ J. Carl Laney, “No Divorce and No Remarriage,” in House, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 45.

⁴⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, “No Remarriage after Divorce,” in *Remarriage after Divorce in Today’s Church: 3 Views*, ed. Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 27.

⁴⁸ William A. Heth, “Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion,” in Strauss, *Remarriage after Divorce in Today’s Church*, 75.

⁴⁹ Wenham, “No Remarriage after Divorce,” 23.

⁵⁰ Craig S. Keener, “Remarriage for Adultery, Desertion, or Abuse,” in Strauss, *Remarriage after Divorce in Today’s Church*, 50.

⁵¹ William A. Heth, “A Response to J. Gordon Wenham,” in Strauss, *Remarriage after Divorce in Today’s Church*, 45.

In 1 Corinthians 7:13-16 Paul writes that if a believer has an unbelieving spouse the believing spouse must not divorce the unbelieving spouse. The reason is that the unbelieving spouse may be won to the Lord by the conduct of the believing spouse (1 Cor 7:16). However, writes Paul, if the unbelieving spouse is unwilling to live with the believing spouse, and the unbelieving spouse initiates a divorce the believing spouse should accept it for the sake of peace (1 Cor 7:15). Scholars and pastors who teach that there are biblically valid reasons for divorce and remarriage cite this passage as the biblically valid reason of desertion.⁵² The unbelieving spouse deserts the believing spouse. As is often the case, much of the debate centers around words. Paul uses the word χωρίζω in 1 Corinthians 7:11 for “separate,” or “leave” in the CSB, whereas the word for divorce in Greek is ἀφίημι. Many have used these definitions to justify separation, but not divorce and remarriage. David Instone-Brewer counters the idea that only one specific word in Greek can mean divorce by noting that there were more than 50 words used for divorce in the Greek language.⁵³ David Garland adds that Paul’s background is Jewish, and in Jewish culture active verbs were used when speaking about men (ἀφίημι) and passive verbs when speaking about women (χωρίζω).⁵⁴ Therefore, if the wife leaves (χωρίζω), Paul is still speaking about divorce, but is following the Jewish practice of using passive verbs for women.

What drives men and women to remarry after a divorce? Why not remain single? Is the driving force sexual desire (1 Cor 7:9), a felt need for community (Gen 2:18), or a combination of both? Jesus says some can accept his teaching that spouses cannot get a divorce for any reason and thus they choose celibacy (Matt 19:10-12). If

⁵² Keener, “Remarriage for Adultery, Desertion, or Abuse,” 109.

⁵³ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 199.

⁵⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 281.

only some can accept Jesus's teaching, then there are some who cannot. Paul states a similar thought, that some are gifted for singleness and some are not (1 Cor 7:7). An initial understanding of Paul's words imply giftedness is static. Jesus says celibacy can be chosen, meaning giftedness is dynamic. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner write that all gifts are from God, whether the gift of celibacy or marriage; however, they also believe that the gift of celibacy is not always a perpetual gift.⁵⁵ Andreas Köstenberger believes only a few can accept an unmarried life.⁵⁶ When God created man he said "let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26). Adopting a Trinitarian interpretation of Genesis 1:26, God exists in the *community* of the Trinity and he created man as male and female in his image in community.⁵⁷ After God created humans, he commanded them to multiply and fill the earth, implying marriage (Gen 1:28). Even though humanity is fallen, God's commands have not been negated and people still bear God's image. Both the desire for community and the fulfillment of biblical sexual morality can motivate divorced believers to pursue remarriage. Paul would have preferred that all were able to be single as he was, but he knew that not all were gifted as he was (1 Cor 7:7). In the New Testament Jesus makes it clear that believers can find family, or community, in the church (Mark 10:29-30). Believers can find the community they were created for without entering the covenant of marriage. Nevertheless, the fact that the New Testament does not forbid people from remarrying, even in cases of adultery and abandonment, should be an encouragement to divorced believers. However, navigating the dynamic gifts of singleness and remarriage needs to be done wisely, preferably with a trusted pastor or counselor, and believers must

⁵⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 285.

⁵⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 67.

⁵⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 353–55.

always remember that God will provide the strength to endure temptation, no matter what their circumstances (1 Cor 10:13).

In the New Testament divorce could happen with a spouse simply walking out the door or telling the other spouse to walk out the door.⁵⁸ In the United States desertion can happen almost as easily. Often one believing spouse will divorce another believing spouse. This can make understanding the divorce as biblically valid and allowing the deserted spouse to remarry in good faith a challenge. Jay Adams's prescription is to take the departing spouse through the processes of church discipline according to Matthew 18:15-20; then the person will be considered an unbeliever if he or she does not repent of a sinful divorce.⁵⁹ Adams's reasoning for this process is that in America divorce is carried out in the court system and believers are not to take believers to court (1 Cor 6:1-8).

To carry out church discipline, according to Matthew 18:15-20, a sinning brother or sister is confronted in private, then, if unrepentant, is confronted with one or two witnesses. Then, if one is still unrepentant, he or she is brought before the entire church, and if still unrepentant is excommunicated. According to Paul, the purpose of expelling a person from the church is to turn them over to Satan for the destruction of flesh, which hopefully will lead to salvation (1 Cor 5:5). Not all churches practice such discipline. For a person going through a divorce in which they have been sinned against, but is not a member of a church that practices biblical discipline per Matthew 18, or if the sinning spouse will not submit to church discipline and simply leaves, what option is left for the believing spouse to pursue a biblical divorce and remarriage with the need to go to court? Jesus makes it clear that those who love him will keep his commandments (John 14:15). No doubt one of Jesus's commands is to remain faithful to one's spouse and not get divorced (Matt 5:31-32). The deserted spouse does not need to pass judgment on the

⁵⁸ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 73.

⁵⁹ Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 88.

status of an ex-spouse's eternal salvation; but if the act of desertion is viewed as the act of an unbeliever, because desertion is in violation of Jesus's direct command not to divorce, then the deserted spouse, for practical reasons, could seek remarriage under the provisions outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:15 without the process of church discipline.

As stated above, believers (and non-believers) live in a world where divorce and remarriage are an unfortunate reality. Also, when speaking of any ideal taught in the Bible it cannot be taught as anything less than God's perfect ideal. This means that all fall short, whether divorced and remarried, or whether continuing in a first marriage until death. The need for a biblical understanding of valid grounds for divorce and remarriage is simple. Everyone will give an account to God one day for their actions (Rom 14:12). This will include everyone who has been divorced and chosen to remarry. For those who teach that divorce and remarriage are completely unbiblical the conclusion should be that those who have divorced and remarried will somehow pay for those sins. However, scholars who do not believe that divorce and remarriage are biblically permissible also do not believe they are unpardonable sins.⁶⁰ No matter what a divorced person has done, if he or she repents God will forgive them.⁶¹ Even though second marriages begin sinfully they can be holy marriages, and they are real marriages.⁶²

To teach and preach that divorce and remarriage are sin, and then in the face of reality simply say, "repent and ask God for forgiveness and he will forgive you," is not a comforting answer, and it does not minister to those who have been divorced and remarried, or are considering remarriage. One might even say this goes against Romans 6:1-2: "What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?"

⁶⁰ J. Carl Laney, "Response [to Larry Richards]," in House, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 250.

⁶¹ Wenham, "No Remarriage after Divorce," 39.

⁶² Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 170–71.

Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” The question of repenting and asking for forgiveness in the situations of divorce and remarriage is difficult. The biblical prescription for reconciling a relationship is repentance, forgiveness, and then reconciliation. However, when there has already been remarriage the consensus is not to advise a second divorce and then remarriage to one’s first spouse. A person cannot commit more sin to remedy past sin. However, to demonstrate repentance towards one’s former spouse without the possibility of restoring the marriage requires wisdom, discernment, and the likelihood that this repentance will need to be demonstrated in concrete ways over a lifetime. The person who has sinned by committing adultery or deserting a spouse should be free to remarry once they have repented of that sin. If there is no possibility of restoring the marriage, either because the ex-spouse has remarried or the ex-spouse refuses, the person who sinned can demonstrate his or her repentance by striving to be at peace with their ex-spouse.

Laney notes, “Many have wondered why God did not outlaw divorce and remarriage in the Mosaic Law and terminate all the future haggling over this issue.”⁶³ God could have outlawed divorce and remarriage. However, he did not. At the same time sin cannot run rampant in the church. There are prescriptions in the Old Testament and the New Testament to regulate divorce and remarriage and define what is biblically valid in these categories. Faithful Christians need biblical answers to life that do not settle for the lowest common denominator of simply apologizing and asking God for forgiveness. Believers who have had divorce forced on them and are not gifted for singleness need biblical answers to guide them in considering remarriage. Christians who are guilty of breaking their marriage vows need to take their guilt seriously and demonstrate concrete ways in which they are repentant. These Christians need guidance in repenting of their sin

⁶³ Laney, “No Divorce and No Remarriage,” 25.

and making amends to whatever extent possible (Luke 19:8); repentance becomes even more difficult once either spouse has remarried.

The Foundation of Every Marriage Is Christ and the Church

When commenting on Matthew 5:31-32, R. T. France writes that the apostle Matthew understands a world in which God's ideals are not achieved.⁶⁴ In addition to this, when writing about Matthew 19:3-12, France says that pastoral ethics need to be established before problems are encountered.⁶⁵ These two comments are foundational for those considering remarriage. First, any believer who is considering remarriage because of divorce knows that God's ideal has not been met. Though God's ideal has not been met in a first marriage, regardless of the reason, believers must strive to reach for God's ideal in a second marriage. Believers must not settle for second best because it is a second marriage. This begins with only marrying in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39). After determining only to marry in the Lord, men and women must determine how they are to love one another as husband and wife in a second marriage. Because God's ideal is still being sought the ethics of a second marriage are the same as a first marriage and, therefore, Jesus's love for the church is still the model for how husbands and wives are to love one another, and relate to one another, in a second marriage (Eph 5:22-33).

The topic of a wife's submission has generated generations of debate in the church. The history of domineering husbands and rebellious wives has made the topic of submission and headship taboo for many. However, Peter O'Brien writes that Jesus submitted to the Father, therefore, submission cannot mean that wives are of lesser value.⁶⁶ Ernest Best believes Paul is not instructing husbands to force their wives to

⁶⁴ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 212.

⁶⁵ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 714.

⁶⁶ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary

submit to them in Ephesians 5:22, but rather, that a wife's submission to her husband is voluntary.⁶⁷ It is also important to note that Paul is addressing wives—not all women—in Ephesians 5:22. Therefore, the mutual submission of Christians to one another in 5:21 does not get extended into marriage. The roles of submission and headship are not up for debate. The church submits to Christ because Christ is the head of the church (Eph 1:22). This never gets reversed; Christ never submits to the church and the church never assumes headship over Jesus Christ. Therefore, when God assigns the role of submission to the wife and the role of headship to the husband the roles cannot be reversed as that would violate the picture marriages are to present of Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-23).

Because a remarried wife has been through a divorce, and assuming her first husband broke his covenantal vows, it is likely that a wife in a second marriage may be more hesitant to submit to her husband. A husband in a second marriage needs to give himself to his wife and love her as Jesus loves the church.⁶⁸ More patience will be required on the part of the husband towards his wife and this added patience can, and should, be extended to any children in the family, whether the children are from the wife's first marriage, or the husband's, or their own children born to them in the second marriage. Frank Thielman suggests that in marriage the greater responsibility for the marriage is placed on the husband.⁶⁹ The responsibility will be even more so in a second marriage. The wife's voluntary submission to her husband is not optional for a Christian marriage. Selfless and mutual submission can go a long way towards a lasting marriage. However, a marriage cannot be a picture of Christ and the church unless the wife

(Leicester, England: Apollos, 1999), 412.

⁶⁷ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: Clark, 2001), 532.

⁶⁸ Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 540.

⁶⁹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 371.

voluntarily submits to her husband, and the husband exercises godly headship of the house (Eph 5:32).

A wife who is reluctant to submit to her husband in a second marriage might use her real-life experience in the first marriage as a reason. A wife in a second marriage cannot let real-life experience keep her from submitting, and she must be aware that it may not be real-life experience that is keeping her from submitting but instead her own sinful nature. Best writes that Ephesians 5:22-33 is written to all husbands and wives, not just a few who might like to make their marriage a picture of Christ and the church.⁷⁰ Also, Paul is not addressing specific marital problems that were present in the churches in Ephesus; therefore, the Ephesians 5 passage is a complete theological picture of marriage and its representation of Christ and the church.⁷¹

Tension and conflict have been present in all marriages since Genesis 3. When God issues curses in Genesis 3:16 for Eve, Eve suffers two consequences for her sin. One consequence for Eve is she will have some sort of desire for her husband, and in response to her desire, her husband will rule over her. The meaning of this desire Eve will have for her husband is highly debated and controversial. The primary interpretation is that Eve will desire to rule over Adam, usurping Adam as the head of the family, and Adam will respond with his own show of force. Eve's desire for Adam is the same as sin's desire for Cain in Genesis 4:7. Therefore, Eve is cursed with a distorted desire for her husband.⁷² A secondary interpretation of Eve's distorted desire comes from John Walton. Walton believes that Eve's desire for her husband is related to her childbearing; he believes that Eve's intensifying pain in childbearing is primarily mental anguish and pain, and that Eve

⁷⁰ Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 558.

⁷¹ Best, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 561.

⁷² Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 50.

will be focused on becoming a mother and bringing forth children.⁷³ The words used for pain in Genesis 3:16 are not the typical words used to describe a woman's labor pains.⁷⁴ Walton adds that because Eve's desire for children will be more dominant than Adam's she will need him more than he needs her.⁷⁵ Therefore, Adam will rule over Eve in her distorted desire to have children. By combining Eve's desire for Adam and pain in childbearing into mental anguish Walton takes two consequences of Eve's sin and makes them one.

The second consequence for Eve is God's proclamation that he will intensify her pain in childbearing and in giving birth. The majority view regarding the increase in Eve's pain is that it is physical pain, not mental anguish. John Sailhamer simply interprets Eve's increased pain in childbearing to be physical pain.⁷⁶ K. A. Mathews concurs with Sailhamer stating that the increase in the pain of childbearing parallels Adam's labor in raising crops (Gen 3:17), and serves as a continual reminder of Eve's sin.⁷⁷ Increased pain during pregnancy and delivery should be the primary interpretation of Genesis 3:16. Otherwise, if there was no increase in physical pain it could be assumed that fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28) would have included intense physical pain before the fall. It would not make sense that Eve experienced the consequences of sin, painful bearing of children, before sin had entered the world. The interpretation of mental anguish should not replace the primary interpretation of an

⁷³ John H. Walton, *Genesis: From Biblical Text . . . to Contemporary Life*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 228.

⁷⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 81–82.

⁷⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 228.

⁷⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 91–92.

⁷⁷ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 248–52.

increase in physical pain for the consequences of Eve's sin. However, mental anguish might be added to the physical consequences of Eve's sin.

If the mental anguish interpretation can be added to the physical consequences of Eve's sin, and if childbearing can be extended to childrearing, then there is direct application to blended families.⁷⁸ In Genesis 1:28 God blesses humanity and commands them to multiply and subdue the earth. Then Adam and Eve sin and the consequences of their sin make it more difficult to fulfill God's commands to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. The consequences of sin when juxtaposed with God's original commands to humanity are multiplied in the context of remarriage and blended families. Voluntary submission of a wife to her husband, and the husband exercising servant-like headship for his wife and his family, becomes even more critical to peaceful family life in a blended family. In addition, a remarried mother may give her children relationship priority rather than submitting to her new husband as head. Now that the desire to have children has been accomplished there is the possibility of the marriage becoming secondary. The marriage becoming secondary is also possible in first marriages.

While the greater responsibility is placed on the husband, the wife does need to voluntarily submit to her husband's headship. A wife's voluntary submission to her husband is part of her obedience to Jesus Christ.⁷⁹ Sins people commit against one another are real, and these real sins cause real pain and have real consequences. However, believers must never let life experience undermine how they interpret, or apply, the Bible. A wife in a second marriage must strive for the ideal that God has set before her.

⁷⁸ I may be taking a liberty here in interpreting Gen 3:16 alongside Gen 1:28. The command to multiply and fill the earth did not only include having children, but also raising children; and since Eve's consequences for her sin are primarily in relation to her fulfilling the commands of Gen 1:28, it seems logical to extend those consequences to raising children as well.

⁷⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 376.

Thielman also writes that wives submit only to their own husbands.⁸⁰ This means that the wife does not continue to submit to her ex-husband as he is no longer the head of her household. Therefore, in the interim period between a first and second marriage the ex-wife would not be required to submit to her ex-husband. When two ex-spouses are co-parenting, the ex-wife must act as head of her own household if she has not remarried. Once a second marriage has been entered, the wife (and mother) now submits to the headship of her new husband. Ideally, the new husband will use his authority as head of the house to love his wife and stepchildren as Jesus loves the church.⁸¹ This may include wisdom and discernment in helping his wife deal with a contentious ex-husband.

Not only does the new husband need to be the head of his new wife, and this includes being her head in relation to her ex-husband, but the new husband also needs to be the head of his new household, including children and stepchildren in a blended family. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” This presents a challenge to a new stepfather. It is likely that he has gained some children who are already angry because of divorce. Divorce is incredibly hard on children and rips their world in two. Therefore, a husband in a second marriage must love his wife as Christ loves the church and this will include loving the children from her previous marriage (Eph 5:25). In a second marriage this means a husband loves his wife and gives himself up for her in the context of her ongoing relationship with an ex-husband due to shared custody of children. It also means that a husband gives himself up for his wife by loving the children from her previous marriage and being their head of the household as well as being head for his biological children.

⁸⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 375.

⁸¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 379.

O'Brien comments on Ephesians 5:26, saying the husband cleanses his bride by washing her with the gospel.⁸² Clinton Arnold differs from O'Brien by interpreting 5:26-27 as a purely Christological picture that cannot be directly applicable husbands because they cannot purify their wives.⁸³ Thielman interprets verses 26 and 27 as a digression from the relationship of husbands and wives to the relationship between Christ and the church.⁸⁴ A husband cannot literally provide salvation for his wife; only Jesus can do that, but a husband can love his wife in the same way Jesus loves the church. The command to husbands to love their wives in Ephesians 5:25 must be based on how Jesus loves the church by making her holy as presented in verses 26 and 27. Paul then immediately returns to the commands to husbands in verse 28 when he writes, "In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies." In John 15:13 Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." Jesus laid down his life on the cross and was then resurrected and provided salvation for humanity. Human beings cannot lay their lives down and accomplish salvation for humanity like Jesus did, but they can selflessly give themselves to one another and love in the same way Jesus loves. Husbands cannot purify their wives like Jesus can, but they can love their wives as Christ loves the church and give themselves up for their wives.

A new husband and stepfather should love his wife the same way Jesus loves the church. He can live out the gospel in his blended family. He can model how a disciple of Jesus lives. He can be kind, gracious, and compassionate. He can endure unjust hardship as his wife, children, and stepchildren adjust to living as a stepfamily. He can give himself to his family. Just as a remarried wife may struggle with voluntary

⁸² O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 423.

⁸³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 420–26.

⁸⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 382.

submission to her new husband because of her life experience, children too may have difficulty accepting the spiritual headship of a new stepfather. Their world has already been torn apart by the selfishness of divorce. It may take years for children to accept the selflessness being lived out by the new head of the household.⁸⁵ According to Ephesians 5:29, husbands are to care for their wives both physically and emotionally as well as, or better, than they care for themselves.⁸⁶ Because children in blended families live in a constant state of upheaval this principle can be extended to them. The upheaval of life does not mean children get to usurp the covenant relationship between husband and wife; however, the more peaceful the family is, the more successful the marriage can be.

In Matthew 20:26-27 Jesus tells his disciples that whoever wants to be great in God's kingdom must be a servant of all, rather than lording their authority over people like the Gentiles do. Matthew 20:26-27 is often referenced when teaching about the headship of husbands and fathers. Also, in John 13 Jesus sets the example of leadership by becoming a servant and washing the disciples' feet, and he then charges the disciples that they are to follow his example (John 13:14). This must be the type of headship a husband exercises if he is to love his wife and family as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25).

Not all marriages end in divorce. For centuries believers and non-believers alike have married and remained married until one spouse dies. Believers are called to a higher standard. Believers are called to present a living picture of Christ and the Church by submitting to God's structure for marriage (Eph 5:22-33). However, if the wife chooses not to submit to her husband, and the husband chooses not to exercise his headship, while the marriage may last it cannot be a picture of Christ and the church. Presenting a living picture of Christ and the church to the world is of even greater value

⁸⁵ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 420.

⁸⁶ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 388.

than a marriage that does not end in divorce. Husbands are called to headship and wives are called to submission not to make the marriage “work,” but to submit their marriage to God, and by doing so, proclaim the gospel. Proclaiming the gospel should happen in second marriages just as it should in first marriages.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEED FOR MINISTERING TO STEPFAMILIES

People who are disciples of Jesus Christ must count the cost of discipleship in all areas of life, including remarriage and stepfamilies. A committed believer who is considering remarriage after a divorce knows he has already missed God's ideal to be married until death. However, pursuing a second marriage does not mean settling for second best. The desire for human community is real. God created mankind in the context of community, specifically marriage (Gen 1:27). God was the one who decided it was not good for Adam to be alone (Gen 2:18). Alone, Adam could not fulfill God's commands to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it (Gen 1:28). While the earth has been filled, the fulness needs to be maintained. Thus, marriage became, and remains, the primary building block of community. Because the primary building block for human community is still marriage (Matt 19:11), many who experience divorce will seek to remarry, risking the heartbreak and chaos of divorce once again.

A man and woman who find each other and are considering remarriage may not take the time necessary to consider all the additional stresses of remarriage, particularly if children are involved. They need to count the costs, such as child discipline, child support, school schedules, co-parenting with ex-spouses, and so forth. In Luke 14:28, Jesus says, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" Jesus is giving an illustration about the cost of discipleship, which is clear from Luke 14:27. Counting the cost of a second marriage can be daunting. In this chapter I argue that the church has a primary responsibility to prepare believers for second marriages, and when a second marriage produces a blended family, special attention must be given to the children who

are part of the new stepfamily. Finally, husbands and wives in second marriages must still fulfill their God-given roles of headship and submission regardless of the added stress of a second marriage. A second marriage does not mean second best.

