

Towards a Strategy of Developing a Marriage Mentoring Ministry at
Northwest Church, Hispanic Ministry

By

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Abstract

The objective of this qualitative study is to develop a ministry intervention proposal, intended to help marriages in the Hispanic Ministry at Northwest Church in Federal Way, WA. Most marriages at one time or another need a vision and perspective that is beyond the scope of the normal experience of marriage. Staying committed in marriage does not have to be an unattainable goal.

To understand the value of mentoring relationships and the role they play in strengthening marriages, a qualitative study was conducted through interviews and surveys. This study was useful in assessing to what extent a ministry of marriage mentoring in the Hispanic Ministry of the Northwest Church can help couples develop stronger marriages.

Thoughtful consideration was given Paul's mentoring model in 2 Timothy 2:2 and its applying to marriages. Based on the research finding, and the interpretation of the data collected, practical recommendation for developing a mentoring ministry at Northwest Church, Hispanic Ministry are offered. The Hispanic Ministry can take a step forward in connecting married couples with mentors.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

1.1 Background

Throughout history, mentoring has been the means of transferring knowledge and skills to a less experienced person (Parrot & Parrot 2006:28). Studies like the one conducted by Vellore (2015) have produced significant findings identifying mentoring as a key tool for knowledge transfer which can trigger innovation and increase performer expertise. Behav (2008) points out that some studies on mentoring seem oriented to the secular world to determine the impact associated with the mentor and protégé relationship in three streams: youth, academic and workplace. Behav argues that results of these studies indicate that mentoring is closely associated with an ample range of relational, motivational and positive career outcomes.

A vision to strengthen marital relationships requires an investment to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of making a healthy marriage. Further, healthy marriages require that spouses make investing in their marriage the highest priority in life, after Christ. Scazzero and Bird (2010:210) comment that the problems is that “we forget the biblical principle: as goes the leader’s marriage so goes the church”. To lead a healthy church, simply lead healthy marriages, as Scazzero and Bird put it “if you are married, your vocation is your spouse first, and then any children God has given you”.

To help us understand marriage relationships and the struggles they go through, Gottman (2014:83) explains that “couples, anywhere, struggle to remain committed to the marriage covenant and therefore are prone to

succumb to forces that fight against marital stability and ultimately the family structure”. Gottman and Silver (2015:6) have advanced the study of relationships, and in their view, “one of the saddest reason a marriage dies is that neither couple recognizes its value until it is too late, and until the divorce paper have been signed”.

1.2 The statement to the problem

1.2.1 Main Problem: How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages?

1.2.2 Summary of the problem

The following **key research questions** summarize the main research problem:

- How can Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry empower couples to build Christ-centered marriages?
- What elements of marriage mentoring would serve the needs of the Hispanic Ministry? group mentoring? formal mentoring? informal mentoring? one on one mentoring? blended?
- What are the biblical principles for the ministry of marriage mentoring and how to apply them to the Hispanic Ministry?
- What biblical strategy should the church be using to mentor its couples and those considering marriage?

1.2.3 Central theoretical argument

A pastoral investigation into the biblical aspect of marriage mentoring can contribute towards renewed insights into developing a strategy for a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church, Hispanic Ministry.

1.2.4 The problem observed

Christian couples in the Hispanic Ministry and even those who are preparing for marriage often find themselves struggling, believing a solution to their problems is impossible. Keller and Keller (2014:79) argues that “we come to marriage with a host of personal experiences which inevitably contribute to conflicts in the marital relationship”. As an example: immaturity, unrealistic expectation, anger, selfishness, lack of forgiveness, patterns of communication, disappointment, separation, not to mention divorce and its negative impact. These are issues that impact any marriage, Christian and non-Cristian. Keller and Keller note that, the danger is stay anchored in what hurts marriages: staying still, while pretending that all is fine. Keller and Keller further add that, regardless what is wounding a marriage relationship, Jesus has placed in the hands of couples the capacity of forgiveness and reconciliation, and move pass the difficulties and embrace each other.

Gottman (2014:83) addresses the importance of saving marriages, when he states: “The chance of a first marriage ending in divorce, over a 40-year period, is 67 percent. Half of all divorces will occur in the first seven years. The divorce rate for second marriages is as much as 10 percent higher than for first-timers”.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:19) challenge the church to consider the facts, “1.2 million marriages would be saved from divorce each year, if only ten marriage mentor couples, were recruited and trained by each of the 400,000 or more churches operating in America”. Parrott and Parrott argue that regardless the size, every congregation in the U.S. has the potential to develop among its member mentorship programs, to alleviate in some measure the issues many couples struggle with.

1.3 Rationale

First, it should not be assumed that marriage mentoring only takes place if there is an official program outlined in the local church. Marriage mentoring is much more than a simple program of placing a Christian couple in the care of another more mature Christian couple. Second, this study responded to the need to develop a Bible-based marriage mentoring ministry suited for the Hispanic Ministry. Third, given the enormous weight that rest on issues related to marriage relationships, is up to the Hispanic Ministry to decide what actions to take against the issues affecting marriages. Fourth, keep in mind that marriages have never been conflict free in the church.

As soon as Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they experienced alienation from each other, which tells that marriage problems have been constant since the fall, (Gen 3:12-13). Finally, marriage should be viewed as God's gift, and must be preserved and nurtured. Genesis 2:21-22, teaches that just as God prepared Adam to receive his gift, Eve; God also prepared Eve to received Adam as her gift. The church ought to pursue biblical based strategies to teach future generations to nourish and support each other in healthy marriage relationships.

Madden (2015) points out that "the number of catholic marriages in the U.S. is at its lowest point, while cohabitation is on the rise". Churches, appear not doing enough in terms of saving marriage ministries. Pattison (2015) observes that,

Despite a drop in the divorce rate, family instability continues to increase for the nation's children overall, mainly because

more than 40 percent of American children will now spend time in a cohabiting household.

The business world has encouraged the concept of mentoring in the workplace at significant levels. Companies ensure that employees take an active role in spreading knowledge and best practices through mentoring. As a result, organizations are becoming more interested in developing their human resources. Allen, Finkelstein, and Poteet (2009:6) argue that “mentoring relationships have been associated with a variety of widely publicized organizational as well individual benefits”.