The Stepfamily: An Area of Needed Ministry

In 1969 Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, signed the nation's first no-fault divorce law.¹ The no-fault divorce law meant that husbands and wives could get divorced for any reason, or in effect, for no reason at all. The divorce rate in the United States more than doubled from 1960 to 1980, growing from 9.2 divorces per 1000 married women to 22.6 divorces per 1000 married women.² These statistics only relate to married women. At the beginning of the 1970s, the divorce rate in America was 3.1 divorces per 1000 people; by the end of the 1970s the divorce rate climbed to 5.1 divorces per 1000 people.³ The Republican governor's signature began the deterioration of marriage and the family in the United States. In recent years the divorce rate has begun to decline. The decline appears to be due to several factors, including the age at which women marry, educational background, and a rise in cohabitation to name a few.⁴ Unfortunately, because of the rise in cohabitation the decline in divorce cannot be solely attributed to people remaining faithful to their marital vows. A cohabitation relationship has a 49 percent likelihood of ending in five years, compared to a 20 percent likelihood of a marriage ending in five years.⁵ The end of a cohabitating relationship does not end in

¹ "The Evolution of Divorce," National Affairs, last modified fall 2009, <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-evolution-of-divorce>.

² "The Evolution of Divorce."

³ Frank Olito, "How the Divorce Rate Has Changed over the Last 150 Years," *Insider*, last modified January 30, 2019, <https://www.insider.com/divorce-rate-changes-over-time-2019-1>.

⁴ "Millennials Are Causing the U.S. Divorce Rate to Decline," *Time*, last modified September 25, 2018, <https://time.com/5405757/millennials-us-divorce-rate-decline/>.

⁵ Center for Disease Control, "Trends in Marriage and Divorce," last modified July 24, 2002,

a legal divorce; thus, the divorce rate is declining. However, the consequences of a broken relationship remain, and if children were born during the cohabitation all involved must deal with the fallout.

For years it has been assumed that the divorce rate for first marriages is approximately 50 percent, though that percentage has been questioned recently. However, it is generally agreed that the divorce rate for second marriages is higher than first marriages.⁶ In their book *Happily Remarried* David and Lisa Frisbee state that the divorce rate for second marriages is approximately 60 percent.⁷ Sixty percent is on the low end, however, as the divorce rate for second marriages may be as high as 67 percent.⁸ In her book *Stepfamily Success* author Natalie Gillespie says that about 75 percent of people who get divorced remarry.⁹ The higher rate of divorce in second marriages teaches at least two things. First, even though many people have been through the heartache of divorce they are willing to commit themselves to another spouse in the covenant of marriage. Second, it teaches that a first marriage does not necessarily prepare people for success in a second marriage.

In addition to the higher divorce rate for second marriages, Gillespie herself laments the lack of stepfamily ministries in churches she has been a part of.¹⁰ Gillespie's lament is a double-edged sword. While not being able to find a church that offered

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/02news/div_mar_cohab.htm.

⁶ US Census Bureau, "Remarriage in the United States," last modified March 10, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-30.html>.

⁷ David Frisbie and Lisa Frisbie, *Happily Remarried* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 16.

⁸ "Divorce Statistics and Divorce Rate in the USA," Divorce Statistics, last modified April 5, 2012, <https://www.divorcestatistics.info/divorce-statistics-and-divorce-rate-in-the-usa.html>.

⁹ Natalie Nichols Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success: Practical Solutions for Common Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 2007), 13.

¹⁰ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 14.

specific ministries or mentoring to those in stepfamilies, she also confesses that stepfamilies do their best to present themselves well on Sunday mornings, though stepfamily life is not always well on Sunday afternoons; Gillespie adds that she was unable to find Christian resources for her book, which she wrote to support Christians in stepfamilies.¹¹ Also, when writing in 1978, Darlene McRoberts noted the lack of published etiquette available when planning her second wedding.¹² The experiences of these women and their stepfamilies call out to the church that there is a need for stepfamily ministries.

The Bible teaches repeatedly about God's grace, mercy, and compassion. The church needs to bring grace, mercy, and compassion to those affected by divorce, including husbands, wives, and children. Fallen human beings sin, even those who have placed their faith in Jesus, and with sin comes consequences. The problem is the closer a human relationship is, the more apparent remaining sins become, and the greater the consequences when the relationship breaks apart. There is no closer earthly relationship than husband and wife. Because marriage is the closest of all relationships, divorce brings with it some of the most devastating consequences, especially when children are involved. In a second marriage the consequences of the divorce from the first marriage do not simply dissipate. Instead, the second marriage can become a magnifying glass, magnifying the consequences of sin from the divorce and adding heat to all relationships involved, like a magnifying glass in the sun. Perhaps churches are hesitant to form stepfamily ministries because every divorce fails to meet the Bible's standard that a marriage is not to end until one spouse dies. This hesitation by churches is understandable but does not make the neglect excusable. Ignoring divorce and remarriage

¹¹ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 14.

¹² Darlene McRoberts, *Second Marriage: The Promise and the Challenge* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 38.

in the church means ignoring many hurting people.¹³ Approximately ninety million people in the U.S. were living in stepfamilies in 2005, and the number has grown.¹⁴ People who attend church are not immune to the issues of divorce and remarriage.¹⁵

One criticism that has typically been directed at churches is that they are not always welcoming to sinners who are deemed to have fallen too far short of God's standards. Believers who have been divorced fall into this category; they often feel like they are second-class citizens in the kingdom of heaven. Churches should take note that a constant criticism leveled at Jesus during his earthly ministry was that he ate and drank with sinners (Matt 11:19). No one should ever feel like a second-class citizen in the church. Whether a person has only told a little white lie or committed murder James says that person is guilty of breaking the entirety of God's law (Jas 2:10). Therefore, believers who have been through divorce and remarriage are not second-class citizens in the Kingdom of heaven any more than the man addicted to pornography or the woman who idolizes her children. What makes divorce and remarriage such a difficult subject is that the consequences of divorce and remarriage are large and visible.

Helping people navigate the consequences of divorce and the potential blessing of remarriage presents church leadership with an incredible opportunity to minister to their congregations. In the book *The Meaning of Marriage* Timothy and Kathy Keller write that one of the purposes of marriage is spouses helping each other progress in sanctification towards their future glorified selves.¹⁶ Knowing one's spouse as a flawed

¹³ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 199.

¹⁴ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 203.

¹⁵ Barna Group, "Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians," last modified September 8, 2004, <https://www.barna.com/research/born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians/>.

¹⁶ Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 149.

individual, whose flaws will be magnified in a marriage relationship, and accepting those flaws as issues to be addressed and not as reasons to end the marriage will go a long way towards a lasting marriage. A second marriage will have the flaws of the new spouse as well as flaws from an ex-spouse, stepchildren, and ex-in-laws, among others. The church can come alongside individuals preparing to remarry and help them count the cost (Luke 14:28). Counting the cost of remarriage should include addressing practical issues, including the following: How much child support will be paid and for how many years? How contentious is the co-parent, or co-parents? What are the shared custody arrangements? Are both spouses bringing children into the second marriage or just one? Are the new husband and wife planning on having children together? Whose house will they live in, or will they find a new one? All these questions are practical. However, when two people are infatuated with each other they are not always thinking practically, and infatuation with a new love interest can be intensified after a person has gone through a divorce.¹⁷

One of the most important questions a couple wanting to get remarried should address is how their first marriage ended. What better place to walk through these painful memories than with the trusted counsel of a pastor, elder, or deacon? If there was blatant sin such as adultery, abuse, or abandonment all involved know why the first marriage ended.¹⁸ However, there is not always a clear sin on the part of one spouse that ends a marriage. Sometimes couples allow little problems to pile on top of one another until they become too big to deal with.¹⁹ Pastors and shepherds within the church need to help

¹⁷ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 34.

¹⁸ I am not necessarily arguing at this point for abuse to be a biblically valid reason for divorce. If a wife or husband was physically or sexually abused by the spouse, that would be the clear reason for the divorce.

¹⁹ Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 45.

couples identify the patterns of behavior in their past that led to divorce so that they might repent of them as they enter a new marriage. Otherwise they will carry old patterns of how they relate into the new marriage.²⁰ In addition, pastors and elders can help men and women extend forgiveness to an offending ex-spouse, or help them determine how they can express genuine repentance to an ex-spouse they have offended.

The church has both a ministerial interest in successful second marriages as well as a theological interest. The ministerial interest is the personal success and well-being of all involved in the second marriage and the new stepfamily. The theological interest is in upholding the institution of marriage. Marriage has come under attack, and with the prevalence of revolving-door relationships people feel the freedom to change marriages like they change jobs. The *laissez faire* attitude that many in America have towards marriage tarnishes the institution and degrades one of marriage's primary purposes in witnessing to the world the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:22-33). One of the biggest lies that has led to the degradation of marriage in American culture is the so-called need for personal happiness. The reason this is a lie is that personal happiness in American culture lies in a self-centered, or selfish, approach to life. Selfishness is a sin against others and is the primary enemy of marriage.²¹ The selfishness of one or both spouses that led to divorce can carry over into the second marriage. Selfishness wreaks havoc in all marriages. The church needs to come alongside men and women in second marriages and help them identify patterns of selfishness that will threaten the marriage and the relationships within the family. David Powlison writes that all believers "have a common calling in all relationships to walk worthy of your identity as the Wife, Child, and Slave of the Lord."²² All relationships includes stepparents and

²⁰ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 35.

²¹ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 8.

²² David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the*

stepchildren, husband and wife, biological parent and biological child, and the web that these relationships form within a stepfamily. Selfishness and the belief in personal happiness play out repeatedly in situations of divorce and remarriage. Judith Wallerstein states parents often believe that if they get divorced and are happy, their children will be happy, and this is simply not true.²³ Instead of happiness, what divorced spouses and their children find is anger—often years of anger, which means that divorce does not bring about happiness.²⁴

With anger in mind, the church can help men and women and their children preparing to enter a second marriage deal with the issues of anger that they will likely bring with them into the new stepfamily. Second husbands and new stepfathers will find themselves the target of angry children. These children are responding in anger to a situation out of their control. Robert Jones defines anger as “our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil.”²⁵ In cases of divorce there is always sin, or evil, involved. Jones’s definition of anger can be applied to family members who have gone through a divorce. Because divorces are all caused by legitimate sin, they are not just a perceived evil but a real evil. Reactions against the consequences of divorce abound among all involved. Ex-husbands, ex-wives, and certainly children of divorce will be angry. A new stepfamily does not cure anger. New stepfathers and stepmothers can expect to be the recipients of justifiable anger from their children, though they may or may not be the justifiable targets of that anger.

Lens of Scripture (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 61.

²³ Judith S. Wallerstein, introduction to *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, by Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee (New York: Hachette, 2014), xxix.

²⁴ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 5.

²⁵ Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 15.

Pastors, elders, deacons, and mature believers can come alongside those preparing for remarriage. They can help them prepare for the angry attacks that are coming. They can encourage remarried husbands and wives that responding to anger in kind will not produce the righteousness of God (Jas 1:20). They can help them count the cost of remarriage so that they will be prepared rather than overwhelmed (Luke 14:25-33), thus avoiding a second divorce. The goal for remarriages is to be a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33), rather than becoming part of the 60 percent divorce rate for second marriages. In the book *Tying the Knot* Rob Green writes to young couples preparing for marriage that they cannot live without the body of Christ.²⁶ Stepfamilies also need the body of Christ to surround them in support and encouragement as they navigate the waters of remarriage. Whereas the husband and the wife should be the focus in counseling for a first marriage, in cases of remarriage, significant considerations should be given to the children as well, who may suffer as much, if not more than, their parents who are now no longer husband and wife.

The church is equipped to minister to men and women who enter second marriages and bring children with them. Faithfulness in a second marriage is vital to all who are involved. One thing the church must teach is that divorce is not an option in a second marriage. Regardless of the reason for the end of the first marriage two people entering a second marriage must not bring an escape clause with them.²⁷ While this may sound like common sense, the truth is that once human beings have failed at something they more easily give up the second time they try. No institution is better equipped to meet the needs of those who have experienced divorce, remarriage, and are living in blended families than the church. As discussed in chapter 2, views and interpretations of divorce and remarriage in the Bible are hotly debated within churches. Indeed, to be

²⁶ Green, *Tying the Knot*, 113.

²⁷ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 44.

faithful to Scripture churches do not want to give license to behaviors that are contradictory to God's moral law. However, churches should never forget that alongside God's moral law is God's mercy, compassion, and desire for reconciliation. God gave the ministry of reconciliation to the church (2 Cor 5:18-21). People must first be reconciled to God and then to one another. McRoberts noted that she and her prospective second husband were unable to anticipate all the difficulties of a second marriage.²⁸ Every remarriage will have different stresses, details, and variables. However, the church can provide a theological foundation for those entering a second marriage. The church can minister to spouses and children in stepfamilies teaching them how to live out God's mercy, grace, forgiveness, justice, holiness, and righteousness in their blended families. This foundation, God-willing, will help reduce the divorce rate for second marriages.

Dealing with the Consequences of Divorce

Divorce is an unpeaceful devastating process to go through for all involved. It is easy to assume that a divorce is the solution to a hostile marriage. In cases of adultery, desertion, or abuse a divorce will most likely provide a greater degree of safety and peace for those who have been sinned against. However, divorce does not bring an end to anger and conflict. When there are shared children, ex-spouses must remain in contact with one another and the same sins that ended the marriage will continue to affect the post-divorce/co-parenting relationship. A divorce that happened because of sin will not cure sin in the ex-spouses. As Jones puts it, expect conflict.²⁹ In addition, remarriage often changes ex-spouses for the worse; therefore, parents must be cautious not to teach their children to hate the other parent.³⁰

²⁸ McRoberts, *Second Marriage*, 54.

²⁹ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 30.

³⁰ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 156, 164.

However, this does not mean that there cannot be peace and reconciliation. Paul writes that one of the reasons for allowing a non-believer to leave the marriage is for the sake of peace. “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace” (1 Cor 7:15). As much as is within the control of the believer, he or she must strive to live at peace with his or her ex-spouse. In *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* Paul Tripp writes about the circle of concern. Using a circle, Tripp represents an area of concern in a person’s life. Within that circle Tripp puts a smaller circle which represents the responsibilities of the person.³¹ These responsibilities are things that the person has control over, areas in which they can make faithful decisions as believers. The rest of the circle surrounding the inner circle of responsibility represents things concerning the person that are beyond his control; these things, writes Tripp, must be committed to God in prayer.³² In situations of divorce and remarriage there are many things beyond a person’s control. They do not have control over the standards of discipline their ex-spouse establishes for shared children. They do not have control over the significant others, or new spouses, their ex-spouse may choose to marry. Therefore, not only do they not have control over the standard of discipline in the other home, but they do not control who will be enforcing those standards. Lack of control is one of the clear reasons that post-divorce life and remarriage must be bathed in prayer.³³ In a stepfamily spouses must make faithful decisions and carry them out in areas within their control and surrender the things beyond their control to God in continual prayer.

³¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 251–52.

³² Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 252.

³³ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 25.

The goal is still peace, even when there is no possibility of restoring the marriage after divorce. In a footnote in his booklet *Restoring Your Broken Marriage*, Jones makes the distinction between attitudinal and transactional forgiveness. Attitudinal forgiveness and transactional forgiveness are both required to restore a marriage.³⁴ However, once a divorce has taken place and remarriage has occurred for one or both spouses, transactional forgiveness, restoring the marriage, can no longer take place. Attitudinal forgiveness, understanding one's forgiveness in Christ and having a forgiving disposition towards an ex-spouse by not holding past sins against him or her, can still take place. There can be reconciliation and a peaceful relationship between ex-spouses even without the restoration of the marriage. Attitudinal forgiveness will be the foundation of reconciling with the ex-spouse and being at peace with one another.

Marriages can be ended by one or both spouses. It has been assumed so far in this chapter that the offended spouse is pursuing peace with the spouse who sinned. What about the offending spouse? The question becomes, how can an ex-spouse whose sin ended the marriage demonstrate genuine repentance when there is no possibility of restoring the marriage? Repentance always begins with confession, so a person must confess his sin, or sins, to his former spouse (Matt 5:23-24). Most likely an ex-spouse is aware of the sins that led to divorce; however, that does not mean that the covenant-breaking spouse has confessed. After confessing sin to a former spouse, the offending spouse can continue to demonstrate repentance by being as cooperative and accommodating as possible. In the case of shared custody, this can mean being on time for dropping children off and picking them up. In a world of changing schedules, one should be as flexible as possible while bearing in mind child custody is worked out in the court system and court rulings need to be obeyed (Rom 13:1). Offending spouses do have

³⁴ Robert D. Jones, *Restoring Your Broken Marriage: Healing after Adultery* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 28.

legal rights when raising children in a joint custody situation. Both former spouses are still the parents of their children. In demanding one's rights, however, one must be cautious in the amount of detail the children are exposed to. Paul writes two times that fathers are not to anger their children (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). It is the children who are shuffled from house to house, packing and repacking their bags. It is the children whose plans are often changed without notice because of their parents' changing work schedules. This inconsistency in life can be multiplied when there is a remarriage of one or both parents. While many of these issues are hashed out in court, co-parents must keep in mind that court proceedings do incredible damage to their children.³⁵ Consequently, even when demanding one's legal rights in terms of co-parenting both parents should place their children's needs and well-being above their own (Phil 2:3). As the offending spouse putting one's children's needs above his or her own rights shows genuine repentance. A former spouse can also demonstrate repentance by not speaking badly about the child's other parent (1 Pet 2:1). These are just a few ways for an offending spouse to show genuine repentance when there is no possibility of restoring the marriage. The repentance of a covenant breaking spouse must be exercised for a lifetime.

One thing that parents and stepparents must consider is that children want answers. They need, and want to know, what led to their parents' divorce. According to Wallerstein and her coauthors, children have a right to this knowledge.³⁶ These children are concerned over who was morally wrong in the events leading up to the divorce of their parents.³⁷ Children see the divorce as a failure.³⁸ People are proud and stubborn when it comes to their failures and sins, refusing to admit their errors. Pride and

³⁵ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 196.

³⁶ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 46.

³⁷ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 287.

³⁸ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 34.

stubbornness are often multiplied in parenting. Parents believe that if they admit their weaknesses or mistakes to their children the children will not respect them or listen to them. Tripp believes that parents must confess their sins to their children, otherwise their children will see through their parents' self-righteousness and this will lead to children disrespecting their parents.³⁹ Confession and repentance are critical for parents who have been divorced. First, it will provide an understanding of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and grace for their children. Second, it should establish in the heart and mind of the child that while they suffer the consequences of the divorce, it was not their fault. They should not blame themselves. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect."

In an ideal world, ex-spouses who are co-parents would get along after divorce and make life as pleasant as possible for their children. However, in an ideal world there never would have been a divorce. Yet the Bible is clear that even ex-spouses must pursue peace with one another.⁴⁰ Romans 12:18b says, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Tripp's circle of responsibility is an application of "as far as it depends on you." But what if an ex-spouse does not want to be peaceable? Jones has a three-step process for unreconciled relationships that do not end:

Ideally, three characteristics should mark our ministry plan: (1) it must be practical, one that includes specific, concrete, doable steps. (2) It must be a long-term, ongoing plan—not a quick-fix, flash-in-the-pan effort but a lifestyle of persevering love. (Since we have no basis for assuming the person will change, be prepared for a long-term ministry.) (3) And it must reflect the teaching and example of Jesus and his apostles.⁴¹

³⁹ Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 40.

⁴⁰ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 36.

⁴¹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 187.

These three steps can be applied to contentious relationships with ex-spouses. Some examples include being on time picking up children, and making sure children are ready to go when they are being picked up, or being as accommodating and as flexible as possible when it comes to vacations and ever-changing work schedules. One suggestion is for former spouses to only talk about parenting issues and nothing else.⁴² Perhaps one of the most important ways people can persevere in love towards an ex-spouse is to make sure they never speak badly about him or her in front of the children. Regardless of how a marriage ended, an ex-spouse is one of only two biological parents the children have. Also, continued conflict takes two people. While both spouses may not be responsible for ending the marriage, each must be willing to evaluate their part in continued conflict with an ex-spouse and be willing to confess and repent of sin.⁴³ Finally, prayer for the ex-spouse is important. No one enters marriage thinking that one day the person they said “I do” to will be their enemy. However, after divorce this may be the case. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus teaches believers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. He is not saying to pray for an enemy’s demise. Jesus teaches believers to pray for an enemy’s good. Jesus says that God sends the blessing of rain on the just and the unjust, therefore believers must pray for the good of an ex-spouse.

Should Remarriage Happen and to Whom?

Believers who have been divorced and who are biblically free to remarry must follow Paul’s principle for widows in 1 Corinthians 7:39: “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” Believers who have been divorced and are not biblically free to remarry—that is, their sin led to the divorce—after demonstrating genuine

⁴² Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 141.

⁴³ Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 58.

repentance and reconciliation when there is no possibility of restoring the marriage, may decide to remarry. These believers must also follow Paul's advice to widows. A believer must marry a believer in a second marriage. In addition to the requirement of marrying only in the Lord, men and women considering a second marriage will need to spend time evaluating their previous marriages as well as the current state of relationships. How have the children handled the divorce? How has the relationship been with the ex-spouse in co-parenting? How have ex-in-laws, the grandparents, contributed to the stability, or instability, of post-divorce life? How has the potential new spouse responded to all these new variables in life? No one can predict the future, however, if a person has not responded to post-divorce life in a godly manner there is no reason to expect that a second marriage will generate godliness. Likely, a second marriage will only add problems, thus leading to a likely second divorce.

Remarriages that produce blended families unite people together who are often still dealing with unresolved conflict from their previous family units. Jay Adams believes that in marriage counseling whatever level of conflict he experiences in the counseling room he multiplies by ten in determining the level of conflict that happens at home.⁴⁴ It would be appropriate to take this principle and apply it to the difference between first and second marriages. Whatever levels of stress and anxiety were experienced in a first marriage couples entering a second marriage can expect the level of stress and anxiety to be multiplied. Two people considering remarriage know that divorce does not completely sever the relationship with an ex-spouse when there is joint custody of children.⁴⁵ Divorce does not solve the issue of anger; the anger former spouses have towards one another will continue.⁴⁶ Because of continuing anger people preparing for

⁴⁴ Jay Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems* (1983; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 91.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems*, 75.

⁴⁶ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 5.

remarriage will need to do the difficult work of forgiving their ex-spouse.⁴⁷ If issues of anger, forgiveness, and co-parenting have not been handled in a godly manner, and remarriage risks multiplying, rather than curing, these issues, a man or woman might want to reconsider the prospect of remarriage.

Children of Divorce and Blended Families

Children who grow up after their parents have divorced are more prone to drug and alcohol abuse; daughters of divorced parents are more likely to become sexually promiscuous years earlier than their peers in intact families.⁴⁸ After a divorce parents are forced to redefine their lives. Mothers who used to stay at home may go back to school full time, back to work full time, or both. Fathers who worked full time and financially supported the family continue to work but must now maintain their own residence and often pay child support. The child support is not equivalent to financial support that the family received when intact, therefore, the entire family is financially less viable after divorce. In these changing home and work environments, children often find themselves alone while their now single parents pursue work and the lives of singlehood.⁴⁹ It is no wonder children of divorce are often angry and rebellious, turning to drugs, alcohol, and sex to alleviate their loneliness.

In the book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* Wallerstein teaches that children of divorce suffer all kinds of consequences, such as “learning problems, school drop-out rates, early sexual behavior, incidence of divorce, physical illness,” and “anger towards parents,” to name a few.⁵⁰ Sex outside of marriage, drunkenness, and drug use

⁴⁷ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 62.

⁴⁸ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 188.

⁴⁹ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 168.

⁵⁰ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 15.

are all behaviors the Bible teaches to be immoral. The question becomes, how do Christian parents who have been through divorce teach, encourage, comfort, and discipline their children within the context of divorce and remarriage? And how do parents and potential stepparents begin a new family with children who are already angry and rebellious? In Ephesians 6:4 Paul writes, “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Divorce clearly violates this command since, regardless of the reasons for the divorce, children are tempted to be angry.

In a second marriage, with children, husbands, and wives begin with the disadvantage of angry children. The new stepfather may demonstrate his selflessness in no more important way than to endure the anger of his stepchildren, and his biological children for that matter, until the children have had time to adjust and process the new marriage and the new stepfamily. A new husband and stepfather may find himself identifying with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:4: “Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.” New spouses need to know that one source of a child’s anger in remarriage is that the remarriage has effectively ended any possibility of the child’s biological parents restoring their marriage. Here then is a man who needs to assume the role of headship in his new marriage and those who may be most resistant to this role is not his wife who submits to him, but his biological children and stepchildren. Of course, one should not assume that children will only be angry at the new head of the household. Stepmothers will also bear the anger of their children. Yet, this anger from children must not stop a woman from fulfilling her part of the picture of Christ and the church. Hard as it may be the new wife needs to submit to her new husband as head of the family even if, in the beginning, her biological children want nothing to do with their new stepfather. The challenges of a stepfamily can be daunting. It should be no secret that being the head of a household in a stepfamily has greater challenges than being the head of the household in

a first marriage and family.⁵¹ However, this does not mean that pursuing a second marriage and a stepfamily is not a worthwhile endeavor. A good second marriage can provide a healing environment for children of divorce.⁵² For the sake of their future, children need to see good examples of marriage.

Children of divorce who grow up splitting time between homes must navigate different standards and expectations. Knowing that co-parents may disagree with the standards established in a new stepfamily, how are the new husband and wife going to define the discipline standards in their home? Take the issue of corporal punishment for example. Tedd Tripp says spanking is a God-given discipline tool specific to the parent-child relationship.⁵³ In making this statement Tripp notes that spanking at school should not be allowed because school authorities do not have the same loving relationship with the children that parents do. A stepfather-stepchild relationship is different than the student-teacher relationship, and the biological, or adoptive, father-child relationship. Adding to the question of corporal punishment is the possibility of legal action. Would the biological father accept the stepfather's spanking his children? Tripp relates that biological parents can be afraid to spank their own children because they may be charged with child abuse.⁵⁴ A stepparent may be concerned about the legal ramifications of corporal punishment if a child's biological parent is opposed to corporal discipline. Also, studies show that a biological father's opinion of a stepfather is critical to the relationship of child and stepfather.⁵⁵ This can make discipline of children even more difficult. Ideally,

⁵¹ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 136.

⁵² Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 261.

⁵³ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2005), 105.

⁵⁴ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 111.

⁵⁵ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 245.

all involved in parenting children in blended family situations would present a united front when it comes to the discipline of children.

Before saying, “I do” to his new bride-to-be, the groom-to-be must count the cost and develop a plan for raising children and stepchildren in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Stuart Scott and Martha Peace suggest that the new husband and wife need to have a united front when disciplining children in a blended family.⁵⁶ It would be helpful for the future husband and wife to write out a plan of discipline together before they get married. The Frisbees recommend that the biological parent be the boss at the beginning of a new stepfamily.⁵⁷ They suggest in the beginning the new stepparent take on more of a grandparent type role, supporting and reinforcing the biological parent’s rules and approach to discipline.⁵⁸ For Christians with a conservative interpretation of the Bible this may seem like heresy. If the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, does this mean he is to be the primary disciplinarian in the family? Of course, he is for his biological children. If Ephesians 5:25-27 is interpreted that the husband is primarily spiritually responsible for his family, and if one of his primary jobs is not to provoke his children to anger per Ephesians 6:4, then the husband must take the steps necessary to alleviate the anger of all children in his household. For the sake of peace, he may relinquish the role of disciplinarian at the beginning of the marriage until the children have had time to adjust. To take on the role too soon will add to the confusion and instability of the children.⁵⁹ It would be better to have a peaceful family than to generate more anger. Writing down a plan for child-

⁵⁶ Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 156.

⁵⁷ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 127.

⁵⁸ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 129.

⁵⁹ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 137.

discipline can be shared with all parental figures involved in the lives of the children. Even if the plan is not accepted by all parental figures at least everyone will be aware of the standard maintained in one home. In addition, the reality is that in a stepfamily there are always going to be four, maybe five, people involved in child discipline, the biological parents, one or two stepparents, and the child.⁶⁰ Because there are so many involved there needs to be good communication and diligent exercise and application of God's wisdom and discernment.

New stepmoms and stepdads should not expect to make an immediate connection with their new stepchildren. One reason is that children of divorce often hold on to the hope that their biological parents will get back together for years.⁶¹ The marriage to a different person will crush this hope or become an obstacle for the child to overcome. In response stepparents must do their best to love their stepchildren as they do their own children. Parents and stepparents must be patient. On average it takes five to seven years for stepfamilies to adjust to their new living arrangements.⁶² The amount of time for a stepfamily to adjust and the patience of parents during the adjustment period is critical because many stepfamilies do not last more than three years.⁶³ A second divorce increases the instability in the lives of children and intensifies their anger. While patience is a critical aspect of stepfamilies, it does not mean doing nothing when it comes to children who are rebellious and engaging in risky, potentially life-threatening behavior. There must still be discipline for children.

Children can feel like they are not valued in a stepfamily. Even in casual conversations with people one often hears phrases such as, "You're not my mother," or,

⁶⁰ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 239.

⁶¹ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 92.

⁶² Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 77.

⁶³ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 33.

“You’re not my father!” In the book *Competent to Counsel* Adams presents a tool that can give voice to everyone in the family. He advises the use of a conference table around which counselees, or entire families, may gather allowing them a concrete forum for communication.⁶⁴ The idea that family meetings are beneficial to stepfamilies is stated in secular research.⁶⁵ Because blended families present the possibility of playing favorites, dad favoring his new wife, or stepmother favoring her biological daughter over her stepdaughter, the use of a conference table when discussing family matters can be used to give everyone a voice. The conference table gives everyone the physical appearance of equal worth, which does not discount parental authority. Rather, the hope is that all family members feel valued and acknowledged at the table. In addition, the use of a table can visually communicate the father as the head of the household and give him the opportunity to lead the family with a servant’s heart.

Julie Lowe offers advice to parents with difficult children. She does not write specifically about children of divorce, however, by the very nature of being children of divorce these children can be difficult to parent. Lowe asks three questions that are pertinent to parents and stepparents: “Is my parenting loving? Is it consistent? Is it wise?”⁶⁶ The first question is important to ask because children often blame themselves for the divorce of their parents and assume if they went away everything would be better.⁶⁷ Children of divorce need to know they are loved by their parents and stepparents. The question of consistency will likely be the hardest question to answer in a stepfamily. With joint custody and different standards in different homes, a child’s world is in a

⁶⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 231–36.

⁶⁵ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 242.

⁶⁶ Julie Lowe, “Reflections on Parenting a Difficult Child,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, no. 3 (2017): 62.

⁶⁷ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 111.

constant state of flux.⁶⁸ The third question, “Is it wise?” must constantly be asked and reevaluated as children grow from childhood, to adolescence, and into adulthood. In an intact family husband and wife may naturally do this together; however, in a stepfamily wise parenting can be more difficult because original custody, child support, and visitation rulings do not change as the children grow and change.⁶⁹

Adjusting to Remarriage

When two people stand up in front of their family, friends, and minister and pledge their lives to one another they are not planning on divorce. They are not planning on fighting, infidelity, abandonment, or abuse. They are planning to live happily ever after. Unfortunately, because they live in a fallen world happily ever after does not always happen and divorce often does. Husband, wife, or both may one day find themselves standing before family, friends, and a minister pledging their lives to another person—this time with the added stresses of child support, visitation or joint custody, as well as the reality of a failed marriage and an ex-spouse to contend with. It is hard to find examples of divorce, remarriage, and stepfamilies in the Bible that correlate to modern times. Some likely candidates would be Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Though their story begins with polygamy in Genesis 16, an accepted cultural practice of the time, it ends with a broken family in Genesis 21, when Hagar and Ishmael are sent away because of Sarah (Gen 21:10). The events of Hagar and Ishmael being sent away occur in Genesis 21; however, God had previously spoken to Hagar about Ishmael. “This man will be like a wild donkey. *His hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him* [emphasis added]; he will settle near all his relatives” (Gen 16:12). Even in the book of Genesis the consequences of a broken family can be seen. What does this mean for the

⁶⁸ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 167.

⁶⁹ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 314.

husband and wife who are seeking remarriage after divorce and are trying to put two broken families together to be one whole? It means they can still be faithful. Abraham and Sarah are both listed as those who lived by faith in Hebrews 11. For all their mistakes, faults, and sins they are counted in the New Testament as faithful.

Wallerstein's book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* has already been cited several times. What has not been stated, however, is that her research is secular. The secular nature of her research requires two observations. First, the consequences of divorce in the lives of children are purely observational. She has observed the effects of divorce on children into adulthood over the span of twenty-five years. The second observation is that with regards to marriage and remarriage Wallerstein remains somewhat ambiguous. She does relate that a long remarriage can be beneficial for children, providing much needed stability in their lives.⁷⁰ However, Wallerstein also acknowledges that there is a greater likelihood of divorce in second marriages, so that rather than adding stability to a child's life a second marriage will likely make life more unstable.⁷¹ Couple this with the fact that more than 40 percent of the children in her study never married, and two out of three children in her study said they never wanted to have kids themselves, it is easy to see the detrimental effects of being a child of divorce.⁷² Most poignantly, Wallerstein states, "Sadly, children of divorce who divorce are not better at protecting their children."⁷³ And yet, in a somewhat contradictory statement, Wallerstein does not believe that America should regress; she views easier divorces as progress in American society, rather than a trend to overcome.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 83.

⁷¹ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 295.

⁷² Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 67, 289.

⁷³ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 220.

⁷⁴ Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee, *Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 297.

Everyone in a new stepfamily needs grace and mercy, and the new husband and wife are the two primary people to practice and preach them. Grace and mercy are the qualities that every long-lasting relationship requires, and a stepfamily will need them in droves. Angry children need mercy and grace. New husbands and wives need mercy and grace. Ex-spouses and co-parents need mercy and grace. Paul Tripp writes, “*Change begins when we see these differences as grace rather than obstructions of grace.*”⁷⁵ The angry child, the fearful new spouse, the overwhelming finances, and the obstinate ex-spouse will all present opportunities to practice grace and point the new stepfamily towards Jesus Christ. No one can bring peace to a new stepfamily like the Savior (John 16:33).

There are several ways to encourage grace in a stepfamily. In *When Sinners Say “I Do”* Dave Harvey says personal sin is the cause of all marriage problems.⁷⁶ People are likely to blame their spouses for the sins that they commit.⁷⁷ When two people get remarried they will need to practice repentance and forgiveness, confessing their sins to each other. They should also be aware that an ex-spouse and co-parent’s sin can, and will, affect the new marriage. The new husband and wife must guard against blaming their new spouse for the ex-spouse’s behavior, an extending of mercy and grace. The remarried spouses must be cautious not to take out their frustrations and anger on each other.⁷⁸ Whenever there are children from a previous marriage there will be a lifelong connection with the ex-spouse.⁷⁹ Child support and shared custody may end at eighteen,

⁷⁵ Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 216.

⁷⁶ David T. Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2011), 51.

⁷⁷ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 49.

⁷⁸ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 42.

⁷⁹ Gillespie, *Stepfamily Success*, 136.

however, there will be college, shared in-laws and grandkids, and shared holidays for the rest of life with an ex-spouse. Two people who desire to get remarried should not let the ongoing relationship with an ex-spouse prevent them from marrying. However, they should realize that the remarriage will not make the ex-spouse go away, and they should plan on the relationship being a possible source of strife and plan accordingly.⁸⁰ Husbands and wives should keep expectations low for what they consider a successful stepfamily.⁸¹ In addition to this, though the expectations should be low, it is helpful to write out long term goals for the new family.⁸² In preparing for remarriage it would be helpful to write out a timeline. How long will child support be paid? How long will there be shared custody of children? How long until some of the additional stresses of a second marriage come to an end? The timeline should include the near and distant future and is part of counting the cost of remarriage (Luke 14:28).

If it can be said that sin is the cause of all marriage problems, it can also be said that every sin is in some way a form of selfishness. Selflessness is the antidote to selfishness, and it is a much-needed antidote. The avenues in which to practice selfishness are multiplied in second marriages as opposed to first marriages. Powlison asks wives if they are just part of the church and wife to Christ the bridegroom, or if they are also the earthly wife of an earthly husband and whether or not she submits, fears, respects, obeys, honors, and serves those whom she has been called to serve.⁸³ Of husbands he writes, “A Wife, Child, and Servant who is also a *husband, father, or master* particularly aims to love, provide, care for, value, bless, bring mercy, give grace, purify,

⁸⁰ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 41.

⁸¹ Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 142.

⁸² Frisbie and Frisbie, *Happily Remarried*, 140.

⁸³ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 63.

build up, teach, and treat fairly.”⁸⁴ The wife submits to her husband, placing her own self-interests aside and obeying her calling from God. The husband exercises godly headship over his family, again, placing his own self-interests aside and obeying his calling from God. In other words, “Both parties repent of self-will, but in different ways.”⁸⁵

There will be many opportunities to be selfless and exercise grace, mercy, and forgiveness in very real, daily, practical ways in a stepfamily. Blended families can function and can function well. Scott and Peace relate an anecdote of a father and stepfather who was so loving and compassionate towards both his biological children and stepchildren one could not tell which were which.⁸⁶ In doing so this man was not only fulfilling his biblical mandate to love his children and not provoke them to anger (Eph 6:4), but he was also loving his wife and giving himself up for her in the context of a second marriage and blended family (Eph 5:25). Since the time of the New Testament and the writing of the book of Ephesians, marriage between believers has been intended to picture the relationship of Christ and the church. The message of the gospel is straight forward. Humanity was eternally lost in its sinfulness. Christ came and offered himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for humanity offering grace, mercy, and forgiveness in place of judgment and condemnation. All who are part of a blended family will have numerous avenues in which to extend mercy, grace, and forgiveness to one another, thus living out the gospel daily. The new husband and wife, father and stepfather, mother and stepmother must set the example. The wife submits to her husband as to the Lord and the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. It is a second marriage, but it is not second best. All Christians marriages are to present a picture of Christ and the church, and thus proclaim the message of the gospel to the world.

⁸⁴ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 66.

⁸⁵ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 64.

⁸⁶ Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 157.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

My project was to write a premarital counseling curriculum for believers entering a second marriage. The research for the curriculum was conducted by interviewing seventeen couples who are currently in successful remarriages. During the first two weeks of the project, I met with a pastoral panel of four pastors to review the Interview Protocol. The pastoral panel evaluated the Interview Protocol using a rubric. Weeks 3 through 9 were used to conduct the seventeen interviews. After the interviews were complete during weeks 10 through 14, I wrote the curriculum. The last three weeks, weeks 15 through 17, were used to evaluate the curriculum with the pastoral panel and submit it to the United Committee on Theology and Social Concerns of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Goal 1

On January 16, 2020, the Professional Doctoral Studies office at SBTS emailed to inform me that the ethics forms for the project had been approved. I sent an email, with the approved Interview Protocol and rubric attached, to the pastors who had previously agreed to serve as the pastoral panel. The questions for the Interview Protocol had been developed during the preparatory reading and writing of chapter 3 prior to the project being implemented so that that they could be approved by the ethics committee. I had written an introductory letter explaining the intent and purpose of the project to couples, constructed a sign-up sheet for contact information, and put together a confidentiality statement utilizing the ethics forms provided by Southern Seminary while making it pertinent to my project where necessary. With these emails and forms complete, and the

ethics packet approved, I began.

The first goal of the project was to have the pastoral panel evaluate the Interview Protocol itself using the rubric before recruiting couples and scheduling interviews. After a series of email exchanges, three pastors and I met for lunch in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, on January 22, 2020. The pastors present were Tim Stutler and Daniel Evans of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC), and pastor Jamie Mosley of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Protocol and rubric were discussed, and the pastors agreed to complete the rubric over the course of the following week.

Pastor Jeff DeWees of the CPC was unable to attend the lunch on January 22 due to a ministry commitment. DeWees and I met separately on January 23 to discuss the Interview Protocol. We met at Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church (DCPC) and discussed the project and the Protocol. DeWees completed and signed the rubric, giving the Protocol a perfect score, out of thirty-two possible points.

I received an email from Daniel Evans with the rubric attached on January 28. Pastor Evans gave the Protocol thirty-one points. On January 29, I received emails from Pastors Stutler and Mosley with rubrics attached. Stutler gave the Protocol thirty points, and Mosley gave the Protocol a perfect score. Overall, the score for the Interview Protocol was 125 out of a possible 128 points, or 97.6 percent. The requirement to achieve the first goal was a score of 90 percent or better. With the first goal having been met, I began to recruit couples with the assistance of the pastoral panel to participate in the project.

Goal 2

January 29, I attended the Wednesday evening Bible study at Beech Cumberland Presbyterian Church (BCPC), the church pastored by DeWees. I was able to meet two couples who were willing to participate in the project. I gave each couple copies of the Interview Protocol and a letter of introduction explaining the project. Each

couple gave me their contact information and I promised to contact them the following week. On the following day, January 30, I emailed six couples from DCPC, the church which I pastor, who were eligible to participate in the project and attached the Interview Protocol. The next day, January 31, I called a couple recommended by Jamie Mosley of Redeemer Church, and left a voicemail stating who I was and the purpose of the project.

On February 2, I attended Goodlettsville Cumberland Presbyterian Church (GoCPC). Following the worship service, I met with five couples recommended by Pastor Stutler. I distributed the introduction letter, the Interview Protocol, and all five couples present signed up on the sign-up sheet. I then drove to DCPC for worship. Following the service, I was able to schedule an interview with one of the couples eligible to participate from DCPC, couple B, for the following Thursday, February 6. On February 3, I texted with couple C (of DCPC) and scheduled their interview for February 6.

The first interview took place at the home of couple A on February 5. At the beginning of the interview I gave them a copy of the confidentiality statement, obtained verbal permission to record the interview should it be necessary while reviewing notes to listen to it, and opened with prayer.¹ Couple A was incredibly gracious, sharing generously from their lives. It was the second marriage for both husband and wife. They have been married for thirty-two years and both brought two teenage children into the marriage. Two things stand out from the interview with couple A. First, at the beginning of their marriage their teenage children were resistant. They made it clear to all their children that they would not allow them to come between them as husband and wife. Second, when it came to disciplining their children the biological parent always

¹ I followed this pattern for each interview. I gave each couple a copy of the confidentiality statement, received verbal permission to record the interview, and opened with prayer. The only exception was couple M. I interviewed them in their home, and they provided lunch. The husband blessed the meal and that served as the opening prayer.

disciplined their own children, unless they were not at home. Though this was the first interview, I began to realize that child discipline within the home would need to be addressed in the curriculum. Later in the day I went back to BCPC to meet with three more couples who were willing to participate in the project. I gave each couple a copy of the Interview Protocol and the letter of introduction, and each couple gave their contact information on the sign-up sheet and listing the days and times during which they were available.

On February 6, I interviewed couple B in their home. Couple B has been married for twenty-eight years. The wife brought four adult children to the marriage and the husband brought three adult children to the marriage. I proceeded question by question through the Interview Protocol. It was the second marriage for both husband and wife. I thanked them for their time and honesty.

The same day I drove to DCPC to interview couple C. This marriage was the second marriage for the wife and the first marriage for the husband. Couple C has been married for twenty-one years and they do not have any children from previous relationships, a reality that made the new marriage a smoother transition for the wife. Without children it is easier to completely sever the relationship from a previous spouse. Though the focus of the project was to prepare couples getting remarried and blending families, it was clear that circumstances would be very different for all couples and the curriculum would need to address a variety of different circumstances.

On February 12, I interviewed couple D at their home. It was the second marriage for both people. They have been married for twenty years. The husband brought two adult children into the marriage and the wife brought three. It became clear through the course of the interview that the husband still harbored a lot of anger towards his ex-wife. It is clear that time does not heal all wounds and people carry unresolved emotions into new marriages.

The following day, February 13, I interviewed couple E in their home. It was the second marriage for the husband and the first marriage for the wife. The husband brought three elementary-age children into the marriage. The wife did not have any children prior to the marriage. However, the wife's parents divorced when she was a child. Her personal experience had cautioned her about marrying a man with three children and becoming a stepmother. Because of her experience, she and her husband were very intentional in how they raised their children and standards of discipline in their home. They used chore charts and discipline charts extensively so that the children had visual reminders of the standards in their home. Visual reminders were a good way for them to help their children navigate different homes. Couple E also noted that they had continuing court costs after getting married. Continued court costs are something that couples getting remarried may need to plan on, and this became part of the curriculum.