Considering the vast array of benefits associated with mentoring, the local church ought to become engaged with marriages ministries more intentionally. However, it seems that mobilizing people in the pews, is a difficult task. An article by Focus on the Family, titled *Healthy Marriages–Healthy Church* sheds insight into the astounding responses from 20 pastors who were surveyed with the following simple question: *In your church, do you have a defined and intentional marriage ministry strategy?*

75 per cent indicated their church did not have a defined and intentional marriage ministry strategy; at best, it was hit and miss. 25 per cent said that their church did have such a strategy, but subjectively ranked the effectiveness of their church’s marriage ministry at a “C” level. Pastors clearly care deeply about marriage, but marriage ministry often gets overshadowed by other important ministries. (Healthy Marriages–Healthy Church: 2017)

This statement is a great concern, the point addressed is that churches aren’t doing enough, in terms of structured marriage ministries. As such, pastoral initiatives in support of marriages are easily relegated while other ministerial tasks take precedence. The Hispanic Ministry is a source of

several strong marriages that can be enabled to equip other couples. If the church embraces the “we can” mentality and think intentionally, that would be a first step.

1.3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study was, first, to examine the current situation regarding marriage ministries in the Hispanic Ministry. That is, to investigate what has worked, what has not, as well as, investigate efforts underway to enhance the marriage relationship. Second, explore the potential for developing a support network that would be tasked in equipping mature couples so they can assume the role of marriage mentors, to help less experienced couples find a solution to their spousal conflicts. The end goal was to formulate a marriage mentoring proposal along with practical solutions to such problems. That is, to move from the current situation to where God wants marriages to be in the Hispanic Ministry.

Studies reveal that struggling couples who do have a support network they can rely on, are more likely to stop placing blame on each other for their problems. Foster (2016:3) argues that,

Spouses are just as that aircraft, if not more so, he or she did not come with a manual or an instructor. There is no marriage simulator in which we practice either.

Furthermore, Foster argues that even though marriage is the most important decision people will ever make “we don’t educate ourselves before climbing into the cockpit for our maiden flight”.

1.4 Research methodology and design

1.4.1 Overview of the LIM research model

This study falls in the field of practical theology. As such, the Loyola Institute of Ministries (LIM) research model was adopted to examine how a marriage mentoring program in the Hispanic Ministry could translate into a vital ministry to strengthen marriages. Cowan (2000), as cited in (Smith 2008:206) identifies four sequential steps that must be followed concerning the LIM research model. These steps are:

- Identification of a real-life problem
- Study of the world as it is (current situation)
- Study the world it should be (preferred scenario)
- The Church's obligation (action plan)

According to Smith (2008:204) the LIM research model is credited to Michael Cowan, from the Institute for Ministry at Loyola University. Cowan (2000), as cited in (Smith 2008:206) addresses three essential goals that serve as guiding principles for a working model for practical theology research, these are:

- 1) Examine the world to understand a real-life problem
- 2) Examine the Word to see what God's ideal is
- 3) Develop an action plan to transform *what is* into *what should be*

1.4.2 Research Design

Step 1-- Identifies a real-life problem

This qualitative study, addressed marriage mentoring as a potential empowering tool for couples at the Hispanic Ministry and the importance to

create an environment for struggling marriages so they can receive healing and thrive.

Step 2-- Interpret the world as it is

Smith (2008:206) explains that this step “interprets the world as it is”. This study surveyed the current situation of marriages in the Hispanic Ministry. That is, areas that after observation were considered difficult for couples to navigate, or difficult to solve. Some of those areas, included: couple’s unrealistic expectation, loneliness, addiction, separation, divorce and its consequence on the family.

Step 3-- This step interprets the world as it should be

Cowan (2000), as cited in (Smith 2008:206) points out that this step consists in moving from the current to the preferred situation. A descriptive research to discover marriage mentoring opportunities was conducted. At this level, a viable solution that faithfully represents the will of God as interpreted by the faith tradition in the Hispanic Ministry was presented.

Step 4- Interpret our contemporary obligations

In the final step of the LIM model, recommendations for the development of a marriage mentoring ministry in the Hispanic Ministry were presented. Smith (2008:206) explains that, in this step a feasible action plan is developed. That is, a viable biblical solution to the problem and potential strategy implementation was presented as well. Cowan (2000), as cited in (Smith 2008:207) expresses that “Not every study can end with implementation; often the researcher must be content with offering recommendations”.

1.4.3 Research methodology

Chapter 1. Introduction

The first chapter presented the main problem: *“How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples*

in building skills to develop stronger marriages". Furthermore, this chapter addressed the key questions, the central theoretical argument, the research purpose, the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2. An overview of previous and current research on Christian marriage mentoring

This chapter examined literature from previous and current mentoring practices. The review was useful in the development of new arguments and insight, particularly with regards to marriage mentoring practices and its contribution to the well-being of couples.

Chapter 3. A case for connecting couples with mentors to build better marriages. (*world as it is*)

Following Cowan's (2000) LIM research model for practical theology outlined in Smith (2008:205-206), this chapter examined the picture of the *world as it is* in the context of the Hispanic Ministry and present realities.

Chapter 4. Biblical principles of marriage mentoring

This chapter examined Paul's biblical model for mentoring exemplified in 2 Timothy 2: 2 and how this model can be applied to help Christian marriages and equip them with tools to lead successful lives as husbands and wives. It draws on Paul' example of a sound and intentional mentor-mentee relationship with Timothy.

Chapter 5. Marriage Mentoring Strategy (*world as it should be*)

Evaluation of the historical and empirical data was conducted utilizing the information provided by participants via questionnaires and also interviews by those participants who could not respond in writing.