I was able to conduct two more interviews during the week of February 9–15. One was on February 14, and was an impromptu interview. The couple had been contacted via email previously and given the Interview Protocol. However, previous attempts to schedule a time to do the interview were unsuccessful. On the previous day, the husband contacted me and stated he and his wife had a three-day window in which they were available. I met the couple at their home during that time. It is the second marriage for both husband and wife, and they have been married for a little over one year. The husband brought two children into the marriage and the wife did not bring any. One aspect of their marriage that stood out was that parental relationships with the husband's two daughters were not good. I realized that couples preparing to get remarried not only need to be prepared to be married to one another, but also need to be prepared for the possibility of hard relationships with children. Couples need to be prepared for hard times even if they have the right approach. I thanked couple G for their willingness to

participate and allow me into their home.²

On February 15, I interviewed couple H. It was the second marriage for the wife and the first marriage for the husband. Couple H has been married for eleven years and the wife brought three young children into the marriage. The ex-husband and biological father tried for years to turn his children against their mother and stepfather. However, the husband of couple H was clear that they never spoke badly about the children's biological father. He himself came from a broken home and did not have a good relationship with his biological father, and he wanted something different for his stepchildren. How people speak about ex-spouses and biological parents is important for the welfare of the children and an issue that needs to be addressed in premarital counseling.

The following week, on February 17, a couple from the GoCPC called me, and an interview was quickly scheduled for Tuesday in their home. It was the second marriage for both. They have been married for eighteen months. The husband brought three adult children into the marriage, while the wife brought two elementary age children into the marriage. Questions in the Interview Protocol focused on shared custody, child support, and alimony. Couple I related that it had taken about a year working with a court-ordered official for the wife to move states with her two children to be married to her new husband. I realized that the curriculum would need to address the realm of possible court orders. I thanked them and was very appreciative of their time.

On February 20, I had the privilege of interviewing couple J at DCPC. It is the second marriage for both, and they have been married for eleven years. The husband brought two children into the marriage and the wife three. One thing that stood out from the interview with couple J was that they endured a lot when it came to raising their

² I skipped the letter F when lettering the couples. After talking to couple G, they agreed that no one wants to receive an F and they were happy to be couple G.

children in a blended family, but they had persevered. It was their interview that led to the title of session 9 in the curriculum, “There Will Be Weather.” I thanked couple J for their time and parted ways until Sunday morning.

On February 22, I met with couple K at their home in Goodlettsville, Tennessee. It was the second marriage for the husband and the fourth for the wife, and they have been married six years. The husband has three adult children from his first marriage and the wife has one adult child from her first marriage. The wife of couple K stated that after three previous marriages, all with unfaithful husbands, that she wondered if the problem was her. Her comments reinforced the need to evaluate how one has related in the past to a previous spouse when preparing for a new marriage. I thanked the couple for their time and for allowing me to come to their home.

I also interviewed couple L at BCPC on February 22. It was the second marriage for the husband and first for the wife and they have been married for two years. The wife brought a daughter into the marriage from a previous relationship. The husband did not have any children from his first marriage. Several times during the interview the husband stated that he was unprepared to be a stepfather to a preteen girl having no previous parenting experience. Daughter and stepfather have found themselves at odds often in the new marriage. Because of the husband’s comments, there is a section dedicated to new stepparents with no previous parental experience in the curriculum.

On February 24, I met with couple M at their home. It was the second marriage for both. They have been married for thirty-three years and neither had children from their first marriages. Both husband and wife had completely cut ties with their ex-spouses. However, the husband made a comment that I had not asked any questions about physical intimacy. He said that memories remain and you must guard your heart and mind. The husband’s comments are the reason that I wrote session 7 of the curriculum, which is focused on physical intimacy.

The same week, on February 26, I met with couple N at a Panera in

Hendersonville, Tennessee. Couple N has been married for twenty-two years. The wife brought three children into the marriage and the husband brought two children into the marriage. Couple N provided a lot of life experience in raising a family with stepchildren from both of their previous marriages. Not the least of their struggles was the wife's children being involved with drugs and alcohol because these substances were readily available at their biological father's house. The husband of couple N also endured the expected, "You're not my father!" assaults from his stepchildren. In all of this, however, couple N brought up joy. They found joy in their marriage, though they did not find that I allowed for the topic of joy to come up in the interview questions.

The next day, February 27, while working through my normal Sunday preparations, I began brainstorming and generating topics for different sessions of the premarital counseling curriculum. It may have been a little premature to do so. I originally planned to chart interview answers in a table before writing. I began formatting the table the following week. However, I began brainstorming because most interviews would generate one or two good ideas that could be used, and I knew if I did not write them down, they were likely to be forgotten. In addition to brainstorming ideas for the curriculum, the following day I began formatting the table to chart the results of the interviews. I listed couples A through Q down the left side of the table and labeled the columns of the table "Stresses and Strategies."

The following week, on March 2, I interviewed couple O at BCPC. Originally it was the second marriage for both, then they divorced; the husband then married and divorced another woman, then they remarried each other. Couple O has currently been remarried for seven years and neither had children from their first marriages or the husband's intervening marriage, though he had a stepson. At the conclusion of the interview I thanked them very much for their time and willingness to share their lives. During the course of the interview the wife discussed how she had been ostracized by her church after her first divorce, even though it was her husband who had been unfaithful.

The wife of couple O paid a nice compliment. She and her husband had gone through the questions together before the interview and she said it had been good for them as husband and wife to reflect on their marriage with one another.

On March 3, I began charting the results, beginning with my notes from couple A. The same day I responded to a follow-up email from one of the couples. On March 2, I received an email addressing the issue of the plethora of emotions people experience going through divorce and remarriage. The email talked not only of the emotions of husbands and wives but also of children, as the wife's parents had divorced when she was young. My response was that I intended not to try and solve emotions in the premarital counseling curriculum but to help couples become better disciples of Jesus in their situations regardless of emotions because emotions can be very subjective. I received a response to my email on March 4 agreeing on the nature of emotions and considering the best approach to helping couples preparing for remarriage. I am grateful for the follow up emails. I hope to continue discussions with couples I have interviewed and, though it is not part of the project, hope to get feedback from them on the curriculum itself once written.

Also on March 4, I received a text from couple P. We had texted the week prior and I had hoped to schedule an interview for March 4. However, I never received a response. At 11:00 a.m. on March 4, the husband texted me and asked if we were still planning to meet, because he had put the interview on his calendar. Fortunately, I was able to adjust my day and met couple P at their home. Couple P has been married for ten years. It is the second marriage for both husband and wife and they both brought two children into the marriage from their first marriages. During the interview, the wife said her first husband was continually unfaithful and the pastors at her church advised her to get divorced. However, after the divorce her pastors did not help her adjust to unmarried life and the possibility of remarriage. Her story highlighted to me the need for more ministry tools in the church for those who endure divorce and get remarried. I thanked the

couple for their time and for letting a stranger into their home to ask them very personal questions. They commented that it was not the first time, as they have had to go through child custody procedures and talking to social workers because of divorce and remarriage. I made a mental note that the issue of having privacy invaded by court ordered officials reinforced the experience of Couple I, and would need thorough attention in the curriculum. Couple P was the fifteenth couple to be interviewed, fulfilling the minimum requirement for completion of the project. I had two more interviews scheduled for the following week and, barring any cancellations, hoped to interview a total of seventeen couples.

On March 6, I spent some time charting the results of interviews. I charted the results of couples B, C, D, and E. Three days later, March 9, I continued working on charting the results of interviews working through notes for couples G, H, and I. The following day, March 10, over the course of the morning and afternoon I was able to chart couples J, K, L, M, N, O, and P.

On Wednesday, March 11, I met with couple Q at their home. It is the first marriage for the wife, the second marriage for the husband, and they have been married three and a half years; the husband has two children from his first marriage. Couple Q's marriage was the only marriage where there was a good relationship between ex-spouses, stepparents, and co-parents. Their story gives hope that it is possible to have peace and stability in life after divorce and remarriage.

On March 12, I interviewed couple R at their home. It is the second marriage for both, they have been married one year; the wife brought three adult children into the marriage, and the husband brought one. In this marriage both husband and wife waited until their children were adults before deciding to remarry. The wife waited six years to remarry and the husband waited for twelve years. Their patience to not rush into a new marriage for the sake of their children is a good example to others tempted to rush into remarriage. One hope of the PCC is that it will help couples slow down and evaluate their

lives before putting them together. Afterwards I charted the results of the interviews with couples Q and R. The interviews with couples Q and R concluded the interview portion of the project. Having interviewed a total of seventeen couples, goal 2 of the project was completed.

Goal 3

On March 23, I began writing the Premarital Counseling Curriculum (PCC). The curriculum consists of thirteen sessions. In the first session, “The Foundation of Marriage,” couples study Ephesians 5:22-33 and consider the issues of headship and submission, their first marriages, and how headship and submission was modeled for them growing up. In the second session, “The Need for the Church,” couples consider their need for a church family and reflect on their church experiences having been divorced and now preparing for a second marriage. Session 3, “Knowing Yourself and One Another,” requires couples to evaluate themselves and share how they, and their children (if any), have responded to post divorce life. In session 4, “Learning to Trust,” the couples focus on trust, specifically on trusting God and not expecting a new spouse to provide what only God can provide. Session 5, “Fruits of Repentance,” is for the believer whose sin ended a first marriage. The session is based on Matthew 3:7-12, and helps couples work through what repentance looks like after a divorce when it is not possible to restore the first marriage. In session 6, “Court Orders,” couples continue to focus on the aftermath of divorce. Couples cover their divorce settlements, discussing issues such as child support, alimony, and court costs, to name a few. Session 7, “Physical Intimacy,” focuses on physical intimacy and helps engaged couples take a serious look at how experiences of sexual intimacy from a first marriage must not be brought into a new marriage.

Session 8, “Discipline,” and session 9, “There Will Be Weather,” shift the focus of the curriculum to children. In these two sessions couples discuss how their

children have reacted to divorce, how they will discipline their children in a new home, how they will handle worry when their children are at the other parent's home, and how they will weather the inevitable struggles that come with being a blended family.

Following the issues of children, in session 10, "Ex-spouses," bride and groom take a serious look at how post-divorce life has been with their ex-spouses, and they prepare for possible continued conflict. Session 11, "Finances," is based on Genesis 2:22-25. In this session couples consider putting their financial lives together considering child support, alimony, shared assets with an ex-spouse, and other extenuating circumstances. Session 12, "Specific Advice from Those Who Have Gone Before," provides believers getting remarried with essential advice from believers who have successful second marriages. In the final session, "Foundation of Marriage Applied," the bride and groom take the answers from previous sessions, work through real life case scenarios, and consider how they will respond as a husband who is the head and a wife who submits. All the sessions followed the general format of beginning with a passage of Scripture, a quote from an author in the biblical counseling movement pertinent to the topic, questions to be answered in a counseling session, and homework for the couple to do throughout the week.

Having begun a rough draft of the PCC, I decided to start surveying other curriculums to see if I was headed in the right direction as far as content and formatting. The first curriculum I surveyed was Wayne Mack's *Preparing for Marriage God's Way*.³ After spending some time on March 26 going through Mack's book, I felt I was on a good path for the size and scope of the PCC for the project. I then spent some time the same day working on sessions 8 and 9, which focus on children and blended families. The next day, March 27, I surveyed Rob Green's book *Tying the Knot*.⁴ I worked on

³ See Wayne A. Mack, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way: A Step-by-Step Guide for Marriage Success before and after the Wedding*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013).

⁴ See Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage*

session 10 of the PCC, “Ex-spouses.” As I continued writing the PCC, I developed the discipline of continually reading through the charted interview results pertinent to the session being written. Reading through the results while writing kept me focused on the topics at hand and did not let me stray too far into my own thoughts and opinions about remarriage.

On March 30, I surveyed *What Did You Expect* by Paul Tripp.⁵ I spent time working on session 4, “Learning to Trust,” and session 5, “Fruits of Repentance.” The next day I worked on session 6, “Court Orders.” I edited and revised sessions 1, 2, 3, and 13 of the curriculum on April 1. At this point I reviewed the curriculum and determined that sessions 7, 8, 11, and 12 still needed to be revised and expanded to complete a first draft. I worked on editing and revising sessions 7 and 8 on April 2. I continued the exercise of reviewing the results chart while writing questions, basing sessions on Bible passages, and utilizing thoughts from biblical counseling authors. The same day, I began listening to the audio recordings of the interviews beginning with couple C. Due to the varying lengths of the interviews I listened to them in the order that my schedule allowed.

On April 3, I finished a rough draft of the PCC, making sure that each of the thirteen sessions was two pages in length including Bible passages, quotes, questions, teachings, and space for answers. On this day I expanded sessions 11 and 12 to finish the rough draft. I searched through previously read books on marriage by biblical counseling authors to find material that would be useful for the curriculum. These books included: *Seeing with New Eyes* by David Powlison, *What Did You Expect* and *Age of Opportunity* by Tripp, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* by Jim Newheiser, and *Resolving*

(Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016).

⁵ See Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Everyday Conflict by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson.⁶ One side goal of the PCC was to make biblical counseling authors known in my denomination.

April 6 began a new week. Having finished a rough draft of the PCC the week before, the goal for the current week was to revise and expand the PCC so that all the sessions were approximately three pages in length. I planned to revise and expand this week, and then revise the curriculum again the following week before sending it to the pastoral panel to be evaluated with the approved rubric. I began by revising and expanding the Introduction and sessions 1 and 2 on this day and continued the practice of reviewing the results chart as I worked on the sessions. On April 7, I listened to the interview of couple B and edited and revised sessions 3 and 4. I reviewed the responses in the chart that were pertinent to sessions 3 and 4. The following day I was able to revise and expand sessions 5, 6, 7, and 9. When the rough draft was finished the goal was for each session to be approximately two pages in length. Some were longer, already meeting or exceeding the three-page goal for the edited and revised draft. Therefore, on some days I was able to revise and expand more than two sessions. I took note of the state of the PCC and planned the remainder of the week. Session 10 needed to be edited and revised. Sessions 8, 11, 12, and 13 needed to be edited, revised, and expanded to three pages.

I listened to the interview of couple Q on April 9. I edited, revised, and expanded sessions 8 and 11 and revised session 10. The next day I edited, revised, and expanded sessions 12 and 13. Session 13 is the pinnacle of the entire PCC with couples taking their responses from the previous sessions, going through the topics of the previous sessions, and framing their responses in the context of submission and headship. Couples work through the issues of church, knowing one another, trust, repentance, court

⁶ See David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003); Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, 2nd ed., Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001); Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*; Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017); and Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

orders, physical intimacy, discipline and children, weathering unavoidable hardships, ex-spouses, and finances, and reflect on these coming issues and how they will respond as husband who is the head of the wife, and wife who submits to her husband in a second marriage (Eph 5:22-33).

The following week, beginning on April 13, I emailed the PCC to three classmates who have more experience with biblical counseling than myself. I requested their input, especially if they were aware of any relevant quotes from biblical counseling authors. I then planned out the final timeline for completing the project. Week 15 of the project would begin on April 23 and conclude on April 30. I began a final revision of the PCC while waiting for feedback from classmates. My primary focus in this revision was to eliminate redundant questions in the PCC. I worked through the Introduction and sessions 1 and 2 of the curriculum. I wanted to make one more thorough revision before sending the PCC to the pastoral panel for evaluation.

On April 14, I continued listening to interviews. I listened to the interview with couple A. I continued revising the PCC looking for redundant questions, reading through sessions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The following day, I read through sessions 10, 11, 12, and 13. In addition, on April 15, I listened to the interview with couple R. On April 16, I listened to the interview with couple I. At two hours and forty-five minutes, couple I was the longest interview in the entire project. I realized that to make it through the interviews in a timely fashion I needed to speed up the playback. I downloaded an app on my phone and was able to listen to interviews at two times normal speed. I was able to cut the listening time in half without sacrificing comprehension. In addition, I listened to the interviews with couples D and M. I began rereading the handwritten notes I had taken during the interviews. I read the notes of couples A, B, C, D, E, I, Q, R, and M.

The reason for listening to the interviews and reviewing the written notes was to ensure that I did not leave out significant contributions couples made in the PCC. I had been in the habit of reviewing the charted results I put together from the written notes;

however, this was a condensation of a condensation. Therefore, I wanted to review all the information I had gathered. On the first day of significant review, April 16, I realized I needed to add sections to the PCC regarding experiences with court officials such as, Guardian *ad litem* or Child Protective Services representatives and questions about extended families and holidays. I also needed to make sure there were enough questions pertaining to families of origin, and address special family times such as daddy/daughter date nights. I also found time to edit and revise the footnotes and bibliography of the PCC.

On April 17, I finished reviewing my interview notes for couples G, H, J, K, L, O, and P early in the morning. I also finished listening to the interviews with couples G, K, H, J, O, L, N, and P throughout the course of the day. Having finished reviewing the notes and listening to the interviews I determined that the following teachings and questions needed to be addressed in the PCC: couples cannot control what happens in the co-parent's house, all children need to be loved the same in a stepfamily, and many couples in successful second marriages take advantage of time when children are at the other parent's home by focusing on their marriage through dates and quality time.

April 20 began a new week. I had received an email from a fellow student over the weekend providing grammatical feedback and a relevant quote for the PCC from the book *I Still Do* by Dave Harvey.⁷ I added the quote to the PCC, footnoted, and added it to the bibliography. I also read through the comments made by my classmate and edited and revised as appropriate. I then added the previously mentioned items to the PCC because of listening to the interviews and rereading the interview notes. These included questions about court officials, extended families, the co-parent's house, and special time with children as they adjust to a new marriage. After making these additions I read through the

⁷ David T. Harvey, *I Still Do: Growing Closer and Stronger through Life's Defining Moments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020).

PCC one more time. Then I emailed the PCC along with the rubric to evaluate it to the four members of my pastoral panel for review. After some further thought, I realized it would be easier for the pastors on the panel to fill out the rubric in PDF form versus Microsoft Word. Therefore, I emailed the pastoral panel a PDF version of the rubric on April 22. By April 27 I had not heard any response from the pastoral panel, so I began a group text thread to check on progress and see if they needed anything from me. I received a couple of responses that they would try and finish as soon as possible and I tried to wait patiently.

April 30 marked the sixteenth week of the project. On May 4, I still had not received any evaluations from the pastoral panel, so I texted them again on the group thread. That day I received rubrics from pastors Stutler and DeWees. I expressed my gratitude for their time and input. I knew the Covid-19 pandemic had made life busier for them. I texted Evans and Mosley on May 11 to see if they had found time to complete the rubric. On Wednesday, Evans and I spoke on the phone, I emailed him the forms again and he completed the rubric and emailed it back to me. I also texted with Mosley on the same day and made an appointment to meet at his church, Redeemer Church, on May 14. We met and discussed the PCC and he gave me his completed rubric.

The scores from the rubrics were as follows. Stutler gave a score of twenty-eight, while DeWees, Evans, and Mosley each gave a score of thirty-one. The PCC received a score of 121 points out of a possible 128 points, giving the curriculum a percentage grade of 94.5 percent. The required minimum percentage stated in the project proposal was 90 percent. Thus, goal 3 of writing the PCC and having it evaluated by the pastoral panel with a passing percentage of 90 percent was accomplished.

Goal 4

After completing goal 3 of the project on May 14, the same afternoon I emailed the PCC and an introductory letter to the chair and co-chair of the United

Committee on Theology and Social Concerns (UCTSC) of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC). The hope is that the UCTSC will see value in the curriculum and distribute it to pastors in the denomination. However, to complete goal 4 all that was required for the project was to receive a response acknowledging receipt of the letter and curriculum. The email was sent at 3:02 p.m., and I patiently waited for a response. The following day, May 15, I texted the co-chair of the UCTSC after getting his phone number from DeWees, who was part of the pastoral panel. The co-chair responded to my text confirming that he had received the email with the letter and curriculum attached. On the same day, I received an email from the chair of the committee stating that the letter and curriculum had been received. Having confirmed receipt of the curriculum and letter by the chair and co-chair of the UCTSC, goal 4 was achieved. The project was also completed on May 15. Glory be to God!

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

During July 2018, my classmates and I spent the week of Project Methodology in the library basement on Southern Seminary's campus. I remember my project coach, Joseph Harrod, saying that the project topic needed to be something I was passionate about because I was going to spend the next three years working on it. Consequently, I chose to focus on divorce and remarriage. I have watched members of the church I serve as pastor go through divorce and remarriage, and I have witnessed the heartache, anger, and grief caused by divorce. I have seen the joy that comes with remarriage and a second chance. There have been days I have been tired. There have been days I did not know what to write or what I was talking about; however, God's people were always the main motivation. My sincerest hope is that this project can be a blessing for God's people. Anything that helps people better follow Jesus would be a personal blessing for me after three years of work. I hope that this project is something I can lay at Jesus's feet one day and hear those blessed words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21).

Evaluation of Purpose

The purpose of the project was to write a premarital counseling curriculum specifically tailored for believers preparing to enter a second marriage. Through the course of the project working with the pastoral panel and the couples who were interviewed I came to the personal conclusion that ministering to believers in second marriages and stepfamilies is much needed in the church. All four pastors who served on the panel were very enthusiastic about the project. Several of the couples who went through divorce and remarriage while attending church noted that there was not much

available to them to guide them as they entered remarriage and navigated stepfamily life. One wife commented during an interview that her church was incredibly supportive of her getting a divorce. Her pastors knew her husband had been repeatedly unfaithful and she had every biblical right to divorce him. However, after she divorced her husband, the same pastors were not involved in helping her pick up the broken pieces of life and family. Navigating a second marriage and stepfamily is something she and her current husband have done primarily on their own.

With the need for church ministry in view, I hope that this project is just a beginning for myself, my denomination, and for the church universal. One aspect of the project that surprised me was the enthusiasm of all involved. I did not meet one person who was discouraging or opposed to the purpose of the project. From Robert Jones, my supervisor, to family and friends to whom I explained the project, to my pastoral panel, to the couples who participated in the interviews, all were supportive and encouraging. I was not only surprised by the support and encouragement, but also by the lack of opposition. No one suggested that I was condoning divorce. No one said the project was unbiblical. Only one couple I attempted to recruit was unwilling to participate in an interview, and this was for personal reasons rather than being opposed to the project itself. There were a handful of couples who were willing to participate, but due to scheduling issues I could not conduct face-to-face interviews.¹ Because divorce and remarriage are controversial issues and sometimes taboo in the church, I expected some resistance. The fact that I did not suggests to me that the purpose of the project was not only good, but needed.