Chapter 6. Research conclusion

Considerations for further research were presented and ended the investigation suggesting practical recommendations to strengthen and support the marriages at the Hispanic Ministry. In conclusion, practical suggestions were offered to move from the present situation, *the world as it is* towards the preferred scenario *the world as it should be*. (Smith 2008:210)

1.4.4 Descriptive research

To assess whether a mentoring ministry was a viable ministry option a survey was conducted. This approach allowed to describe observations of existing conditions impacting marriages at the Hispanic Ministry. Smith (2008:223) raises a point about descriptive research when he mentions that, “many studies in practical theology involve fieldwork (empirical) research in which the researcher uses interviews, surveys, questionnaires and case studies, to gather original data about a church, community, organization, event, or something else”. Smith continues, “the descriptive research does what its name says, it describes”. Smith explains that, like all research “descriptive seeks to examine a problem”.

Research limitations and delimitations

Limitations: This study was carried out by asking the couples participating open-ended questions through a questionnaire and interviews. Next, observations and recommendations based on data collected from participants were presented.

Possible weaknesses of the study, that can't be possibly controlled

One of the limitations for the study was the time-consuming nature of the collection of data, and analysis of the information gathered from the participants, some couples declined to participate. Most of the data provided came from native Spanish-speaking participants, and their input needed to be accurately translated from the source language to English.

Delimitations.

The study was limited in scope to marriage mentoring, formal or informal, for couples in the Hispanic Ministry at Northwest Church. However, considering the findings, it is likely that other churches in the area, may be encouraged to consider marriage mentoring ministries, if they still do not have them.

Key activities

This research project involved a range of activities undertaken over the course of a year and a half. Some of these activities are described briefly in this section.

- Studied the local church demographics and history to discern the current situation and develop a picture of the current situation with respect to concerns affecting marriages
- Conducted structured and unstructured interviews to selected couples to discover what is happening, and why is happening. The objective was to obtain a reliable perspective from both formats
- Formulated a theological model for the prefer scenario, based on a biblical perspective. The objective was to move from the current situation to where God wants the Hispanic Ministry to be with regards marriage mentoring.
- Conducted an overview analysis of scriptural teaching related to mentoring, and specifically marriage mentoring.
- Examined Paul's mentoring model in 2 Timothy 2:2

1.4.5 Resources & tools

For this study, a qualitative research method was used to gain new perspectives on information and the meaning of events that would be

difficult to interpret through other models. Strauss (1990), as cited in (Hoepfl:1997) claims that,

Qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.

Considering Strauss argument, it appeared logical to assume that a qualitative model, rather than a quantitative one, would interpret more adequately the problem at hand. For this study, the focus of the investigation was established by the following question: How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages?

Data collection plan:

In this study, a questionnaire was developed as a measuring instrument to collect primary data in the empirical research process

- In addition to the questionnaire, interviews were conducted to those who could not respond in writing
- Determined how specific the research questions needed to be and how faithfully data needed to be captured
- Determined from whom data was to be collected and set a realistic timeframe
- Established data collection recording modes
- Analyzed and interpreted the data collected timely

Participants

Criteria for participant selection and recruitment

First, the pool of participants was selected based on their ability to understand the questions of the survey. Secondly, the selected participants could provide sufficient input to the problem being studied. Thirdly, a decision was made to select couples who were willing to participate and met above criteria. Participants were informed by electronic mail and in person about the study. Further, a cover letter was included which explained the purpose of the survey, return date, and confidentiality of the study

Estimated risk level of study

One risk of the study was that it would not lead to enough interest by the participants to become involved. Asking couples to address their challenges viewpoints, even their aspirations, through a questionnaire or interviews and making such information available was rather unsettling for some. Some chose not to participate. Another risk was misunderstanding of the purpose behind the study. As such, some questions that were helpful to the success of the research were not fully addressed at first try. Failing to this, the researcher needed to clarify to the participants the justification of the study and generate trust and consequently additional input.

Benefits for participants

A direct benefit was a sense of purpose, in contributing towards the advancement of marriage mentoring ministry. Becoming a representative voice of an effort focused on strengthening marriages was a fulfilling experience. The participants had a chance to express their opinion in a first-time opportunity to be heard. Gained a sense of value and empowerment by becoming a key player and contributor to a worthwhile study. In general terms, participating in the research was a rewarding and positive experience for the participants.

1.5 Conclusion

The research problem of this qualitative study addressed the following question, “How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages?”. To answer this question a qualitative study needed to be conducted. Despite the variety of research models available, the LIM model of research was chosen as the most suitable approach to answer the research question. The first phase of the project consisted in examining the current nature of the problem “*The world as it is*”. The second phase of the project also called “*The world as it should be*” consisted in moving from the current situation and focusing to where God wants marriages to be in the Hispanic Ministry, which is the desired scenario for marriages. The third phase of the project consisted in presenting recommendations for potential implementation for a mentoring ministry, that is, the Church’s responsibility. To keep track of the progress, a project charter was created. This project outline served to identify deadlines and to meet them in timely manner, throughout the program of study. Finally, the methodology explained the approaches and key activities that needed to be carried out during the data collection process and how to interpret the data collected.

Chapter 2

Overview of previous and current research on Christian marriage mentoring

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a literature review of current research on marriage mentoring practices. The review was vital to gain access to information and to critically evaluate these findings in relation to the mentoring practices and most importantly as it relates to marriage mentoring. The first part of the literature examines mentoring practices from a secular perspective. The second part reviews marriage mentoring practices and its contribution to the well-being of couples. The third part examines mentoring following Jesus' model, as an example of caring for others rather than for Himself.

2.2 Review of significant literature

Mentoring defined

Despite the many definitions for the term mentoring, it is not difficult to come across certain themes associated with it, for example: mentoring is an aspect of discipleship, mentoring is equipping people, teaching, developing, advising, and investing in another individual's development. Some argue that mentoring is empowering others to develop their skills, while maximizing their potential for goals accomplishments. Rainey (2015) from *The Art of Marriage*, defines mentoring as follows:

Mentoring is a learning relationship, generally focused on long term development. The primary purpose of mentoring is to drive a personal growth; build skills, knowledge and understanding. Mentors may use coaching skills, in their

conversations, but usually the mentor role is wider than that of a coach and may include opening doors, making connections and sharing experiences. Rainey (2015).

Buff (2016) defines mentoring as a process that involves the engagement of an experienced person known as *mentor* assisting and guiding another person, the *mentee*. This relationship may include among other benefits, the development of specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less experienced person's professional and personal growth. While everyone has a story to tell or something to share with another person, mentoring is more than sharing one's life journey. Buff argues that,

True mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing occasional help by a more experience and knowledgeable person. It is about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue and challenges relevant to a person's professional and personal development.