¹ The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 prevented scheduling these additional interviews, due to the “safer at home” initiatives that were being implemented. The pandemic ended the possibility of any further in-person interviews, however it did not derail the project. Seventeen interviews had already been conducted before the pandemic, exceeding the minimum requirement of fifteen.

Even though I did not receive any opposition to the project, I learned from the couples I interviewed and the pastors I worked with, that there are very few resources available in the church when it comes to counseling people through a divorce and preparing them for remarriage. The lack of resources is understandable. When a believer abuses alcohol he is told to repent of drunkenness and stop abusing alcohol. The Bible is clear that drunkenness is a sin. I agree with Jay Adams and other writers in the biblical counseling movement that while not all divorces are sinful, all divorces are caused by sin. The man who gets drunk can repent, stop sinning, and remain sober. The spouses involved in divorce can repent of sin, but they cannot become un-divorced if there is no possibility of restoring the marriage. There is a fine line to maintain at this point. All divorces are caused by sin, but not all men and women who are divorced committed covenant-breaking sins. Yet, these men and women still bear the stigma of divorce and often face judgment and ostracism from their church families. These men and women need the love and encouragement of the body of Christ. While the church may hesitate, concerned that ministering to stepfamilies may give the appearance of condoning divorce, these men and women need the church.

The men and women who did commit the covenant-breaking sins that led to divorce also need the love and support of the church. Just as the church would willingly hold the drunkard accountable for his choices and seek to lovingly reconcile him to Christ, the church also needs to hold the covenant-breaking spouse accountable and lovingly seek to reconcile him to Christ and his body (2 Cor 5:20). In summary, the purpose of this project is good and can be used to help disciples of Jesus be faithful to him.

Evaluation of Goals

The goals were appropriate to the project. Had time allowed, the goals could have been expanded for increased thoroughness and detail. More time could have been

spent accomplishing each goal. The first goal of the project, evaluating the Interview Protocol using a rubric with the pastoral panel, was a decent goal. I would have preferred to utilize the pastoral panel in writing the questions themselves and make better use of their years of pastoral experience. However, the timing of events, particularly the need to have the ethics committee approve all forms used in the project prior to beginning the project, including the Interview Protocol, excluded this possibility. Minor changes to the Interview Protocol would have been submitted to Robert Jones the project supervisor. However, to write, or rewrite, the protocol would have required resubmitting the Interview Protocol to the ethics committee and time did not allow for this. Also, regarding time, I am extremely grateful to my pastoral panel for the time they gave to the project. It would have been helpful if the pastoral panel had read the same books and articles I did when preparing the questions. However, I think it would have been unreasonable for me to expect them to spend the same number of hours I spent writing the questions for the Interview Protocol. Their evaluation of the protocol overall was positive allowing me to proceed to goal 2.

Goal 2 was to interview a minimum of fifteen couples in successful second marriages. I am incredibly indebted to my pastoral panel and their willingness to recruit couples to participate in the project allowing me to complete goal 2. There were not enough couples at Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church (DCPC) where I am the pastor to meet the required fifteen couples. I do not think goal 2 could have been improved upon in theory. The ways to improve goal 2 would have been to improve the Interview Protocol itself, improve my own interviewing skills, and interview more couples. While I would not say I ended the project as an expert at interviewing people, I did listen to all of the audio recordings of the interviews while writing the premarital counseling curriculum (PCC); I believe I improved as the project progressed. Spending more time with each couple could have also been beneficial. However, I allowed the couples to determine the pace of the interviews. Interviews ranged in time from forty

minutes to nearly three hours. Because all the participants were volunteering their time, had I tried to impose more time on them it would have been a disservice and hindered their willingness to share.

The third goal of the project was to write the PCC and then evaluate it with the pastoral panel using a rubric. It was initially my hope to schedule a morning with the four pastors to sit down, edit, and revise the curriculum in person until all were satisfied and it passed the 90 percent threshold as stated in the project proposal. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 and shelter-in-place guidelines, this was not possible, and the evaluation of the curriculum had to be accomplished primarily through email. I was able to sit down with one pastor in order to talk through the PCC. It may have been possible to use a Zoom meeting; however, I know many pastors found themselves not only trying to shepherd their flocks remotely during “safer at home” guidelines, but also needing to become quick study videographers. Rather than working fewer hours due to safety guidelines, many pastors found themselves working more hours. Considering what the United States and the world has gone through in 2020, I am grateful that my pastoral panel still managed to find the time to evaluate the curriculum. Evaluating the curriculum with the rubric was an adequate goal. If I had been able to revise the PCC in person with the pastoral panel, they could have added their years of pastoral experience to the curriculum improving goal 3.

The final goal of the project was completed quickly. Goal 4 was to submit the PCC to the United Committee on Theology and Social Concerns (UCTSC) of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC). During Project Methodology, Joseph Harrod recommended that this goal be completed once a member of the committee acknowledged receipt of the curriculum with a letter. He recommended not requiring the committee to distribute or recommend the curriculum to pastors in the denomination because this would be beyond my control. Harrod’s advice was wise. Even though the CPC is a small denomination, prior to beginning and completing this project I had never met anyone who serves on the UCTSC. Therefore, the completion of goal 4 was

accomplished with acknowledgement from the chair and co-chair of the UCTSC that they had received an email with the PCC and letter attached as PDF files.

Strengths of the Project

The primary strength of the project was the couples who participated. Without their willingness to share their lives, the project could not have happened. I believe part of their willingness to share was because not many resources are available to Christians who have been through a divorce and are preparing to remarry. Several of the couples and I met for the first time when I showed up at their house for the interview. Yet, no couple held back when sharing the ups and downs of divorce and remarriage. They believed that the project was necessary for the church and were willing to share their lives with a stranger. Part of the willingness to share lives is because of my pastoral panel. While several of the couples met me for the first time for the interview all of them had been informed about the project by their pastors. The reputations of the pastors they know and love helped them trust me.

I also learned much. I was able to anticipate several of the issues that I thought would be struggles in second marriages, but certainly not all. New things I learned from couples became a strength. One example of something I did not anticipate was the struggle between husbands and wives when it came to discipline with children and stepchildren. I assumed that co-parenting with an ex-spouse would make child discipline in the new stepfamily difficult. To a certain extent this assumption was correct. What I did not anticipate was that child discipline within the new house, between the new husband and new wife, can bring stress to the marriage and make things difficult. Looking back, this makes sense. In a first marriage with first-time parents, a husband and wife grow together as a mom and dad. There may be some differences given their own upbringings, but they can work things out with a minimum of conflict. When two parents enter a second marriage together, they have already spent time growing differently as

parents, and while it is not necessary to label one as wrong and one as right, the differences can create conflict in the new marriage.

Another area that I did not anticipate at all was how invasive court proceedings can be. Given my limited knowledge, I focused all the interview questions on child support, shared custody, and alimony. More than one couple shared that they had continuing court costs after the divorce and into the new marriage. Moving from one state to another can become an incredibly difficult process that is played out with lawyers and judges. Two families spent months being evaluated by social workers and court-appointed guardians. These ongoing processes can bring incredible stress to a new marriage. These are just two examples of things I learned while doing this project that were invaluable and made for a stronger project.

A general principle I observed is the variability of second marriages. No two remarriages are the same and I think this worked itself into being a strength of the project. About halfway through the interviews I realized that the curriculum needed to be malleable. Any church curriculum needs to be malleable to a certain extent; however, in this case the curriculum was going to need to be malleable without being generic. I thought if the curriculum were too generic it would simply be ignored, which is still possible. However, from the information gathered in the interviews it became clear that a counselor and couple using it would need to be able to bend and form the curriculum to tailor it to the specific couple and the specific variables that they will be facing in their remarriage. Another reason this strengthens the project is because it helps to prepare the counselor. One husband in an interview said that “there is no one size fits all” when it comes to second marriages. If a counselor is expecting a universal approach to second marriages, he or she will likely be discouraged by the process, and the man and woman preparing to get remarried may be discouraged as well. Hopefully, as a counselor and counselees go through the process of tailoring the curriculum to the variables of their specific remarriage, they will be encouraged rather than overwhelmed. The process of

tailoring the curriculum to their specific remarriage could also help them slow down. Infatuation is hard to overcome in any relationship, and in a new relationship after a divorce it can be even more so. Being required to slow down and think through everything thoroughly can add strength to any marriage.

One aspect of the curriculum that I found to be most helpful was the last session of the PCC, where there are several scenarios for couples to think through as they prepare for remarriage. They are to think through the scenarios as husband who is the head of the wife and wife who submits to her husband. Several of the scenarios are based on real stories from the interviews. This is a helpful exercise because couples take the abstract principles of headship and submission and think through them in real, concrete examples from life. The fact that some of the scenarios are based on things that have happened help to make the curriculum that much better. The last session moves the curriculum from the realm of theory to the realm of reality.

A final strength of the project, a beneficial byproduct, was being able to introduce biblical counseling authors and thinkers to my denomination. The last goal of the project was to send the PCC to the UCTSC. My hope is that they will distribute it to pastors in the denomination. If so, many pastors in my denomination will become familiar with authors like David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, Robert Jones, and Dave Harvey, among others. I had heard of none of these authors before beginning this degree program at Southern Seminary. The CPC needs the biblical counseling movement.

Weaknesses of the Project

The primary weakness of the project was not interviewing couples who have been through a second divorce. As previously stated in this project, the divorce rate for second marriages is higher than first marriages. However, what the statistics do not always tell is why something is the way it is. It would be highly beneficial to interview couples who have remarried and divorced a second time. These couples could give

insight into exactly why it was that they got a second divorce. More than one couple during the interview portion of this project noted that after someone has failed at something once it is easier to give up a second time. The question is, what are the primary factors that lead to giving up? Do the struggles that were overcome by couples interviewed parallel the struggles that lead many to give up on a second marriage? If the answer to this question is yes, then this gives greater credibility to the project and would become a strength of the project. However, without the ability to interview couples whose second marriages ended in divorce this cannot be correlated and becomes a weakness of the project. If ex-spouses of a second marriage could be found and if they were willing to share what led them to getting divorced, this information could be beneficial.

A second weakness of the project was the limited number of couples interviewed. To complete the project, the minimum number of interviews needed was fifteen. The final total number interviewed was seventeen. What I found over the course of seventeen interviews is that no two remarriages are the same. In the previous section I stated that discovering this fact is a strength of the project. However, the fewer couples interviewed the weaker the project and the more couples interviewed the stronger the project. Given the variable nature of second marriages, the more the better. A certain amount of uniformity can be expected when preparing couples entering a first marriage, but little uniformity can be expected in second marriages. One hundred couples could be interviewed and still one would find more diversity than unity among couples in second marriages. The number of couples needed to turn this from a weakness to a strength would be an arbitrary number. Remarriage is an area of ministry that simply requires a lifetime of study and ministry.

Another area that needs to be more thoroughly addressed are stepparents who were not previously parents. In at least four of the couples that were interviewed, one of the spouses was not previously a parent and the other spouse brought children into the marriage. These spouses entered marriages with stepchildren ranging in age from toddlers

to teenagers. One gentleman expressed how he was unprepared to be a stepfather to a teenage stepdaughter and he hoped for more guidance and material to be available within the church. A wife and stepmother who married a man with three young children said she was more prepared because she herself was a child of divorce and she was aware of the stresses and anxieties that come with blended families. Another wife came into her second marriage with high hopes of good relationships with her husband's two daughters, having no biological children of her own; unfortunately, good relationships with her stepdaughters have not been possible. It has been hard for her and her husband to distinguish between normal behavior, behavior to be expected from children of divorce, and outright conflict and disrespect. It should be stated that this wife also grew up as a child of divorce and was not unaware of the difficulties. The new stepparent with no previous parenting experience presents a unique challenge. It was not a challenge that I anticipated at the beginning of the interview process and that weakness comes across in the curriculum with only a short section to address the issue. It would be good for another project to be completed focusing on remarried couples where one of the spouses has no previous parental experience.

In addition, not a weakness per se, but the primary purpose of the project was to write a curriculum for believers getting remarried not to use a curriculum for believers getting remarried. I stated in the project proposal that it is not right to judge the effectiveness of any premarital counseling based on the success of a marriage. All people fail to uphold all of God's ideals all the time. For that reason, I asked the pastoral panel to evaluate the curriculum based on what they knew about the couples who participated in the interviews and biblical faithfulness. Still, some curriculums are better than others and this curriculum does need to be tested and refined in the counseling room and in pastoral ministry. Effectiveness may be the wrong word to use because it brings up thoughts of statistics related to marriage and divorce. Relevance is a better word. Through using the curriculum in the counseling room and pastors observing and ministering to believers in

second marriages who have gone through the curriculum, the relevance of the curriculum could be observed and adjustments made as necessary. I am sure it will be necessary to adjust the curriculum.

Lastly, time did not permit me to focus on couples who remarried after being widows and widowers. My supervisor and I discussed whether or not to include this group in the project, but decided that it would be too broad of a focus, though it would be a worthwhile project as well.

What I Would Do Differently

If I could re-do the project, I would increase the amount of time interviewing couples and increase the number of couples to be interviewed. Frankly, the better part of a year could be spent interviewing couples for a project like this, although time was certainly a limitation as it is for every project. In addition, I would ask for input from some of the couples who were interviewed in the writing of the PCC itself. Of the seventeen couples interviewed, their Christian walks were as varied as the circumstances of their remarriages. To be clear, they were all committed Christians at the time of the interviews, however, they were not all committed Christians at the times of their divorces or even remarriages. Even so, the couples who participated in the project stated that they would not be where they are now in their second marriages had they not become committed Christians at some point. The couples who were committed Christians during their divorces and remarriages had additional elements of faithful insight and perspective on what they had been through. Had it been possible, about half of the couples interviewed could have made valuable contributions to writing the curriculum.

Of the seventeen couples interviewed, sixteen attend CPC churches and one attends a Southern Baptist church. Many of the participants in the study did not grow up in the denomination they currently attend, and some were attending different denominations at the times of their divorces and remarriages. It would be beneficial to

expand the interview base across more denominations. Because issues of divorce and remarriage are controversial, denominations take different stands on them. A wider interview base across denominations would give a better understanding of what people go through, how they are encouraged, judged, ministered to, or ostracized based on the denomination they belong to. If time had permitted, getting a wider denominational base for how divorce and remarriage are handled could have been done through reading the doctrines and polity of different denominations. The PCC could be tailored to more specific denominational use. And yet, life experience is still pertinent. It often depends on which local Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Christ, Nazarene, independent, Catholic, Lutheran, or Episcopal church a person attends as to how they were ministered to, or not, when going through divorce and remarriage. In the CPC, my own denomination, there is no standard when it comes to divorce and remarriage. CPC churches range from very liberal to very conservative in their views. How a person is received and cared for through the processes of divorce and remarriage depends on the local churches themselves.

It would have been good to involve the pastoral panel in the interview process. Involving the pastors in the interviews would not have been feasible given that would have meant coordinating the schedules of seven people seventeen times. However, the pastoral panel could have been helpful for all involved in understanding how and why the curriculum was written the way it was written. Perhaps the pastoral panel could have listened to the audio of the interviews after the fact, though this would have changed the nature of the confidentiality of the project. Two of the pastors on the pastoral panel did the premarital counseling for at least three of the couples interviewed. Their insight into the premarital counseling process, plus the information provided by the couples during the interviews, would have added a worthwhile element to the project.

The last thing I would have done differently, but still plan to do in the future, is use the curriculum and evaluate its relevance as people prepare for remarriage. Time did

not permit for this to be part of the project and the availability of couples preparing to get remarried is something farther beyond my control than finding couples who are already in successful second marriages. However, the curriculum is by no means all-encompassing and it will need to be used to edit, revise, and refine it to be a more effective tool for ministry. Of course, I hope to use it myself in premarital counseling settings. Additionally, I have at least four other pastors who are familiar with it and if they use it in the future I hope to receive feedback from them to edit and revise accordingly. Technically, using the curriculum and continuing to revise would not be something I would do differently in the project itself, but hopefully the project extends into practical ministry rather than sitting on a hard drive.

Theological Reflections

One thing that became clear through the course of this project is that there is a great need in the church to minister to stepfamilies. One husband said repeatedly in the interview that there was so little from the Christian perspective on blended families available. I wonder if churches are hesitant to commit to remarriage and stepfamily ministries for fear of appearing to condone sin. Donald Hagner notes in his commentary on Matthew that God's ideals cannot be taught as anything less than God's ideals.² In the case of marriage, God's ideal is that husband and wife do not separate until the death of one spouse. Churches may fear that focused ministry on those who have fallen short of this ideal will lessen the teaching and position of the church.

Churches always minister to those who fall short. When the church ministers to those who succumb to substance abuse, it does not lessen God's ideals to minister to the person (Eph 5:18). When church leadership ministers to a person who lashes out at

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 551.

people in anger, they do not lessen God's ideal that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (Jas 1:20). In both cases the difference is that the sinful behavior can cease. All Christians are called to put off the old self and put on righteousness (Eph 4:22-24). A changed heart and changed behavior demonstrate repentance. In a situation of divorce and remarriage, a changed heart and changed behavior do not undo the consequences caused by divorce. Therefore, churches may be hesitant in their willingness to minister to those who suffer because the consequences cannot be removed.

In 2 Corinthians Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Cor 1:3-4). Believers have the privilege and responsibility to comfort one another when they have been through the same suffering that their brothers and sisters are currently going through. The leadership in the church needs to help facilitate this comforting when it comes to the suffering involved in divorce and remarriage. I use the word facilitate for three reasons. First, the church needs to facilitate this comforting to make sure that it happens. Everyone is busy. Everyone has schedules that they fill up and this means people often forsake church commitments at the expense of busyness. Second, the church needs to facilitate this ministry of comfort to give guidance and protect the purity of the gospel. Every believer is in danger of allowing life experience to be the lens through which they understand, interpret, and apply the Bible. The more extreme the life experience, the more likely a person will bend the understanding of the Bible to the experience and ease the pain of accountability. Third, church leaders do not need to be divorced and remarried themselves, but they can find mature couples in second marriages to mentor couples beginning second marriages in their churches. Pastor, elders, and deacons need to be engaged in ministries of comfort to stepfamilies to ensure comfort comes with accountability and not with license.

I have not been through a divorce and remarriage, but I can commiserate with couples about the lack of available resources for Christians who are getting remarried. In my own reading and study preparing for this project, I found most of the written resources do not make it past the debate of whether divorce and remarriage are biblical. While it is important to have a theological foundation when it comes to divorce and remarriage, the biblical debate tends to remain in the theoretical realm. Not many in the church have written or addressed the practical realm of divorce and remarriage. I certainly do not want to give license to sin when divorce and remarriage are clearly sinful, however, I do not want to miss an opportunity to minister to those who have gone through the harsh, practical realities of divorce and remarriage.

Much of my study and reflection on marriage over the years has been focused on making marriage work. From a pastoral perspective, I want to make sure that when a man and woman say “I do,” they really do. Through this project I realized that marriage is much more than not getting divorced. A marriage between two believers is to present a picture of Christ and the church. Marriages should preach the gospel. Living out the gospel means loving people as Christ loved his bride and sacrificed his life for the church. Given the realities of divorce and remarriage, believers in second marriages have multiplied opportunities to love sacrificially. A new husband can love his new wife and her children as he does his own children. Loving stepchildren as one’s own is a harder love to carry out, but to love as Jesus loved it is necessary. In a second marriage love can be multiplied, but there is a danger in glorifying remarriage. During the interviews one additional question I asked was, “Do you have a preferred term for your family, such as stepfamily, blended family, etc.?” Some had opinions and some did not, but there was a caution that several espoused. Most did not like the term “bonus family.” Bonus family is a term being used in our current culture. The reason these believers did not like the term “bonus family” is because it made things sound good and happy, that people would want to go through the heartache of divorce to get to the “bonus family.” When I say that

believers in remarriages have additional avenues to love people as Jesus loves, that does not mean believers should pursue divorce and remarriage for this purpose. However, when believers form blended families, they need not look at their situation as an obstacle to following Jesus, but as an opportunity with multiplied avenues to continue following Jesus loving people as he loves his church.

During the interviews one couple brought up another concern; they expressed that while going through premarital counseling for remarriage, they were unsure how much their pastor could truly help them, since he himself had not been divorced and remarried. I found this to be an interesting statement and a misperception that may exist in the minds of many believers: “My pastor cannot help me if he has not been through the same thing that I am going through.” With all kindness and compassion, I must say this is untrue. Jesus never sinned. Yet, he can help people when they are tempted to sin: “Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (Heb 2:17-18). One does not need to have experienced the sin of a divorce, even if it was not his or her own sin that caused the divorce, to minister to those who have been through a divorce. In the proposal for the project, I stated that the purpose of the interviews was to gain real-life knowledge in the areas of divorce and remarriage. Then the information gathered from the interviews needed to be understood through the lens of Scripture and not the other way around. The input from the pastoral panel was necessary though none of the pastors on the panel are divorced or remarried. Not that I would claim the same qualifications as Jesus, for myself or the pastoral panel, when it comes to ministering to people, but the principle is clear. A person does not need to experience or commit a specific sin to minister to those who have experienced or committed that specific sin.

In recent decades many have been trying to redefine marriage in the United States, from the Supreme Court ruling in 2015 effectively making homosexual marriage legal, to the continual LGBTQ+ agenda constantly seen in the media and entertainment. I find it necessary not to attack all evils, but to uphold the truth, specifically the truth of marriage. The truth is that marriage is to be between one man and one woman, and is to present a picture of Christ and the church. I think that there may be a hidden danger that second marriages and stepfamilies might just become another version of marriage thrown in with all the other versions of marriage modern culture is espousing if the church does not defend biblically valid remarriage. Second marriages need to be upheld and honored in the church just as first marriages are. Men and women in second marriages need to be held to the same standards of headship and submission, presenting a picture of Christ and the church. I am afraid if the church continues to let second marriages and stepfamilies slide because it is uncomfortable talking about them, they may slide into the mire that the culture is using to distort marriage. I also believe it is the picture of Christ and the church that protects the institution of marriage. Because the church is consistently pictured as the bride (and brides are always women) of Christ in the New Testament and Jesus is the bridegroom (and grooms are always men) to present the picture marriage can only be between one man and one woman.

Personal Reflections

Five years ago, I began serving DCPC in my second pastoral position. In ministering to the believers and families at DCPC I have come to realize the great need to minister to believers in their marriages, as well as believers in their second marriages. I have come to realize that ministry is messy. Ministry is particularly messy in regards to second marriages; five years ago, it would have been an area of ministry I would have gladly avoided, but after the completion of this project it is an area of ministry I sincerely hope to expand. My motivation for going back to school and pursuing a concentration in

biblical counseling was so that I might better equip myself to minister to people not only in second marriages but in all marriages. I do not know that I could have articulated it before starting school. I simply wanted to be better equipped to help people in their suffering. However, I think I can articulate it now: I believe in marriage.

One thing that I found that somewhat surprised me, though it should not have, is the joy that couples found in their second marriages. I admit that I began this project from a pastoral perspective, a desire to minister to those at my church who are part of stepfamilies, but initially my motivation was somewhat limited to the following idea: “Let’s make sure the same mistakes are not made twice.” Certainly, a pastor does not want people to experience pain and suffering. However, keeping a second marriage intact is not just about avoiding a second divorce, it is about the joy of following Jesus in a second marriage. It is about the joy of being husband and wife, the joy of headship and submission, the joy of being a stepfamily and being God’s children. It is this joy that should inform a pastor. Joy allows pastors to grow from ministering out of a fear of failure to ministering out of joy as they follow Jesus together with their people. No matter what situation in life a believer is in, there is always joy in following Jesus.

Of course, joy in following Jesus is often accompanied by sorrow and suffering. It was distressing to listen to stories of people being rejected and ostracized by their churches. Even the people whose spouses were unfaithful, abusive, or abused substances in their first marriages often received judgment rather than comfort at church. There can be no doubt that there is a stigma attached to divorce even when the person with divorce forced upon them had no desire to be divorced at all. Perhaps part of the problem, aside from the fact that all divorces are caused by sin in some way, is that people in churches simply do not know what to do or what to say. Instead, they find it easier to judge, ostracize, or ignore. I can say I found it easier to interview people I did not know while doing this project. It was awkward to interview people at my own church and ask them about the details of their divorces and remarriages. Of the five couples I

interviewed at DCPC, four of them had divorced and remarried before I began my time at the church. I can understand why church families struggle to minister to those who have been through, or are going through, divorce and remarriage. However, believers are called to love people when it is hard, not just when it is easy.

On August 10, my wife and I will celebrate eighteen years of marriage. It is the first marriage for both of us. Sometimes I forget the joy we share in marriage. Some days being husband and wife is easy, and some days it is hard, but there is always joy. Thinking through divorce and remarriage, interviewing couples and learning about their struggles and triumphs, and writing a curriculum to help remarried couples navigate blended families well while presenting a picture of Christ and the Church I have learned, and been reminded, that my wife and I must do the same. I am not perfect, nor is my wife, but we must strive to present a picture of Christ and the Church to the world just as Christians in second marriages must strive to present a picture of Christ and the Church to the world. People in second marriages may be tempted to quit on the marriage because of past failure. People in first marriages may be tempted to think because they are not divorced, they are doing good enough and then fall short of picturing Christ and the Church. I do not want to miss the joy of our first marriage, or miss the joy of following Jesus as a husband and a father. I am grateful to the couples I interviewed for reminding me that marriage brings joy.

I look forward to being able to walk alongside believers who have gone through a divorce and are preparing for remarriage. I know that there is a fine line to walk. I can say that most of the spouses in the couples I interviewed were not the offending spouses in their first marriage, making it easier for me to sympathize with them while listening to their stories. Spouses who were the offending spouse in their first marriage were definitely the minority in this project, and while holding people accountable for their actions was not the purpose of the project, I know that it will be necessary in future ministry. I do not think that any believer should joyously seek out

conflict and confrontation. However, Scripture is clear: “My brothers and sisters, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, let that person know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:19-20). If anything has been revealed to me through this project, it is that the “error of his way” affects many more people than just the sinner when it comes to divorce and remarriage.

Conclusion

When I was working towards a Master of Divinity degree at Ashland Theological Seminary, I had a classmate who was working on his Master of Theology. He was making plans to pursue PhD work following his time at Ashland. I remember over lunch one day, he said that he believed academic pursuit in and of itself was a worthwhile endeavor. I do not believe academic pursuit is an end in and of itself. Academic pursuit in a seminary is about ministry and will always be about building God’s kingdom. Furthermore, God’s kingdom is always about the people God has called to be his children through faith in his son, Jesus Christ. My sincerest hope is that while this project has come to an end, the PCC developed over the course of the project has not. I hope to utilize the PCC in my own ministry and want to continue to hone and develop the curriculum itself. People make up these remarriages—people who are following Jesus. I pray that this PCC will be used to minister to men, women, and children to build God’s kingdom. In December of 2020, God-willing, I will be presented with a degree from Southern Seminary. I will get to walk across a stage and be handed a Doctor of Ministry. I know that there are many people who have made that moment possible who will not be walking across the stage with me. The faculty and staff of Southern Seminary are part of the degree. Classmates who have become more than peers and colleagues are part of the degree. Family and friends are part of the degree. Pastoral colleagues and people who shared their lives are part of the degree. The woman who edited this project is part of the

degree. It is not an individual degree, it is a “people” degree. It is a degree that fulfills the motto printed on a coffee cup given to me when I visited Southern Seminary three years ago for a campus tour: “For the truth, for the church, for the world, for the glory of God.”

APPENDIX 1
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening Questions

1. How long have you been married?
2. How long was it for each of you between your first marriage and your new marriage?
3. Were children part of your new marriage from the beginning?

Dealing with the Consequences of Divorce

1. How did you expect the divorce to change the relationship between you and your ex-spouse?
2. Has post-divorce life with your ex-spouse been positive or negative?
3. Studies show that spouses and children who have gone through divorce are angry and the anger can remain for years, even decades. How angry were/are you after going through your divorces?
4. How has anger from the ending of your first marriages affected the new marriage?
5. If you had children in your first marriage and brought them into the new marriage how have they expressed anger? How have you ministered to your shared children in the new marriage?

Deciding to Get Remarried

1. What factors led to your decision to get remarried?
2. How did the Bible inform your decision to get remarried?
3. In what ways were you concerned that your potential new spouse would have the same character flaws that your first spouse did?
4. Regardless of how your first marriage ended in what ways have you addressed your own character in preparing for a second marriage?
5. What role did children play in deciding whether to remarry and whom to remarry?

The Stepfamily and Church Ministry

1. What support, or lack of support, did you receive from your church family as you went through the processes of divorce and remarriage?
2. Did you talk with a pastor, or a trusted Christian, about getting remarried? If you did not talk with anyone why not?
3. Was premarital counseling available to you? If so, was it pertinent to a second marriage versus a first marriage? How was it pertinent to a second marriage?
4. Was your church family supportive of the new marriage? How has your church family ministered to you all as a stepfamily?
5. Do you worship together at the same church as a couple/stepfamily or have you split time between churches?

Children of Divorce and Blended Families

1. If an ex-spouse/co-parent has also remarried what fears and anxieties do you have with the thought of your children being under the care of another adult?
2. How has co-parenting with ex-spouses affected your marriage? How has division of child custody affected daily life in the new marriage both positively and negatively?
3. For the sake of shared children do you both try to be as cooperative as possible with ex-spouses? (That is without compromising your principles or morality.)
4. Do you fear your ex may do something illegal regarding your children? How has this fear led to tension or unification in your marriage?
5. Have you been able to coordinate how you discipline the children with ex-spouses and how did you do so?
6. Are you on good terms with your ex-spouse or ex-spouses? If yes, how has this impacted child discipline positively, if no, how has this impacted child-discipline negatively?
7. Do you, or did you, have regular meetings with your children to instill the rules of your household in them as they navigate life between different households?
8. Do you primarily discipline your biological children, or both biological children and stepchildren?
9. How well do the children get along? How do you provide a peaceful environment in the home?

Finances

1. What stresses have you experienced beyond the stresses you experienced in your first marriage?

2. How did you combine your finances or approach your finances as a married couple?
3. How have additional financial stresses with child support and/or spousal support affected your marriage?
4. When preparing for remarriage and beginning a stepfamily did you write out a timeline of when certain stresses would change such as child support and shared custody?

Stepfamily Life

1. How did you decide where to live when you got married? How did your children's schooling affect the decision of where to live?
2. Do you live close to your ex-spouse or far away (i.e. same city or different states)?
3. How have the holidays impacted your new marriage? How have you worked through the stress and frustration of children being in different places during the holidays?
4. What new, fun family traditions have you all begun as a new stepfamily?
5. How has the Christian faith and the Bible strengthened your second marriage and stepfamily?
6. How have you made your marriage a priority without minimizing your children?

Closing Questions

1. What was your greatest hope in getting remarried? How has that hope been realized and how has that hope been disappointed?
2. What has been your greatest struggle in your remarriage? What has been your greatest blessing?
3. What questions have not been asked that you would ask? What have your experiences in a new marriage taught you that you believe others preparing for a new marriage need to know?
4. What three pieces of advice would you want to give to couples getting remarried and beginning blended families?

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL RUBRIC

Interview Protocol Evaluation Tool					
1= not true 2=somewhat true 3= true 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The questions are biblically and theologically consistent.					
The questions address practical issues you have seen remarried believers experience in your ministry.					
The questions are honest but not condemning in nature.					
The questions promote open ended answers.					
The questions submit real life experience to the Bible and not the other way around.					
The questions are general in nature and do not chase down rabbit trails.					
The questions do not pry into sordid details of divorce but do bring the reality of divorce into view addressing remarriage.					
The answers to these questions will help bring glory to God's kingdom in the counseling curriculum.					

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Church: _____

Denomination: _____

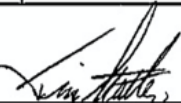
APPENDIX 3

COMPLETED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL RUBRICS

RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Evaluation Tool					
1= not true 2=somewhat true 3= true 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The questions are biblically and theologically consistent.			✓		This is hard as most are not biblical in content. can the answers be used in biblical counseling - yes
The questions address real-life issues in the lives of remarried believers.				✓	
The questions are honest but not accusatory in nature.			✓		Difficult as they may lead the
The questions promote open ended answers.				✓	
The questions attempt to draw out the real-life successes of second marriages.				✓	
The questions are general in nature and do not chase down rabbit trails.				✓	
The questions do not pry into sordid details of divorce but do bring the reality of divorce into view addressing remarriage.				✓	
The answers will help bring glory to God's kingdom in the counseling curriculum.				✓	I hope so

Name: Tim Stuller

Signature: 

Church: Good Hopeville Church

Denomination: Cumberland Pres

RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Evaluation Tool					
1= not true 2=somewhat true 3= true 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The questions are biblically and theologically consistent.				X	
The questions address real-life issues in the lives of remarried believers.				X	
The questions are honest but not accusatory in nature.				X	
The questions promote open ended answers.				X	
The questions attempt to draw out the real-life successes of second marriages.				X	
The questions are general in nature and do not chase down rabbit trails.				X	
The questions do not pry into sordid details of divorce but do bring the reality of divorce into view addressing remarriage.				X	
The answers will help bring glory to God's kingdom in the counseling curriculum.				X	

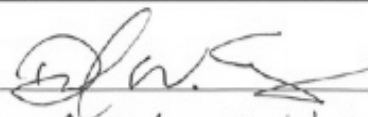
Name: Jamie Mosley Signature: [Signature]
 Church: Redeemer Church Denomination: SBC

RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Evaluation Tool					
1= not true 2=somewhat true 3= true 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The questions are biblically and theologically consistent.				✓	
The questions address real-life issues in the lives of remarried believers.				✓	especially like the q's regarding raising children in the re-married context
The questions are honest but not accusatory in nature.				✓	very open-ended q's + will lead to long answers
The questions promote open ended answers.				✓	and inverse w/ the previous row on "honesty"
The questions attempt to draw out the real-life successes of second marriages.				✓	
The questions are general in nature and do not chase down rabbit trails.				✓	
The questions do not pry into sordid details of divorce but do bring the reality of divorce into view addressing remarriage.			✓		a few questions seem to "assume" or imply b/c of stats + research but in a counseling
The answers will help bring glory to God's kingdom in the counseling curriculum.				✓	session, that could easily be addressed.

↪ excellent

Name: DANIEL W. EVANS

Signature: 

Church: Gallatin Church

Denomination: Cumberland Presbyterian

RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Evaluation Tool					
1= not true 2=somewhat true 3= true 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The questions are biblically and theologically consistent.				✓	
The questions address real-life issues in the lives of remarried believers.				✓	
The questions are honest but not accusatory in nature.				✓	
The questions promote open ended answers.				✓	Where they are not open ended are necessarily closed.
The questions attempt to draw out the real-life successes of second marriages.				✓	
The questions are general in nature and do not chase down rabbit trails.				✓	
The questions do not pry into sordid details of divorce but do bring the reality of divorce into view addressing remarriage.				✓	The questions about anger from the first may have the potential to go this route, but are necessary for information in regards to
The answers will help bring glory to God's kingdom in the counseling curriculum.				✓	

Name: Jeff Decker
 Church: Beck CP

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]
 Denomination: Cumberland Presbyterian

APPENDIX 4

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Premarital Counseling Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The New Testament view of marriage is taught in the curriculum.					
Stresses of remarriage are effectively anticipated.					
Issues of blended families are effectively addressed.					
The experiences contributed by interviewees are treated fairly, truthfully, and anonymously.					
The curriculum is not condemning in nature but is edifying and encouraging.					
The curriculum contains an appropriate amount of material to counsel for remarriage.					
The curriculum will appeal to Christians in a broad range of church traditions.					
The curriculum is visually appealing and easy to navigate.					

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Church: _____

Denomination: _____

APPENDIX 5

COMPLETED PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRICS

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Premarital Counseling Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The New Testament view of marriage is taught in the curriculum.				✓	
Stresses of remarriage are effectively anticipated.			✓		
Issues of blended families are effectively addressed.				✓	
The experiences contributed by interviewees are treated fairly, truthfully, and anonymously.				✓	
The curriculum is not condemning in nature but is edifying and encouraging.				✓	
The curriculum contains an appropriate amount of material to counsel for remarriage.			✓		
The curriculum will appeal to Christians in a broad range of church traditions.				✓	
The curriculum is visually appealing and easy to navigate.		✓			

Name: _____

Signature: 

Church: _____

Denomination: _____

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRIC

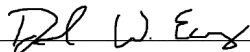
Premarital Counseling Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The New Testament view of marriage is taught in the curriculum.				X	
Stresses of remarriage are effectively anticipated.				X	
Issues of blended families are effectively addressed.				X	
The experiences contributed by interviewees are treated fairly, truthfully, and anonymously.				X	
The curriculum is not condemning in nature but is edifying and encouraging.				X	
The curriculum contains an appropriate amount of material to counsel for remarriage.				X	
The curriculum will appeal to Christians in a broad range of church traditions.			X		
The curriculum is visually appealing and easy to navigate.				X	

Name: James Mosby Signature: 

Church: Redeemer Church Denomination: SBC

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Premarital Counseling Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The New Testament view of marriage is taught in the curriculum.				X	
Stresses of remarriage are effectively anticipated.					
Issues of blended families are effectively addressed.			X		Slightly more emphasis could have been placed on age/racial differences of couple
The experiences contributed by interviewees are treated fairly, truthfully, and anonymously.				X	
The curriculum is not condemning in nature but is edifying and encouraging.				X	
The curriculum contains an appropriate amount of material to counsel for remarriage.				X	The "teaching" sections are a great tool for this to be achieved.
The curriculum will appeal to Christians in a broad range of church traditions.				X	
The curriculum is visually appealing and easy to navigate.				X	Excellent job on this aspect of the assignment.

Name: Daniel W. Evans Signature: 

Church: Gallatin Church Denomination: Cumberland Presbyterian

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Premarital Counseling Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The New Testament view of marriage is taught in the curriculum.				✓	Beginning w/ and circling back to Eph. 5 was very insightful
Stresses of remarriage are effectively anticipated.				✓	
Issues of blended families are effectively addressed.				✓	Great job in leaving open ended to encourage further thought especially w/ sections 17+18
The experiences contributed by interviewees are treated fairly, truthfully, and anonymously.				✓	I had contributing participants + still could not tell of solutions applied to them
The curriculum is not condemning in nature but is edifying and encouraging.				✓	
The curriculum contains an appropriate amount of material to counsel for remarriage.				✓	The length was Perfect!! I wish I had this for some of my premarital counseling that I have conducted.
The curriculum will appeal to Christians in a broad range of church traditions.				✓	This is a very biblical approach + thereby does not focus on denominational approach.
The curriculum is visually appealing and easy to navigate.			✓		As covered it will suffice. However, color or pictures would aid in bringing out sections.

Name: Jeff DeWees

Signature: 

Church: BEECH

Denomination: CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN

APPENDIX 6
A PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM
FOR REMARRIAGE

Introduction

When two people stand up in front of their family, friends, and minister and pledge their lives to one another they are not planning on divorce. They are not planning on fighting, infidelity, abandonment, or abuse. They are planning to live happily ever after. Unfortunately, because we live in a fallen world happily ever after does not always happen and divorce often does. Husband, wife, or both may one day find themselves again standing before family, friends, and a minister pledging their lives to another person, this time with the added stresses of child support, visitation or joint custody, as well as the reality of a failed marriage and an ex-spouse to contend with. It is hard to find examples of divorce, remarriage, and stepfamilies in the Bible that correlate to modern times. Some likely candidates would be Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Though their story begins with polygamy in Genesis 16, an accepted cultural practice of the time, it ends with a broken family in Genesis 21, when Hagar and Ishmael are sent away because of Sarah (Gen 21:10). The events of Hagar and Ishmael being sent away occur in Genesis 21; however, God had previously spoken to Hagar about Ishmael. “This man will be like a wild donkey. *His hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him*; he will settle near all his relatives” (Gen 16:12, italics added).¹ Even in the book of Genesis the consequences of a broken family can be seen.

What does this mean for you who are seeking remarriage after divorce and are trying to put two broken people and two broken families together to be one whole?

Hebrews 11:8-12: *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

11 By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered

¹ All Scripture references from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

that the one who had promised was faithful. 12 Therefore, from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore.

It means you can still be faithful. Abraham and Sarah are both listed as those who lived by faith in Hebrews 11. For all their mistakes, faults, and sins they are counted in the New Testament as faithful.

Second marriages can be incredible blessings, they can also be incredibly difficult. It is generally agreed that the divorce rate for second marriages is higher than first marriages.² In fact, the divorce rate for second marriages may be as high as 67 percent.³ The purpose of this premarital counseling curriculum is to equip you to navigate your new marriage well. The purpose is to take a hard-practical look at what the Bible says about marriage and a realistic look at what your new marriage will most likely be like. Whether a first marriage, second marriage, or a single life all believers are called to follow Jesus in every aspect of their lives.

Following Jesus is what we are doing. We are counting the cost of following Jesus in a second marriage.

Luke 14:25-33 - *Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

28 “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

31 “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

The reason the divorce rate for second marriages is higher than first marriages is beyond this curriculum. However, it is my prayer that by counting the cost of the remarriage beforehand, the difficulties and stresses of a new marriage will not overwhelm

² US Census Bureau, “Remarriage in the United States,” last modified March 10, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-30.html>.

³ “Divorce Statistics and Divorce Rate in the USA,” Divorce Statistics, last modified April 5, 2012, <https://www.divorcestatistics.info/divorce-statistics-and-divorce-rate-in-the-usa.html>.

and consume you both. My prayer is that by counting the cost of being Jesus's disciples in a new marriage you will work through the difficulties and find new blessings in your new marriage. It is my prayer that you will bring glory to God as your new marriage presents a picture of Christ and the church to the community around you and furthers the message of the Gospel.

In Christ,

Michael Bertsch

P.S. The following premarital counseling curriculum has limited space for answers to the questions. A notebook or journal for each of you would be a helpful tool.

SESSION 1 – THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

Welcome/Prayer

Ephesians 5:22-33 - *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.*

Teaching

The passage from Ephesians is a much beloved, misinterpreted, misapplied, incredibly grand teaching about marriage, husbands, wives, Christ, and the church. Chances are in your first marriage, if you were believers at the time, you attempted to apply these verses to your marriage with varying degrees of success. As you prepare for a new marriage these verses must still be beloved, interpreted, and applied. All married believers are called to live out these verses as a picture of Christ and the church. Our marriages are to “preach” the gospel to the world. These marriages include any remarriage. Second marriages are not second best.

Questions

1. What does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband?

Wife –

Husband –

2. What does it mean for a husband to be the head of the wife?

Wife –

Husband –

David Powlison: In these self-assertive times it is not popular to speak the language of subordination. But the Bible is consistent in the way it speaks of obedience, submission, and fear. First, we do all such things to God, but God never does them back to us. The common call presses all of us to obey, fear, and submit to the Lord. The only alternative? Serve the world's agenda, your own sinful flesh, and the devil. Second, the particular focus consistently presses wives, children, slaves, citizens, and the flock to serve those over them. But husbands, parents, masters, rulers, and pastors do not do the same back; they are to serve the welfare of those in their care. *Both parties repent of self-will, but in different ways.*⁴ (italics added)

3. Considering Ephesians 5:22-33 and the extended quote from David Powlison how does a wife repent of self by submission and how does a husband repent of self by being the head?

Wife –

Husband –

4. How does Jesus give Himself up for the church? How does the Church submit to Jesus?

Wife –

Husband –

5. What are the direct correlations between your answers to question 4 and husbands and wives?

Wife –

Husband –

⁴ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 64.

Homework

Before returning for the next session reflect on your life growing up and your first marriages.

Genesis 1:26-28: *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."*

27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."

Teaching

Marriage is God's idea. God created human beings in community, specifically in the context of marriage. Since God created marriage it is safe to assume that God knows best how a husband and wife should relate to one another in marriage. We also have many earthly examples set for us about how to be married, and if you are getting remarried you have firsthand experience as well. Remembering your answers to the questions in the counseling session about Ephesians 5:22-33 compare them to the examples and experiences in your life by answering following questions.

1. How was headship and submission modeled for you growing up?

Wife –

Husband –

2. If you did not grow up in a family with Christian parents how did your parents relate to one another as husband and wife?

Wife –

Husband –

3. Was there divorce and remarriage in your family growing up?

Wife –

Husband –

4. How did practicing the biblical principles of headship and submission work in your first marriages?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Wife – was practicing submission in your first marriage good, bad, or indifferent (please elaborate)?