Based on Buff's (2016) view, what distinguishes mentoring is a continuous learning and personalized support on the road to success on behalf of a less qualified and less accomplished individual. When one evaluates mentoring, it is inevitable to think of a ministry reserved for the educated person who acts as an adviser to less educated individuals. It appears though, a person can mentor others, if that person is committed to invest time and sometimes resources to sharpen someone's abilities, so that at some point in life, that person becomes a mentor. Pulliam (2013:129) put forth this in perspective when he writes,

Mentoring is a type of modern day discipleship that Jesus began by modeling his faith in his actions; such as when he took time to listen, and answer each of his disciple's

questions, responded to their daily needs and challenged them in their call to glorify God. Every day we can follow Jesus steps in our daily lives wherever we are: at work, in our homes, in our church or even the mall.

Parsloe (2017) defines mentoring in these words: "Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be". On the other hand, Aitkens (2015:10) explains that "Although mentoring is an idea whose time has come, it has so far been poorly defined and erratically implemented". Mentoring in Aitkens view, is a fuzzy concept which is in fashion but short of facts. According to Aitkens, even the most basic questions reveal a shortage of authentic knowledge and accurate information on the subject. For example:

- When and where should mentoring begin?
- How should mentoring results be measured?
- How should mentors be trained, organized and made accountable?
- What is the precise balance between volunteer mentors, professional mentors, case workers and managerial supervisors?
- What needs to be done to bring a better sense of common standards, best practice and shared purposes?

Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:18) point out that the established origin of the word "mentor" comes from Homer's epic the *Odyssey*. The story relates that when the Greek warrior Odysseus went off to fight in the Trojan war, he entrusted his inexperienced son Telemachus to the care of a wise man named *Mentor* who served as an overseer and trusted advisor. Based on the story, when Odysseus returned from the war, he found his son Telemachus taught "not only in books learning, but also in the wiles of the world", thanks to the tutelage of *Mentor*.

Although not a comprehensive definition, Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:18) point that based on such story a mentor is portrayed as “a wise and trusted counselor and teacher.” That is, someone who, to some extent, acts as a paternal figure that fundamentally affects and influences the development of another individual, generally younger. According to Hendricks and Hendricks,

At their best, mentors mature our souls. They shape our character. They call us to become complete men, whole men, and by the grace of God, holy men. The Bible puts it this way: “As iron sharpen iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

At a basic level, one can see that a mentor is one who possess knowledge, skills, and is willing to train, advise, encourage, and wants to invest in the growth of others. Brazo (2004:159) claims that when one finds a mentor, has found a teacher and a friend, someone who can listen. Brazo shows the reader, that in mentoring a two-way relationship is established. Furthermore, Brazo sees a *mentor* as someone who can educate another person, someone with whom mentees can celebrate the joys as well as share the crises of life.

2.2.1 The role of a mentor

Biehl (1997) explains the role of a mentor as follows:

The mentor must be focused on what the relationship can do for the protégé, not the other way around. Nonetheless, in the process, both the mentor and protégé get to know well, and in instances become friends.

Biehl also explains that in a mentoring relationship mentors shouldn't be doing the "heavy lifting," even though they might be tempted to do so. This last point is an important reminder for mentors as they are often people who are all about "getting stuff done".

According to Biehl (1997) a mentoring relationship, implies a distinctive role for mentor and protégé, but what characterizes a mentor is his or her willingness to sacrifice, and make a difference in a persons' life, not his talent or his intelligence, or his status. In the opinion of Biehl a protégé under the supervision of a mentor will always have a major advantage over those not involved in a mentoring relationship.

Mentors care for people, Benner (2003:15) claims that,

Christian soul care, is much too important to be restricted to curative activities associated with modern clinical therapeutics. It is also much broader than counseling, even pastoral-counseling.

Essentially, as Benner explains, "caring for souls is caring for people". Christians are called to repentance first, and then to service, bearing on another's burdens. (Gal. 6:2).

Carr (1999) points out that mentoring is more than just transmitting knowledge about God. It involves showing people how to love and serve God. Carr defines mentoring as:

A support and guidance process valuable for learning and development. In this process, a person (mentor) helps a rather less experienced person (mentee) providing support, direction, words of wisdom, and sometimes counsel.

The significance of this statement, is that it raises up mentoring and promote it as a viable tool for mutual learning, development, sharing of knowledge in a safe environment.

Wright (2015:6) approached mentoring from a biblical view point as follows: “Mentoring is a biblical means of loving and caring for people around you”. In Wright’s view, Jesus provides an excellent example, primarily when he imparted values and knowledge to his disciples with his words and actions as he cared for them during his earthly ministry.

Parsloe (2017) believes that mentoring focuses primarily on empowering, therefore, views, mentoring as learner focused and highly effective to empower people who want to progress in their careers. Parsloe adds that, mentoring serves as a bridge that links two people who normally work in a similar field and the mentor has achieved experience that can be valuable to the mentee. Wicks (2000:125) points out that “Mentoring is dissimilar from therapy, counseling and clinical supervision which usually have fees, and spiritual direction for which a donation is often given. Although there are some exceptions (when the mentor requires the income for support)”.

2.2.2 Discipleship defined

Webster’s Dictionary describes the term *disciple* as “a pupil or a follower of any teacher or school of religion, learning, art, etc.”. For example, a Christian disciple follows Jesus. What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? Being disciple of Christ, does not begin with something we do, but rather with something He already did for us. A Christian disciple, is someone who has entered a personal, saving relationship with him and by God’s grace, becomes more and more like Christ through a life of faith and obedience. Christ said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Joh. 13:15). In his letter to the Corinthians Paul urged

them to: "Follow my example as I have followed the example of Christ" (1Co. 11:1). To be a Christian disciple is to follow Jesus's example, anyone claiming to be disciple must be following Jesus.

2.2.3 Biblical discipleship

The Bible contains many references to biblical discipleship, for example, from Colossians 1:6-10 one learns that Paul encouraged Christians to walk worthy of the Lord, that speaks of loyalty. Towns (2002:79) argues that biblical discipleship is characterized by loyalty to his master even to the point of opposition. A disciple must be able to endure persecution. A disciple is a faithful follower, who no longer lives for himself, disciples deny themselves and obediently take the cross of Jesus. At some point in his ministry, Jesus turned toward a crowd and said to them,

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me (Luk. 9:23).

Another definition of the term *disciple* comes from the original Greek word μαθητής (*Mathetis*), referring primarily to a student who endeavor to learn from the Lord Jesus. The New Testament refers to many followers of Jesus during his ministry, but only a few became his disciples. John 6:66 declares: *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*

Denver (2016:14) points out that Christian discipleship "begins with accepting the gift of God's grace, a relationship with God, and the promise of eternal life". We accept this gift through faith, turn away from our sins, and trust him as the Lord and savior. Discipleship requires that believers spend daily time in the study of the Word and obey it. In keeping with 1 Peter 3:15 *discipleship* is not a private matter, a disciple must *Always be*

prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect.

Discipleship speaks of accountability, as followers of Christ, one can observe the model of Jesus, that he spent time teaching and nurturing his disciples, as they followed Him and learned from Him. Jesus expected that the mature disciples take under their wings the undeveloped Christians. One example is found in Barnabas nurturing relationship with Paul, as declared in Acts 11:26

And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

As one can note, the relationship between Jesus and his discipleship was fundamental, he commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations. Jesus message has not changed; the great commission remains the same since his ascension to heaven. Regardless of how it is defined or approached: “discipleship must be measured by its fruit. Christ intends for each one who follows him to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him”. (Towns 2012)

The essence of discipleship is a response to God’s call and willingness to commit to others, who have been won for Christ to teach them to become all what God wants them to be. It is crucial that Christ's disciples continue to teach the teachings, values, and way of life of Christ, and not conform to this world.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (Phi. 3:12)

Jesus last commandment on earth was given to a group of mostly Galilean fishermen, a tax collector and other individuals of the working class. Jesus hope was that this group of 11 men of various backgrounds reach the world. To them He gave instructions to make disciples in the same way he had done with them, teaching new disciples what Jesus had taught them. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus' command to his disciples to "go and make disciples" speaks of a mission statement to every believer to model what Jesus did during his three years of ministry showing the world his grace and unconditional love. Finally, in Matthew 28:19 Jesus is telling that his church is meant to be first and foremost a disciple-making body.

2.3 Mentoring from a secular perspective

Secular mentoring is concerned with the development of a mentee. As such, a mentor will take time to listen and answer his or her pupil's questions and concerns. Essentially, non- faith based mentoring is intended to impart wisdom and skills to another through teaching, modeling, correcting, encouragement and mutual accountability.

Tingum (2007) points out, that employers of mentored employees, gain from greater productivity in the workplace. Tingum argues that more and more employers realize how beneficial mentoring is to an organization when experienced workers transfer their skills to others through mentoring programs. Furthermore, Tingum argues that the long-term success of companies and organizations seems to be associated in part with their ability to leverage the pool of employees capable of transferring skills and

knowledge. This can indeed affect the culture of work with a variety of benefits, for mentors, protégés and businesses as well.

Zachary (2005:263) explains that as organizations constantly move from one initiative to another, they have discovered that often, they have little or not enough time to truly capture learning along the way, consequently incurring in the same mistakes when innovative initiatives are developed. Zachary suggests that one way to stay ahead of this challenge is to develop a mentoring culture that would capitalize the human resources of skilled workers on lessons learned to effectively manage changes when and if they occur.

An article titled *5 Reasons why Mentees & Mentor Training is Critical* (2017) suggest that “No one is born knowing how to be a successful mentee or mentor, even though certain aspects of mentoring might come naturally to some people. Training helps mentors understand their roles, which involves supporting, encouraging, and listening to mentees”. Overall, if you look at the business world today, one cannot fail to notice mentoring taking place and those that succeed, almost without exception claim they had a mentor who invested in improving their skills process.

Over the years, mentoring has been a tool used to convey wisdom, guidance and advice to others, whether in formal or informal relationships. For example, when an experienced worker care about the upward mobility of a novice employee who wants to raise the bar a level. Orpen (1995) argues that, “Newcomers to the workplace who have as mentor an influential senior manager should logically have improved prospects of promotion and salary increases”. This view appears to validate the effectiveness of mentoring, whether it is to provide guidance, advice, or taking someone else's career path to higher levels.

Provident (2005) a supporter of mentoring practices argues that, most recently the concept of collaborative mentoring has emerged within academia. Provident's consensus indicate that collaborative mentoring allows the development of essential virtues in individuals, such as, intuition and collaborative peer interaction, that can be essential to transform and shape an individual. Provident claims that,

This form of mentoring replaces the hierarchical model with one that focuses on mutual empowerment and learning. Collaborative mentoring is described as a practice that creates a creative, democratic relationship which promotes the development of insights and understandings between peers.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:27) point out that "trades rely on apprenticeships and professions require internships because personal attention from experienced practitioners help learners master essential skills, techniques, attitudes and knowledge". That should serve as an incentive for the Christian church to identify elements of non-religious mentoring practices that can be useful in a marriage mentoring environment.

2.4 Biblical origin of mentoring

One of many examples of mentoring in the Old Testament is found in Exodus 18:6-27 where Moses is taken under the tutelage of an experienced elder. An elder in the Old Testament was a person of authority, one who inspired respect and reverence. One such elder was Jethro, a priest of Midian who listened the plight of Moses, and advised him how to lead the people around him and lighten his heavy burden.

Parrott and Parrott (2005:28) explain that, through a dynamic interface Jethro, facilitated a critical learning dimension that allowed Moses to engage with the people in a satisfactory manner and with greater wisdom and understanding. Parrott and Parrott explain that, “Moses walked with the Lord, talked face to face with Lord, was a great leader of Israel, but he too, needed a mentor in his life”. Considering this, it is important to note that, mentoring is not a recently introduced concept, but a means through which, historically, people have invested time and efforts to empower others with wisdom and skills.