6. Husband – was practicing headship in your first marriage good, bad, or indifferent (please elaborate)?

7. Now that you are getting remarried how (in what ways) will you correct your practices of submission and headship in your second marriage from your first marriages?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, please watch over us. We know that we, like all believers, will never attain the ideals You set forth in the Bible. When we fall short encourage and strengthen us. Let us never stop striving to attain Your standards of holiness and godliness in our marriage. Let us never stop striving to present a perfect picture of Your Son and the church to the world and in doing so proclaim the gospel. Amen.

SESSION 2 – THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Hebrews 10:23-24 - *Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.*

Rob Green: Both family and work communities are valuable, but they are not essential for spiritual health. But there is one kind of community that you cannot live without, namely the body of Christ.⁵

⁵ Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 113.

Teaching

Couples who have strong second marriages state that being committed to the Christian Faith and being committed to a local church family have been essential to the success of the new marriage. It can also be said that several of the couples interviewed for this curriculum experienced judgment and ostracism when they went through their divorces. Sometimes people in church confuse judgment with accountability. They forsake mercy and compassion for fear of condoning sin. Nevertheless, almost all the couples in second marriages cited the Christian Faith and a good church home as essential to the success of their second marriages.

Questions

1. What is your personal testimony? (Include church history, personal salvation event, denominational background, significant spiritual successes and failures, etc.)

Wife –

Husband –

2. How would you describe your current church life (committed, absent, ebbs and flows, etc.)?

Wife –

Husband –

3. What was your experience with your church families while going through the heartbreak of divorce?

Wife –

Husband –

4. If your ex-spouse committed the sin that led to the ending of your first marriage did your church family comfort and encourage you or pass judgment and ostracize you?

Wife –

Husband –

5. If you are the one who committed the sin that led to the ending of your first marriage did your church family rebuke you, hold you accountable, judge you, or simply dismiss the sin?

Wife –

Husband –

6. Did you start attending a different church after divorce and why?

Wife –

Husband –

7. If you are going through this premarital counseling curriculum with a pastor, is he the pastor of the church you belong to and do you plan to continue attending this church after you are married?

Together –

Homework

2 Corinthians 1:3-5: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Teaching

Husbands, wives, and children who have been through divorce need the comfort that comes from the church, the comfort that flows from believer to believer which we have in Christ Jesus. Yet, in blended families the family may be divided and unable to attend church together on Sunday mornings. The following questions are written so that you may get a picture of church life in your new marriage and family.

1. If one or both of you have children, do they attend church with you?

Wife –

Husband –

2. If you answered no to the previous question, do your children attend church?

Wife –

Husband –

3. If you continued to attend the same church as you did in your first marriage does your ex-spouse also attend the same church?

Wife –

Husband –

4. If you answered yes to the previous are you able to worship at the same church as your ex-spouse without continual conflict?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Does attending the same church as your ex-spouse allow your shared children to consistently attend the same church/youth group?

Wife –

Husband –

6. Do you have any fears about committing to a local church and what are they?

Wife –

Husband –

7. How will your love for Jesus and Jesus's love for you help you overcome your apprehensions about people in the church possibly judging and ostracizing you?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that we are not perfect, we know that no church is perfect, but we know that your Son, our Savior, is perfect. Please provide a church family where we can grow as disciples of your Son and serve in His kingdom. Please give us a spirit of commitment, that we would commit to a church family who would exhort, encourage, edify, rebuke, and hold us accountable in our new marriage. We pray that our marriage would bring glory and honor to You and help to further the work of Your kingdom. Amen.

SESSION 3 – KNOWING YOURSELF AND ONE ANOTHER

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Luke 14:25-33 - *Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

28 “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

31 “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

Teaching

In these verses Jesus is talking about discipleship. Jesus is talking about counting the cost of following Him. That is the goal and purpose of this Premarital Counseling Curriculum, to count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus in a second marriage. In addition to counting the cost, another goal of this curriculum is to have a picture in mind of what being a disciple of Jesus will look like for each of you in your second marriage. What are the variables in life and the specific context of your marriage and how will the principles of the Bible and following Jesus play out in your new marriage? While there are many outside variables that will be present in a second marriage that are not present in a first marriage you are still married to each other and to no one else. We will begin counting the cost by going through your own histories as you prepare to put your two lives together.

Questions

1. What was (were) the circumstance(s) of your divorce(s)?

Wife –

Husband –

2. How long was your first marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

3. What were your primary responses to divorce (anger, grief, anxiety, fear, etc.)?

Wife –

Husband –

4. How long was it between filing for divorce and the beginning of your relationship?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Sometimes first marriages end in similar ways for each spouse and this common ground can bind a new husband and wife together in a second marriage. Did your first marriages end in similar ways or different ways?

Together –

6. What counseling (or group experiences such as Divorce Care) have you received?

Wife –

Husband –

- a. What did you learn about yourself through counseling?

Wife –

Husband –

7. How many children (if any) are each of you bringing into the new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

8. What responses did your children have to the divorce (anger, grief, anxiety, fear, etc.)?

Wife –

Husband –

9. Have your children received any counseling or care after the divorce?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

More than one couple who participated in the interviews for this curriculum stated that they will redirect emotions. For example, the new wife will redirect her new husband's anger knowing that the source of the anger is from the previous marriage and not necessarily from a conflict in the new marriage. Chances are, if you have emotional carryover from your first marriage these issues have already come up in your relationship. The following questions are to explore this issue and based on the biblical principle Peter outlines in the following verse. The command is for husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, but we will apply the principle to both of you, to understand and live with one another as best as possible.

1 Peter 3:7: *Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

1. Take your primary emotional responses to your divorce (anger, fear, grief, anxiety, etc.) have you experienced these emotions in an inordinate way as you prepare for marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Do you think your fiancé experiences emotions out of proportion to the situation at times?

Wife –

Husband –

3. If you have experienced these inordinate emotions from your fiancé, how have you reacted?

Wife –

Husband –

Exercise

Ephesians 4:20-24: *But that is not how you came to know Christ, 21 assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.*

4. In these verses Paul is talking about putting off our old sinful lives and putting on our new righteous lives in Jesus Christ. We can take the same principle and apply it to marriage. Taking your answers to questions 1 and 2 what old ways of relating to a spouse do you need to put off and what new ways of relating to a spouse do you need to put on?

Wife –

Husband –

Together –

Ephesians 4:25: *Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.*

5. Part of putting off and putting on is being held accountable for our shortcomings. To speak the truth to one another from **Ephesians 4:25** is to speak the gospel truth into

one another's lives. How will you hold one another accountable without getting defensive?

Wife –

Husband –

Dave Harvey: Our past relational experiences exert a powerful sway over our present. They do not determine our behavior, but they deeply influence how we think and choose. To truly understand your spouse—to know them fully in order to love them devotedly—is to understand their relational past and how it influences their present.⁶

6. What other difficulties did you experience in relating to your first spouse that you are concerned will carry over into this marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for bringing us together. We pray that You would bless each of us as we prepare to begin life together as husband and wife. We know that only You can truly know the hearts of people. Yet, we ask that You bind our hearts together, we ask that You always give us a spirit of truth, honesty, and openness in communication. We ask that we will always be able to speak of difficult topics with one another without causing conflict and sinning against one another. We ask that You always watch over us. Amen.

SESSION 4 – LEARNING TO TRUST

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Proverbs 3:5-6 - *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Philippians 4:6-7 - *Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Teaching

Most of the people interviewed in second marriages for this curriculum were spouses who did not break their wedding vows in their first marriages. Most of the people

⁶ David T. Harvey, *I Still Do: Growing Closer and Stronger through Life's Defining Moments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 33–34.

interviewed for this curriculum also married people who they believed were completely unlike their first spouses (in other words, they did not worry that their new spouse would make the same mistakes as their first spouse). A handful of people who participated did bring in initial insecurities such as, mistrust, anger, and fear into the second marriage. However, through open and constant communication these initial insecurities and negative emotions were overcome.

It is tempting to take a purely horizontal approach to the issue of trust. By horizontal I mean that it would be tempting to approach the issue of trust by talking only about your relationship, trying to determine how you can best know each other well enough that you will not break one another's trust in the future. However, that is impossible for two reasons. First, we cannot predict the future. Second, we are all fallen, sinful human beings. You WILL fail each other, but that does not mean the marriage will fail. With that said we will approach trust beginning with the vertical relationship, your relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The reason for approaching your marriage beginning with your vertical relationships with God is so that you can begin your marriage as content disciples of Jesus Christ, no matter what happens in the future, AND so that you will not place unnecessary expectations on one another as husband and wife that only God can fulfill. Once trust is established in God the Father you will be ready to trust one another.

Questions

Timothy and Kathy Keller: A marriage based not on self-denial but on self-fulfillment will require a low- or no-maintenance partner who meets your needs while making almost claims on you. Simply put – today people are asking far too much in the marriage partner.⁷

1. What things do people expect a spouse to provide that only God can provide?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Did you trust your first spouse to provide fulfillment that only God can?

Wife –

Husband –

3. Are you trusting your new spouse to provide fulfillment that only God can?

Wife –

⁷ Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 30.

Husband –

4. What are you trusting your new spouse to provide?

Wife –

Husband –

5. In what ways was trust broken in your first marriage and what are you most afraid will happen in your new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25: *There is nothing better for a person than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand, 25 because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from him?*

6. All meaning from ordinary things in life comes from God's hands, and this includes marriage. How will trusting God for meaning in life rather than each other enable for a successful second marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

Paul David Tripp: You want to build such a strong foundation of trust together that when you sin against one another, you have established enough trust to deal with the sin in a way that doesn't further erode trust and do lasting damage to your union.⁸

1. Couples interviewed for this curriculum could not stress enough the need for constant, intentional, honest communication. How, When, and Where will you talk with each other daily about your marriage?

Mornings, afternoons, evenings, lunchbreaks?

Talk about children, finances, discipline, ex-spouses and co-parenting, physical intimacy?

2. How do you define open and honest communication?

⁸ Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 153–54.

Wife –

Husband –

The culture in the United States tends to define open and honest communication as saying whatever you are thinking or feeling in the moment. Giving people a piece of your mind, good, bad, or indifferent, is considered being transparent and virtuous. Contrary to this Jesus teaches. . .

Matthew 12:36-37: *I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

3. Considering Jesus's words in Matthew 12 and your answers from question 2 do you need to redefine your definition of open and honest communication and application of that definition?

Wife –

Husband –

4. If one of you (or both) are bringing children into the marriage how do you see yourself responding if your new spouse offers constructive criticism about your children?

Wife –

Husband –

5. What are your top three reasons for wanting to get remarried?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father teach us contentment and hearts that trust in You above all else. Thank you for giving us to one another. Teach us to be disciples of Your Son as we become husband and wife and help to practice mercy, grace, repentance, compassion, and forgiveness in our marriage as we trust You to sustain us, uphold us, and join our lives together. Amen.

SESSION 5 – FRUITS OF REPENTANCE

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Matthew 3:7-12 - 7 *When he (John the Baptist) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. 9 And don’t presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

11 *“I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”*

Teaching

Jay Adams: Divorce, even when proper, always is occasioned by someone’s sin. At its best, then, divorce always brings misery and hurt. That is why God hates it.⁹

Most of the couples interviewed for this curriculum were not the ones who broke their marriage vows in the first marriage. In other words, they did not commit the sin that led to divorce. All divorces are caused by sin, though not all divorces are sinful. If you were the spouse who committed a covenant breaking sin in your first marriage have you repented of that sin? Sins that lead to divorce are not the unpardonable sin that prevent one from receiving eternal salvation. Jesus teaches

Mark 3:28-30 - *“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”*

Scholars have debated what Jesus means by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit for years with no definite consensus. Whatever it is has been labeled the “unpardonable sin.” Whatever the unpardonable sin is in these verses that Jesus is talking about it is clear He is not talking about divorce.

Questions¹⁰

1. Were you the spouse whose committed a covenant breaking sin in your first marriage?

⁹ Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (1980; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 25.

¹⁰ If you, or neither of you, broke your vows in your first marriage you could answer these questions from the viewpoint of whether your ex-spouse has demonstrated any fruits of repentance. Answering the questions from that viewpoint would not be for the sake of gossip or slander, but rather to give you an idea of what an ongoing relationship with the ex-spouse will be like as you prepare for marriage, especially if there are shared children.

Wife –

Husband –

2. If you answered yes to the previous question what was the sin committed?

Wife –

Husband –

3. Have you confessed your sin to your first spouse and repented of the sin, how?

Wife –

Husband –

4. Did you try to reconcile and restore your first marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Assuming you have confessed and repented of your sin, apologized to your first spouse, and been unable to restore the marriage, how have you demonstrated the fruits of repentance in concrete ways such as being on time for child drop off and pick up, not speaking badly about your ex-spouse, and/or trying to be more than fair in the divorce settlement?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 - *To the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife.*

1. Ultimately the hope of repentance and forgiveness is to put a relationship back together, what we will call reconciliation as Paul writes in verse 11. Is your first marriage completely beyond reconciliation?¹¹

¹¹ A marriage may be unreconcilable due to remarriage of your ex-spouse, or a continually demonstrated unwillingness to restore the marriage by your ex-spouse after divorce.

Wife –

Husband –

2. With the possibility of reconciling your first marriage unattainable how have you/will you demonstrate genuine repentance for the sin that broke your marriage vows?

Wife –

Husband –

3. Your ex-spouse may have forgiven you without reconciling the marriage. God-willing you and your ex-spouse are at peace, but it is also possible that is not the case. Even so,

Romans 12:18 - *If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

How will you continue to pursue peace with your ex-spouse considering your new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

4. How will you guard yourselves and your new marriage from allowing an unpeaceful ex-spouse to undermine your new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Have you accepted God's forgiveness of you for the sin of ending of your first marriage regardless of the response of your ex-spouse?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

2 Corinthians 7:10 - *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death.*

Heavenly Father forgive us for our sins. Give us grief that produces repentance and leads to salvation. Please take away from us worldly grief that produces death. Please do now

allow worldly grief to undermine the marriage covenant we are preparing to enter and bring about the death of another marriage. Amen.

SESSION 6 – COURT ORDERS

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Romans 13:1-7 - *Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. 2 So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. 4 For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. 5 Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. 6 And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. 7 Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.*

Teaching

Not every divorce goes to court. Many are decided in mediation with both spouses having their own lawyers. Even though divorces don't need to go to court divorce settlements such as division of assets, child support, child custody, and alimony are legally binding. Paul makes it clear in Romans 13 that Christians are to obey the laws. He goes so far as to say that opposing our governing authorities goes so far as to find ourselves opposing God Himself. As heartbreaking and devastating as divorce as can be you are still required to abide by the provisions set forth in a divorce settlement. Getting remarried does not change the provisions agreed to in a divorce settlement.

Questions

1. What was the division of assets in your divorce?

Wife –

Husband –

2. What are the financial repercussions from your divorce such as shared retirement, garnished wages, car payments, shared consumer debt, tax liabilities, etc.?

Wife –

Husband –

3. If one of you, or both of you, have children from your previous marriage what are the shared custody arrangements (weekly, monthly, yearly)?

Wife –

Husband –

4. What procedures did you go through determining custody arrangements (Guardian ad litem, CPS, etc.)? Might these continue in your marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Have you ever had to go back to court, or go to court? If so, why did you go back to court and what was the outcome?

Wife –

Husband –

6. The couples interviewed for this project all live in Tennessee. One couple noted that if you and your ex-spouse agree on things you can do what you want to do. However, if you disagree on things the default is always the parenting plan agreed to in the divorce proceedings. Has your experience been sticking to the parenting plan, or have there been times when you and your ex-spouse have been able to agree to terms different than the parenting plan?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

1. Court costs – what court costs have you incurred due to divorce and joint custody, what costs do you foresee in the future?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Following up on question 1 do your court costs exceed your income or make living financially stressful?

Wife –

Husband –

3. How willing will you be to help pay your spouse's court costs if it means not being able to live in the lifestyle you have become accustomed to?

Wife –

Husband –

4. What does 1 Corinthians 6:7 mean to you in view of your specific situation?

1 Corinthians 6:7: *The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*

Wife –

Husband –

5. Considering the meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:7, and the larger context of 6:1-11, while also taking into account the safety and wellbeing of your children, do you foresee the need to go to back to court in the near or distant future?

Wife –

Husband –

Exercise

Make a weekly calendar. With 24 hours listed for each day make two columns and fill in your daily schedules. Include times you go to work, church, child pick up and drop off, and so forth. At this point include any overlap in these schedules, i.e. times where you are both at work but one of you needs to pick up the kids.

6. Are there any times during the week when you will be/are unable to fulfill your obligations?

Wife –

Husband –

7. Before you get married what adjustments can you/do you need to make to your weekly schedules?

Wife –

Husband –

8. What support system do you have to rely on beyond yourselves (extended family, trusted friends, church family, etc.)?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessings of government and a new marriage. Help us to navigate the waters of court orders and co-parenting. Help us to be Your obedient disciples by being obedient to governing authorities. Help us to be faithful to You as husband and wife. Help us to be faithful parents and stepparents doing what is necessary to provide a safe, nurturing, godly environment for our children. Amen.

SESSION 7 – PHYSICAL INTIMACY

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Genesis 2:24: *This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.*

1 Corinthians 7:1-4: *Now in response to the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to use a woman for sex.” 2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. 3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does.*

Teaching

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God given to men and women, husbands and wives. Genesis 2:24 refers to more than sexual intimacy, it speaks to the combing of two lives in every way, and this certainly includes sexual intimacy. Physical intimacy is enjoyed between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage. When there is remarriage this intimacy has been previously shared and enjoyed. However, people cannot assume that intimacy shared in a first marriage will directly correlate to a second marriage. The one flesh union in the first marriage has been severed by divorce. This includes severing the physical, financial, and the life-partnership union of the marriage. However, as one couple noted during the interviews for this curriculum the memories of physical intimacy remain. These memories, while they cannot be deleted from the mind, must not be willingly recalled or brought into the new marriage.

Questions

1. What personal boundaries do you have when it comes to physical intimacy?

Wife –

Husband –

2. What personal boundaries do you not have when it comes to physical intimacy?

Wife –

Husband –

3. What boundaries did your first spouse have in your first marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

4. What boundaries did your first spouse not have in your first marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Looking at the answers from questions 1 through 4 what differences can you foresee when it comes to physical intimacy in your new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

6. What struggles do you foresee in your new marriage if you expect the pleasures from the first marriage to carry over to the new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

Again. . . .

1 Corinthians 7:1-4: *Now in response to the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to use a woman for sex.” 2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. 3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does.*

(For the sake of purity, you may want to answer these homework questions separately and then answer the “Together” part of the answer with your counselor during the homework review at the next counseling session.)

1. Answer this question in your own words. What does Paul mean when he writes that “*A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband*”?

Wife –

Husband –

Together –

2. Answer this question in your own words. What does Paul mean when he writes that “*A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does*”?

Wife –

Husband –

Together –

Teaching

Physical intimacy as defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 is not about pleasing yourself but about pleasing your spouse. There are 3 principles that I find helpful for all marriages. First, seek to please your spouse not yourself. When you seek to please your spouse and not yourself you will not take advantage of your spouse and use them for your own personal gratification. Second, respect your spouse. There may be sexual practices that you believe are biblically permissible, but your spouse may find them uncomfortable or demeaning. Do not push your spouse to do things he or she is not comfortable doing. If you are practicing the first principle, to please your spouse and not yourself, then respecting your spouse should naturally follow. Third, and finally, there are sexual practices that even if both of you want to engage in them, they are inherently ungodly.¹² Your bodies belong to God being temples for the Holy Spirit. I personally base these principles on **1 Corinthians 7:1-4** and the following passage.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20: *Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. 19 Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.*

¹² As uncomfortable as it may be, if you are uncertain you may want to talk about sexual practices prevalent in our culture that are inherently unbiblical with your counselor.

3. Have you engaged in or enjoyed any sexual practices that, considering **1 Corinthians 6:18-20**, you don't think should be part of your new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

4. What will you do if one of you wants to engage in an activity the other believes to be ungodly?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father remind us that our bodies are not our own. Teach us that our bodies belong to You and that they are temples for the Holy Spirit. Give us joy and help us to please one another in the sexual intimacy we will experience in our marriage. We pray that the sexual union of husband and wife would bind us together. We ask that in all we do we would bring glory to You, including what we do in the privacy of our own home and marriage. Amen.

SESSION 8 – DISCIPLINE STEPCHILDREN AND A BLENDED FAMILY – PART 1

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Proverbs 22:6: *Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.*

Colossians 3:20-21: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged.*

Teaching

Discipline can be both a positive and negative. It is positive when we teach children to be disciplined in their studies, prayer, sports, faith, and so on. Discipline is negative when we need to correct sinful behavior. **Proverbs 22:6** makes it clear that children must be trained. Goodness and godliness do not come naturally to human beings. Discipline can be particularly challenging in a blended family. Chances are, if you have children, you will begin your new marriage with exasperated and discouraged children. Do not let this discourage you. While the beginning of your new marriage may be rough when it comes to the children a stable marriage that pictures Christ and the Church to your children will be invaluable to them as they continue to grow and learn. With that said, you and your new spouse will need to be a united front when it comes to raising and disciplining your shared children.

Questions

1. In what ways have your children acted out?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Husbands and wives who participated in making this curriculum have almost unanimously said they made the conscious decision that their children would not end the relationship/marriage. Have your children been supportive or disruptive of your relationship and impending marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

3. If your children have been disruptive of the new relationship what are their ages and how have they been disruptive?

Wife –

Husband –

4. At this point, engaged to be married, it is assumed that you have spoken with your children about putting two families together. What resistance or support have you experienced with your kids?

a. Children often resist the new relationship because they hold on to hope that their parents will get back together. A new marriage brings an end, or serious obstacle, to this hope. Have your children tried to break up your relationship?

b. How will you minister to children who are already angry as husband and wife/parent and stepparent?

5. If exes are remarried how did the new marriage change the nature or your co-parenting relationship?

Wife –

Husband –

6. How would you apply this **Proverb 13:24**: *The one who will not use the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him disciplines him diligently*, in your soon to be blended family?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

1. Have you met each other's children and have your children met?

Together –

2. What activities, if any, do you all do together?

Together –

3. Has church been a priority for you as you get ready to put two families together?

Together –

4. If you have weathered hostility from your children in the dating phase of your relationship you can probably expect to weather even more hostility at the beginning of your marriage. How will you set an example of godliness for your children at the outset of your marriage?

Together –

5. Have either of your ex-spouses tried to use the children against you? Have you found an ex-spouse has tried to manipulate and control the children?

Wife –

Husband –

6. How will you respond if your ex-spouse tries to turn your children against you and your new spouse?

Wife –

Husband –

7. Couples in successful second marriages who participated in this curriculum had experiences in dealing with ex-spouses and children which ranged from bad to indifferent. How will you discipline your children in a loving, firm way when you know they are being negatively influenced by the other parent?

Wife –

Husband –

8. One characteristic of multiple couples who participated in this curriculum intentionally decided to never speak badly about the other parent in front of the children. Have you made this decision, can you make this decision, how would you apply it?

Wife –

Husband –

Ephesians 4:31-32 - *Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.*

As mentioned above one of the commitments that many people in successful second marriages make is not speaking badly about their exes in front of shared children. This does not mean that ex-spouses do not continue to sin against you and/or your children. Ephesians 4:31-32 makes it clear that slander and gossip are not to be part of a Christian's speech.

9. One couple wrote down a very intentional “discipline continuum” so that the husband/stepfather (first marriage for him 2nd for his wife with 3 kids) could grow into the role of disciplinarian. Write out what you believe would be an appropriate timeline to grow into the role of disciplinarian with your stepchildren (the older the children the likely the longer the timeline will be).

Together –

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father we lift our children up to you. We pray that in all we do and say our children would not be hindered from coming to Your Son in prayer and faith. Jesus you said, “Let the little children come to me, and don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Father we thank You for the stewardship of these Your children. We pray that You would always remind us in times of conflict that we raise them for You, and we entrust them to You and not to ourselves. Watch over us, our children, and our co-parents as we begin life together as a blended family. Amen.

SESSION 9 – THERE WILL BE WEATHER! STEPCHILDREN AND A BLENDED FAMILY – PART 2

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Ephesians 6:1-4 - *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, 3 so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. 4 Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Paul Tripp: Let's start with the inner circle, the Circle of Responsibility. This circle represents a particular person's biblical job description. These are the things that God, in his Word, calls this person to do in his present situation and relationships.¹³

The outer circle, the Circle of Concern, represents those things that are important to a person (the love of a spouse, a child's salvation), yet beyond his ability to bring about. Therefore, they are not his responsibility. Here we are calling a person to recognize his limits and to remember God, who is faithful to his promises (Ps. 145:13) and sovereign over all things (Acts 17:24-28). The response of faith in this case is to entrust these matters to God in prayer.¹⁴

Teaching

You can do everything right. You can have the right approach when it comes to discipline. You can make sure to never speak badly in front of your children about the other parent. You can make the rules and expectations for behavior clear. You can write them on poster boards and display them around the house. But there will be weather. There will be bright warm days when the sun is shining, and there will be stormy days when you are tossed to and fro and there is nothing you can do about it. When it comes to children and blended families there will be days when you will just need to settle in, weather the storm, and pray.

Questions

1. What is a normal transition time like when your children come home from their other biological parent's care?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Do you experience worry or anxiety when your children are in the care of your ex-spouse and/or their new spouse if they are remarried?

Wife –

Husband –

3. One couple interviewed for this curriculum found the use of cellphones particularly valuable. When their children were gone, they could be in contact and track their locations. Do your children have cellphones? Do you think the use of technology could be a good way to reduce the levels of stress and anxiety in your new marriage?

Wife –

¹³ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 252.

¹⁴ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 252.

Husband –

4. How receptive have your extended families been to your coming marriage and the reality of step-grandchildren, step-nieces and nephews, etc.?

Wife –

Husband –

For the Soon to Be Stepparent who does not have his/her own children.

1. How old are the children who are about to be part of your family?

Answer –

2. Do you have any younger siblings with an age difference large enough you were given authority roles growing up? If so, what were they?

Answer –

3. Do you have your own personal views of how to raise children? What are those views, and have you discussed them with your soon-to-be spouse?

Answer –

4. What role does your soon to be spouse, the biological parent, want you to play in the discipline of his/her children?

Together –

Homework

1. Christians who have successful second marriages have found different avenues to navigating discipline in their homes. If you are both bringing children into the new marriage, to the best of your ability, write down the standards of discipline and conduct you have for your children.

Wife –

Husband –

2. Take the two approaches you have written down for child discipline and compare the similarities and differences.

Similarities –

Differences –

3. Next decide what would work best for you.

- a. You can maintain two different standards in your home with each parent parenting only their biological children.¹⁵
- b. You can find common ground and come up with a set of household rules, not his and hers but household rules, and have a uniform standard for all children that will be part of the blended family.

Wife – same/different –

Husband – same/different –

4. Using Paul Tripp's circles of concern and responsibility look at a typical week for your children, Sunday through Saturday. Considering shared custody and court orders daily what are your areas of responsibility and what are your areas of concern?

- a. How will you commit your areas of concern to prayer and your areas of responsibility to presenting a united front to the children?
- b. How will you handle the fact that you cannot control what happens in the co-parent's house when your kids are away?

5. What can you do to guard your hearts when there is bad weather? And there will be bad weather when raising children in a stepfamily! How will you guard your hearts and your marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

Advice

Couples interviewed for this curriculum gave some advice when it comes to raising children in a blended family to consider. One couple recommended daddy/daughter date nights. Special focused attention on children who become part of stepfamilies can help ease the transition. Also, do your best to love biological children and stepchildren the same. The children may not accept what is going on, but you can accept them as your own. Another part of weathering the storm is to keep your marriage strong. Several couples said that they took advantage of weekends and evenings when they did not have

¹⁵ The ages of the children will affect the plausibility of this approach. If there is a significant difference in the ages of the children, they may not be as affected by there being two different standards of conduct in the home. However, if they are of similar age this may add confusion and frustration to the lives of the children as they navigate two standards of conduct in your home, plus a possible third standard of conduct in the home of their other biological parent.

any children. They went on dates, spent quality time together, prayed together, and just enjoyed being husband and wife. The stronger your marriage the more you can weather!

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father please give us wisdom, discernment, mercy, patience, and grace as we put these two families together. Help us to teach our shared children to respect our marriage and to respect one another. Help us to be gracious and merciful and patient with them, knowing that none of what they have gone through has been by their own choice. Help us to navigate the balance between authority and compassion, and please help us to honor You in everything we do and say with our children. Amen.

SESSION 10 – EX-SPOUSES

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 - *To the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife. 12 But I (not the Lord) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.*

Teaching

No one walks down the aisle of their wedding expecting the person to whom they make their vows to one day be an enemy. Unfortunately, after divorce this is often what happens. Of the thirty-four people (seventeen couples) interviewed for this premarital counseling curriculum only one couple said they had a positive relationship co-parenting with the ex-spouse. The rest of the responses ranged from extremely negative relationships to neutral at best. For those who did not have shared children with an ex-spouse once the dust had settled from the divorce proceedings typically there was no contact. For those who did have shared children co-parenting with the ex-spouse can bring a whole new level of stress and anxiety to a second marriage.

Questions

1. Do you have shared children with your ex-spouse? (If no skip to question 3.)

Wife –

Husband –

2. Describe your experience of co-parenting and shared custody with your ex-spouse?

Wife –

Husband –

3. What has been your primary emotional response to the end of your first marriage and towards your ex-spouse (anger, anxiety, grief, stress, etc.)?

Wife –

Husband –

4. How have these emotions continued in any ongoing relationship with your ex-spouse?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

Matthew 5:43-48 - *You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Robert Jones: Ideally, three characteristics should mark our ministry plan: (1) it must be practical, one that includes specific, concrete, doable steps. (2) It must be a long-term, ongoing plan – not a quick-fix, flash-in-the-pan effort but a lifestyle of persevering love. (Since we have no basis for assuming the person will change, be prepared for a long-term ministry.) (3) And it must reflect the teaching and example of Jesus and his apostles.¹⁶

Teaching

As already discussed during the counseling portion of this lesson people who make their wedding vows to one another are not planning on their wedding day to go through the heartbreak and ugliness of divorce. A bride and groom are not planning on thinking of one another as enemies and fighting in court about the division of assets and children. Unfortunately, this is sometimes the case. If you have come to regard your ex-spouse as an enemy and you especially if you have shared children how will you relate to your ex-spouse in the context of your new marriage?

¹⁶ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 187.

1. What are 3 specific ways in which you can pray for your ex-spouse as you would pray for an enemy? (When Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies, He wants us to pray for their good, not for their demise. We know this because Jesus says God sends His rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.)

Wife –

Husband –

2. Per the Robert Jones quote above what concrete ways can you do good to your ex-spouse(s)?

Wife –

Husband –

3. After you get married how do you see the long-term relationship(s) with your ex-spouse(s) being affected and in what ways will you need to persevere?

Wife –

Husband –

4. What are the legitimate sins that your ex-spouse has committed against you after the divorce in which you will endure and follow the teachings of Jesus as Jones states in point 3?

Wife –

Husband –

5. How have you responded to these sins?

Wife –

Husband –

6. Second marriages often make the relationship with your ex-spouse worse rather than better. Should (and likely they will) the sins committed by your ex-spouse continue after you are married how do you plan to respond to those sins as husband and wife?

Wife –

Husband –

7. How will you protect your children from these sins so that they will obey their other biological parent?

Wife –

Husband –

Closing Prayer – Heavenly Father, give us the discernment to see our sins and responsibilities. Give us hearts to pursue peace with everyone who will be involved with our family. When we are returned evil for good turn our hearts towards you and give us your peace. Amen.

SESSION 11 – FINANCES

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Genesis 2:22-25 *Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:*

This one, at last, is bone of my bone

and flesh of my flesh;

this one will be called “woman,”

for she was taken from man.

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

Teaching

Genesis 2:24 is an important passage for understanding marriage. The passage teaches that the marriage covenant relationship supersedes the relationship of parent and child. There is also more than just the physical union of husband and wife being alluded to when the text says, “and they become one flesh.” Marriage is putting two lives together in every aspect possible physically, emotionally, practically, and financially, to name a few.

In a second marriage there can be additional financial pressures that are not present in a first marriage. In order to prepare for these pressures please answer the following questions.

Questions

1. Ideally a husband and wife would put all finances together “becoming one flesh.” Several couples in successful second marriages have done so. However, there can be extenuating circumstances. In the beginning keeping finances separate can prevent an ex-spouse from taking you to court to get money that rightfully belongs to your new spouse.

a. Can you think of any extenuating circumstances regarding your new marriage where it would be beneficial to keep your finances separate at the beginning of your marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

2. Do you still have any assets which both you and your ex-spouse are responsible such as a mortgage, car payment, lease, etc.?

Wife –

Husband –

3. Do either of you have any court ordered financial responsibilities as a result of divorce?

Child support, alimony, additional (shared car payments, continuing mortgage, retirement, etc.)

Wife –

Husband –

4. In cases of child support or alimony do you. . . .

a. receive child support or alimony?

Wife –

Husband –

b. pay child support or alimony?

Wife –

Husband –

5. Did either of your ex-spouses do anything unethical such as draining bank accounts, defaulting on payments, etc.?

Wife –

Husband –

Homework

1. Taking the answers to the questions above regarding child support, alimony, and any additional financial obligations from your first marriage sit down and write out a timeline of these obligations.

- a. I.e., When will child support end? How many months/years from now? Will alimony payments come to an end? When?

Together –

2. Being required to pay child support or alimony can certainly add stress to a new marriage. Should you be receiving payment for child support or alimony?

- a. If yes, who receives payment and how much is it per month?

Together –

- b. Is your ex-spouse current on their payments? A little behind? They cannot be found and have made no payments for an extended period of time?

Together –

3. How much debt are each of you bringing into the new marriage?

Wife –

Husband –

- a. It is possible that you will pay for an ex-spouse's lifestyle from the first marriage, will you allow that stress to negatively impact the new marriage?

4. If one or both of you are bringing children into the new marriage have you planned for financial costs beyond court ordered child support?

- a. How will vehicles and auto insurance be paid for when children turn 16?

- b. Who is responsible for medical bills and medical decisions for shared children?

- c. Has paying for/going to college been discussed for shared children?

- d. Questions a, b, and c are all financial questions that involve an ex-spouse/co-parent. Are you able to discuss these matters with your co-parents?

5. Follow up to question 4, should something happen to one of you what would happen to that spouse's biological children? (This question is being asked because sometimes the co-parent is negligent, abusive, or completely absent. However, if a biological parent were to pass away legally the children would be placed with the remaining biological parent.

6. When you are legally married what lawyer will you use to do your estate planning?

Together –

7. Will you be purchasing a house together, selling houses, moving into a house one of you already owns?

Together –

Exercise

1 Timothy 6:3-10: *If anyone teaches false doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. 8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

1. Sit down and write out a family budget for the first year of marriage. Include your incomes, and any expected support such as child support or alimony. Also, include what you will do if the expected child support or alimony is not received.

a. Can you project a budget for your second year of marriage?

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, we know that we are not to love money. We know that You teach us we cannot serve both God and wealth. We also know that money will be necessary to live and take care of our family. We know that the added financial stresses will add stress to our marriage. Please watch over us and protect us. Do not let us put our faith in money and finances. We ask that you give us hearts only for You. Help us to view and use our money to bring glory to You. Amen.

SESSION 12 – SPECIFIC ADVICE FROM THOSE
WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Titus 2:1-8 - *But you are to proclaim things consistent with sound teaching. 2 Older men are to be self-controlled, worthy of respect, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance. 3 In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior; not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God's word will not be slandered.*

6 In the same way, encourage the young men to be self-controlled 7 in everything. Make yourself an example of good works with integrity and dignity in your teaching. 8 Your message is to be sound beyond reproach, so that any opponent will be ashamed, because he doesn't have anything bad to say about us.

Philippians 3:17 - *Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us.*

Proverbs 1:5 - *let a wise person listen and increase learning, and let a discerning person obtain guidance—*

Teaching

The Bible is full of passages in which believers are told to learn from one another. Often, we are told to learn from those who are older and more mature in the faith than we are ourselves. During the research for this curriculum the last question to all couples was “What three pieces of advice would you want to give to couples getting remarried and beginning blended families?” The following is a list of the most shared responses.

1. Communicate About Everything, and again COMMUNICATE ABOUT EVERYTHING!

Matthew 12:36-37: *I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

Secular culture in the United States encourages saying whatever you think or feel in the moment, often not taking the other person's well-being to heart. Intentionally communicating about everything in a second marriage is critical. How will you communicate about everything in a godly way according to what Jesus teaches in Matthew 12:36-37?

Together –

2. Get Premarital Counseling. Done!

What issues have been covered in your premarital counseling that you had not thoroughly considered before going through the curriculum?

Together –

3. Pray a Lot!

Do you set apart time for focused prayer everyday as individuals? If you do not set aside time every day for focused prayer as an individual do you think you will do so when you are married? When would be the best time of day to pray given your schedules, energy levels, and focus during the day? What are the issues beyond your control that you will most need to commit to God in prayer?

Together –

4. Make Sure Church and the Christian Faith is Part of Your Marriage!

Have you been going through this curriculum with a pastor at the church you attend together? If not, do you attend church together? Sunday school? Bible Study/Small groups, etc.

Together –

5. Talk about all the hard issues, kids/step kids, finances, sex, ex-spouses, etc.

Are there any hard issues left in your lives that have not been addressed in this curriculum? If so, what are they? How will you address/overcome them?

Together –

6. Find trusted Christian mentors who will be willing to walk through the messiness with you and hold you accountable.

What people do you have in your lives you consider mentors? If you cannot think of anyone currently who in your church/families/friends do you think you could ask to walk with you in this new marriage?

Together –

7. Have realistic expectations and be patient, there is NO happily ever after.

What are your expectations for this marriage? Do you think they are realistic? If your personal expectations are not met do you think that means your marriage will be a failure or a mistake.

Together –

8. As often as possible, eat dinner together.

When you are married what evenings of the week will you all be together? How will you make mealtime an essential part of family life, cooking together, devotionals, prayer, cleaning up together, etc.?

Together –

9. Have a plan for child discipline in place before getting married.

Have you written down your approach to raising children? Have you shared the future rules of your household with all involved, children, co-parents, grandparents, etc.?

Together –

10. Discuss wills and plans for child custody should something happen to the biological parent.

Thinking about, and planning for, death is something that no couple enjoys doing. In cases of stepfamilies it may be even more difficult to discuss. Have you looked at your wills and estates plans? Are you okay with what would happen to children and assets as currently stated? If not, what can you change?

Together –

Homework

1. Talk through each item in the list above. How do your expectations of getting remarried match up with the advice given from couples who are in successful remarriages?

Together –

2. Many of these things have been addressed throughout the course of this premarital counseling curriculum. However, if there is anything that hasn't been brought up, if there are any doubts that are still lingering or concerns that you have the homework this week is to communicate with one another about them and pray. The next day discuss them again and pray again. Repeat this process every day for the entire week before returning for the final counseling session.

Together –

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, we know that we cannot anticipate every difficulty we will encounter in our upcoming marriage, but we know that You can and do. Please give us the love and commitment we need to be Your disciples in our new marriage. Help us not be overwhelmed by the stresses and difficulties we cannot foresee. Instead, help us to see

each struggle as an opportunity to grow in mercy and grace and become more and more like You, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

SESSION 13 – FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE APPLIED SUBMISSION AND HEADSHIP

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Ephesians 5:22-33: *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.*

Teaching

Now that you have gone through 12 sessions detailing the lives and families you are putting together by getting remarried it is time to fit those details under the theological umbrellas of headship and submission, Christ and the Church. In other words, it is time to take the answers to questions from session 1, sit down and think through how you will live out the picture of Christ and the Church in the context of your remarriage and/or blended family.

Questions

1. Soon to be wife, how will you live out the biblical principle of submitting to your husband in the context of. . . .
 - a. Church life (Session 2)?
 - b. Knowing One Another (3)?
 - c. Trusting one another (4)?
 - d. Repentance (5)?
 - e. Court Orders (6)?
 - f. Physical Intimacy (7)?
 - g. Children and Discipline (8)?

- h. Weathering the Storms (9)?
 - i. Ex-spouses (10)?
 - j. Finances (11)?
2. Soon to be husband, how will you live out the biblical principle of being the head of your wife and family in the context of. . . .
- a. Church life (Session 2)?
 - b. Knowing One Another (3)?
 - c. Trusting one another (4)?
 - d. Repentance (5)?
 - e. Court Orders (6)?
 - f. Physical Intimacy (7)?
 - g. Children and Discipline (8)?
 - h. Weathering the Storms (9)?
 - i. Ex-spouses (10)?
 - j. Finances (11)?

Homework Exercises

Take the answers from the counseling session you just finished. Look at the following scenarios and discuss how you would respond to the following situations. They may not all apply to your marriage so you can select the ones that are applicable. However, even if they are not all applicable you may answer them all to practice biblical discernment in possible real-life situations.

1. Wife your ex-husband is refusing to pay child support. You know where he lives, and you know the amount of money he is behind. You have both communicated with him about this when dropping off and picking up children. His lack of child support has started to cause a financial strain and you are not sure if you will be able to pay the mortgage this month.

How will you respond together as submitting wife and head of the household husband?

2. You have planned a weekend away. You have been married for six months and want to celebrate. Plane tickets have been booked and a hotel room has been reserved. You then get a notice that your credit card has been rejected. As it turns out husband your ex-wife still had access to the credit card and has maxed it out.

How will you both respond?

3. Your ex-spouses have been gossiping about you and slandering you in your church and community. False accusations of abuse have been leveled at you husband. Husband you know in your heart that you never once abused, or even entertained thoughts about abusing your ex-wife. Wife you have never once doubted the character of your new husband, but now upon hearing the rumors, worry begins to creep in.

How do you respond to this together?

4. You have been through another hard transition weekend. Your teenage son came back from his dad's house angry and depressed. He does not have a curfew at his dad's house and essentially no rules to follow or chores to do. He says he hates it at your house and does not want to live in a house with a man who is not his "real dad." In the divorce you were given primary custody and you know how destructive the environment at his dad's house is for his physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

How will you handle this situation together?

5. Husband you were not awarded primary custody of your two children. Your ex-wife, who has abandoned the church altogether since the divorce, is now living with a man you suspect of abusing your daughter. You are both concerned about what your daughter is going through and what your son is witnessing. You can call the authorities, go to court to sue for sole custody, or take other legal action. You know you need to protect your children from what is happening and minimize their exposure to court proceedings to protect them as well.

How will you take action to solve this problem?

6. You have been married for two years and somewhat to your surprise being remarried has been relatively smooth. Then one day wife when on your lunch break you see a man who looks like your husband get out of a car with another woman and walk into a restaurant. Immediately the emotions of grief, anger, jealousy, and depression overwhelm you just like they did when your first husband confessed to his affair. It turns out the man was not your husband; in fact, your husband never left the office that day for lunch. Yet, when you both get home in the evening you are still shaking with overwhelming emotion.

How will you respond to this together?

You can also reverse the roles, (the husband sees someone he thinks is his wife).

Closing Prayer

Dear God in heaven, thank You for giving us another chance at experiencing the blessings of marriage. Watch over us and our family. Be with us every step of every day. Give us patience, mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness, godliness, holiness, and justice. Help us to develop these characteristics in our marriage, as we parent, as we have continued contact with our ex-spouses, former in-laws, new in-laws, and our church family. Heavenly Father we commit ourselves and this upcoming marriage to You and You alone. Amen.

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ABSTRACT

COUNSELING DIVORCED MEMBERS FOR SECOND MARRIAGES AT DONELSON CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH DONELSON, TENNESSEE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert D. Jones

The purpose of this project was to write a premarital counseling curriculum for Christians preparing to get remarried. In order to write an effective curriculum, seventeen Christian couples in second marriages were interviewed. Their life experiences and how they overcame the additional stresses and struggles of remarriage were paired with pertinent Bible passages and homework assignments to develop the curriculum.

The couples interviewed included those who were not guilty of breaking their marriage vows, as well as those who had broken their vows but demonstrated repentant hearts through their words and actions. Five couples were included from Donelson Cumberland Presbyterian Church and other couples were asked to participate with the guidance of pastors who served on the pastoral panel for the project. The pastoral panel evaluated both the questions asked in the interviews as well as the premarital counseling curriculum itself.

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