In the New Testament Paul offers an example of biblical mentorship. Paul was a mentor to his younger convert Titus and through this strong mentoring relationship and the work of God a strong spiritual movement was started. Paul-Titus mentoring relationship is summarized in Paul’s letter to Titus where Paul is viewed as a spiritual father to Titus and Titus as a spiritual son whom Paul calls to undertake a challenging task. Titus 1:4-5 declares, “To Titus, my true son in our common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior”. In his words, Paul attests that the reason he left Titus in Crete was that he might put in order what was left unfinished and to appoint elders in every town, as Paul directed him to do.

According to Gibbs (2007:247) “the basic function of a mentor is not to teach content but rather provide feedback”. Further, Gibbs argues that churches lack trained mentors, consequently, the church should make it a priority to train mentors. Gibbs claims that, “those who serve as educators, need to help the church understand the strategic importance of a mentoring ministry” Gibbs’ argument leaves little doubt that, the development of a culture of Christian mentoring is a much-needed strategy in the Hispanic Ministry.

Although the term “mentor” is never found in the Bible, there are many instances of someone who is wiser or experienced acting as a counselor, or a wise teacher. For example, Abraham had Melchizedek as mentor, Saul had Samuel, Joshua had Moses, Moses had Jethro, Paul had Barnabas, Timothy and Titus had Paul, the disciples had Jesus. Bradley (2017) explains that,

While the word mentor is not used in Scripture, the Greek term *meno* (enduring relationship) is found in the New Testament one-hundred and eighteen times and thirty-three times in the Gospel of John alone. In his farewell messages, Jesus repeatedly used the term to express the steadfast relationship.

2.5 Marriage mentoring from a Christian perspective

Although many Christian and secular marriage manuals have been written so far, there is not much comprehensive material written on Christian marriage mentoring. Hunt, Hof, and DeMaria (1998:192) recognize that “marriage mentoring is urgently needed for both marriage wellness and for dysfunction /divorce prevention. Furthermore, Hunt, Hof, and DeMaria claim that,

One important solution to family crisis and failures is linking healthy couples to couples that need help. Many religious leaders support marriages through pastoral care, education and other efforts of churches, synagogues, and other religious, para religious agencies. Mentors couples who themselves, have coped well with difficult situations, can be especially helpful, to other couples who are facing issues such as financial crisis, chronic illness, major accidents, or the death of a child.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:21) point out that they first used the term “marriage mentoring” in 1990, when they started a movement to mentor experienced couples to serve as marriage mentors. Their purpose was to encourage mentoring to help struggling couples, and newlywed couples, especially those who felt hopeless, purposeless, or unfulfilled. As Parrott and Parrott, point out, marriage mentoring allows mentor couples the opportunity to engage with less experienced couples and invest in their lives. Parrott and Parrott also state that, in a mentoring relationship a mentor couple serves as a model usually to a younger couple, opening doors for the younger couple to interact and learn new skills from the mentoring couple who has been through “rough spots” themselves.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:28) argue that people do not have to be theology experts, or professional counselors to help a marriage. “One can help a marriage, when willing to offer a word of wisdom, a warm greeting, an ear that listens, and make a difference in the lives of those around us”. According to Parrott and Parrott, the practice of marriage mentoring is something the church has not heard much of, though the benefits of partnering strong marriage mentors with less experienced couples can’t be dismissed.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:30) describe marriage mentoring as a ministry characterized by a commitment made by “a relatively happy, more experienced couple purposely investing in another couple to effectively navigate a journey that they have already taken”, applying biblical principles and helping them become mentors at some point.

Benson (2005:247) points out that the benefits of marriage couldn’t be more evident. Benson explains that marriage mentoring is the transfer of experience, from the most experienced to those that have less experience.

At the center of Benson's message is the idea of learning from the mistakes of others, to avoid repeating them.

Biehl (1997) writes about mentoring from a Christian perspective and proposes that marriage mentoring as a "relationship in which a mentor helps a protégé reach his or her God given potential." Considering this perspective, Biehl explains that the essence of mentoring, is "offering help, advice, encouragement and passing skills and wisdom". When people commit to strengthening the marriages of other couples, their own marriages are strengthened as well. God calls us to bear the burdens of others (Gal 6:2).

Burns and Fields (2014:26) are amazed that couples focus so much attention on planning their wedding day, that they spend almost no time planning for their future marriage life. Burns and Fields state the following about counseling engaged couples:

It is like working with people on drugs, natural chemicals such as dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin, can cause the same reaction as an illicit drug. Dating and engaged couples often find themselves, in a chemically induced condition. They have an uncanny ability to focus on their partner's ability, rarely noticing the reality of their partners' weakness.

Burns and Fields (2014:26) further explain that a wonderful feeling of being in love with one's partner can translate into wonderful benefits, and it may release those chemicals to the brain, but that won't help one's marriage. Burns and Fields argue that what matters to couples who are seriously considering or are already engaged is thinking and preparing for their future

married life; that's where couples should put their energy. One of the ways couples can achieve that is through premarital education.

Burns and Fields (2014:28) cite Parrott & Parrott who warns couples about the impact of neglecting pre-marriage education: "couples will either do the essential premarital preparation or the painful post marital repair". Burns and Fields point out that preparing for marriage reduces significantly the divorce rate by 30 percent. Burns and Fields arguments are logical and indicate that Christian premarital counseling can be a vital ministry in the local church, as everyone carries something within them that needs healing.

Neumann and Edwards (2014:39) argue that one reason for the current mentoring crisis in the church is the gap between generations. Neumann and Edwards claim that this gap is even deeper in the present era. As such, changes must be implemented to effectively guide the current generation, especially in a time when technology has changed people's daily lives dramatically.

Neumann and Edward (2014:39) are advocates of an innovative approach to mentoring that is "organic", which in their view is the most viable form of mentoring the current generation. To reinforce their argument, they note that many of today's mentoring programs are stuck in obsolete models. Furthermore, Neumann and Edwards build a case for mentoring as an effective tool that can lead today's church to excellence in building intergenerational relationships. They argue that,

Because this generation is experiential, they also tend to learn more through stories than lectures. They will listen to lectures, but are moved by stories that speak to their experiences, and engage their hearts. In a frequently chaotic world, stories help them make sense of their experiences. They want to tell their

stories and hear other's stories, especially one that shows how God has been at work. In a mentoring relationship, telling stories is a great way to build bridges across the generational divide.

Counselling

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016) definition of the term counseling is "Professional guidance of the individual by utilizing psychological methods especially in collecting case history data, using various techniques of the personal interview, and testing interests and aptitudes".

The Collins English Dictionary (2016) defines counselling is "advice which a therapist or other expert gives to someone about a particular problem". Another definition of counseling provided by The English Dictionary (2016) is "guidance offered by social workers, doctors, etc., to help a person resolve social or personal problems".

Collins (2007:34) claims that today counseling has broadened its acceptance in the Christian community, this moves the ministry of counseling in a very positive direction, around the world. Collins affirms that "*counseling is all about change*", it is about people who want to change, but are often caught in behavioral patterns that keep them powerless to bring change to their lives, even people know full well it is in their best interest to change. Lastly, Collins points out that counseling is also about helping people who are not motivated to change or seek help to change, and purposely resist change and choose to stay as they are, which undermines their capacity to breakthrough from the condition they are in. Thus, many give up and stop trying, "not knowing what to do to bring about change".

Group mentoring

Meister and Willyerd (2010) claim that the segment of the population known as millennials, those born between 1977 and 1997 would benefit from a less-resource-intensive form of mentoring known as “group mentoring”. Meister and Willyerd believe that, group mentoring would be an effective way of giving millennials the feedback they need:

Group mentoring can be led by a more senior manager or can be peer-to-peer, but in both cases, the company sets up a technology platform that allows employees to define mentoring in their own terms. Mentoring takes place in self-organizing, topic-based groups, which are called leadership circles. Managers frequently share mentoring responsibilities within a circle, for instance, three executives might work together to advise a group of nine employees. Face-to-face meetings, conference calls, and webcasts supplement the online coaching.

Formal and informal mentoring

Often, secular formal mentoring programs have specific goals in mind. Lynn (2016) admits that some objectives may include “transferring technical knowledge, advancing career goals, learning management savvy, or addressing performance deficiencies”. However, as Lynn explains, it could be argued that mentoring implies an expectation, and often the objectives are defined in an agreement by mentor and mentee. While in informal mentoring two people whose chemistry match, can meet to discuss ideas more freely in a field of interest.

Formal mentoring relationships in the workplace are known to help staff achieve career goals, in part due to mentors who have gone to the extra mile to help others. A technical report by Sun Microsystems Laboratories

revealed a study on the career progress of more than 1,000 employees over a five-year period. Such study revealed that mentors and mentees were 20 percent more likely to get a raise than people who did not participate in mentoring. “What is more, mentors were six times more likely to be promoted than employees who didn't mentor” (Sun Microsystems Laboratories:2016). There seem to be convincing reason to argue that, formal mentoring open doors to people who may not normally have access to mentoring. As such, mentoring can be a valuable tool for conveying knowledge, and impact society for generations to come.

Another argument in favor of mentoring is by Hart (2009) who points out that any successful business can attest the inestimable value and multiple benefits of mentoring. According to Hart in a mentoring relationship a “more experienced and more knowledgeable person nurtures the professional life of a less experienced, less knowledge person”. Additionally, Hart argues that “leaders who mentor effectively, transfer their knowledge and expertise back into their organization”. He explains that mentoring relationships nurture the alignment between employee’s aspirations and organizational imperatives, and create depth and loyalty within the organization.

2.5.1 Jesus approach to mentoring

In *Mentor Like Jesus*, Campbell and Chancy (2009:7) claim that Jesus is the greatest mentor of all time. Jesus’s mentoring style was characterized in that “more time spent with fewer people, equal greater kingdom impact”. Although this view may seem somewhat differing from the widely-accepted definition, Campbell and Chancy believe this was Jesus’ discipleship model.

So then, according to Campbell and Chancy mentoring traces its roots to the first mentoring group started by Jesus who handpicked a small group of mostly fishermen, not church goers with whom He spent considerable amount of time. Thus, this group that Jesus taught from the Scriptures for

a certain period, after "graduating," were sent as trained mentors to impact the world for Christ. Jesus, the perfect mentor continues to model for us, by his example, his prayerful life, his faith, self-sacrifice and spirituality.

Collins (2007:34) argues that "Jesus who is the Christian example, spent many hours talking to needy people in group or in face to face contact". This implies that we Christians are invited to look at him first and foremost, as our most caring, wise, wonderful counselor. Additionally, Collins adds: "the apostle Paul, who was very sensitive to the needs of hurting individuals, wrote that we who are strong, must bear the weaknesses, and help carry the burdens of those who are weaker" (Rom 15:1).

Jesus modeled an excellent example, he actively sought individuals willing to learn, so that at some point in time they could also equip others. Proverbs 19:20 declares "*Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise*".

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented a literature review of scholarly sources regarding mentoring practices, including workplace mentoring, marriage mentoring as well as Jesus' model of mentoring. Based on reviews of the current literature, one can observe the rapid growth of literature on mentoring from a business, secular perspective. This seems to say that the business world is noticing the transformative power of mentoring.

The Christian world, on the other hand, indeed has shown an interest in this important subject. According to Gibbs (2007:247) mentoring is not a new concept in the church, unfortunately a considerable number of Christian leaders, have had little experience in this area. This is intriguing considering that the New Testament vastly emphasize mentoring relationships such as the ones exemplified by Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, Jesus and

the 12 disciples. It is now incumbent upon the Christian community at the Hispanic Ministry to respond wisely to this opportunity through a wise examination of the potential for a mentoring ministry, that serves the needs of marriages.

Finally, after an analytical review of the literature at hand, the support for mentoring practices seem compelling, especially as evidenced in the none-religious, business world. One can find that, the relational component mentoring foster, is something that the corporate world is taking advantage of. Formal and informal mentoring programs are being developed in the business world today. Experts realize that regardless who people are, or their greatest achievement, an outstanding mentor is always an asset in business. Since the practice of mentoring is woven throughout the Bible, it can be argued, that the faith based world has a responsibility to work intentionally, to generate trust and optimism in support of mentoring practices in the local church.

Chapter 3

A case for connecting couples with mentors to build better marriages

3.1 Introduction

Following the LIM research model for practical theology outlined by Cowan (as cited in Smith 2008:206) this chapter examined *the world as it is*, in the context of the Hispanic Ministry. Further, perceptions related to concerns of couples in the Hispanic ministry, including the threat of divorce were examined. Finally, this writer examined current ongoing marriage enrichment initiatives underway to connect couples to build better marriages.

3.2 History of the Hispanic Ministry

The Hispanic Ministry is a Hispanic-Latino congregation whose members adhere to Pentecostal tradition, a movement of the Foursquare Church that believes that Jesus Christ is Savior, Healer, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and soon-coming King. The church stands firm on the foundation set by Hebrews 13:8 which proclaims: *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.*

In 2001 the leaders of Northwest Church and a small group of Hispanic-Latino families felt led of the Lord to plant a daughter church to serve the Hispanic-Latino population of Federal Way, a suburb of Seattle, WA. US. They were holding on to Jesus' great commission to step out in faith and spread the good news, a command which God gives all believers in Matthew 28: 19-20.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Three years later, the Hispanic Ministry held its first official meeting at the church's location in January of 2004. By this time, the weekly meeting had grown to about 25 people. In 2008 an associate pastor was installed to care for the growing church. Currently, the church holds a weekly Sunday service, averaging 140 people, including children and a mid-week service, for fellowship and discipleship training. Currently the Hispanic Ministry is considered one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the Seattle area for Spanish speakers.

The Hispanic Ministry exists primarily to reach the Hispanic-Latino population of Federal Way, WA, and outlying communities. From its inception, the Hispanic Ministry has operated under the oversight of Northwest Church, of the International Foursquare Gospel.

The vision of the Hispanic Ministry aligns with the *mother* church's strategy: "relationships, discipleship, win souls for Christ and service". As a faith community, the church's vision reaches out to the unsaved, so that people experience a compelling life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Hispanic Ministry has had a noticeable impact, resulting over the years in a substantial number of salvations, restored lives and healings. Federal Way, is a community of approximately 95,000 residents of which 12 percent are considered of Hispanic-Latino descent. The Hispanic Ministry looks

forward to the future, believing that God will continue to empower the body of believers to serve in the local church as well in neighboring communities.

Leadership

Currently, the leadership of the Hispanic Ministry is comprised of one full time Pastor, a board of volunteer leaders, and a committed group of lay leaders who meet regularly with the pastor to evaluate the state of the church and to plan support activities. The church's slogan: "Committed to relationships with Jesus Christ, not religion" speaks of the importance the church place on relationships.

Marriages

The Hispanic Ministry support the sanctity of marriage, and teach that man was created by a direct act of God and that all humankind is descended from Adam and Eve. The "Northwest Church" the Anglo ministry of which the Hispanic Ministry is a part of, is an International Foursquare Gospel Church. The name "Foursquare" stands out when compared to those usually given to churches; that's because it was born out of an unusual move of God during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

3.2.1 Demographic profile

The Hispanic Ministry is formed by people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities who strive to honor God and develop healthy relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ. The congregation is formed by United States born of Hispanic origin, and immigrants from Latin America, primarily from Mexico. Ramirez (2004) points out a special report census of 2010 which indicates that: The United States federal government defines Hispanic or Latino as a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Therefore, given that Hispanics can be of any race, federal policy defines Hispanic as an ethnicity, not a race.

It is estimated that 80 percent of the people attending the Hispanic Ministry are of Mexican descent, the rest are from Central American and South America. The Hispanic Ministry is primarily a working-class congregation; some members are independent contractors, and some are small business owners. Approximately 55 percent of the members are women, many adults are married. A small segment of the church population is formed by grandparents and single parents both male and female.

Single parents, male and female, constitute one of the fastest growing population segment nationwide, especially among Hispanics. Rainer (2014) states that “Four out of ten children in America are born to single women. That rate is six times its level since 1960. This pace continues even though teen pregnancy has been declining” Most people would be surprised at this statistic, which brings staggering implication for the church in general. Considering this, one would wonder: what is the Hispanic Ministry doing to reach singles parents? Rainer continues, “These statistics provide incredible insights about a part of the population that many churches have no specific plans to reach or to minister to”.

Statement of faith

The Scriptures

The Hispanic Ministry teaches that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. As Christ's church, we believe in the inerrancy of the Word, as declared in 1 Timothy 3:16-17; Isaiah 55:10-11.

Repentance and Acceptance

We teach that upon sincere repentance, godly sorrow for sin, and a whole-hearted acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, they who call upon Him may be justified by faith, through His precious blood and that in place of

condemnation they may have the most blessed peace, assurance and favor with God

Jesus Christ

We believe, in the deity of Jesus Christ, and that he was, as the Apostle creed declares, “born of the virgin Mary, crucified, dead and buried” and that on the “third day, He rose from the dead”. (Heb. 1:8; Isa. 7:17; Mat. 1:20-23)

Salvation

The church teaches that humans are broken. This brokenness has resulted in alienation between God and humanity, as seen in the countless evidence with individuals, families, communities and nations. All who acknowledge their need and place their trust in Christ as their source of transformation and forgiveness can restore their broken relationship with God.

The Hispanic Ministry encourages its member to pray and discover where their gifts and abilities might allow them to serve. Additionally, it encourages its members to consistently read the Word, join a community of small groups fellowship, grow in relationship with God, and with the community. The Church’s core theology states that Christ is central, and grace is through Christ.

3.3 Perceptions of couple’s concerns in the Hispanic Ministry

The purpose of this section is to provide a sample of some observed problem areas that some couples in the Hispanic Ministry seem to be dealing with. The purpose was to evaluate to what degree a mentoring ministry could alleviate these concerns and hopefully understand how to respond more appropriately to these challenges by building on what was learned.

3.3.1 The problem of temporary separation of the family nucleus

The state of Alaska, due to its proximity to the Seattle area, attracts younger men from the congregation to highly paid jobs in the fishing sector, especially during the fish harvest months. Given these opportunities, some men choose to leave the family nucleus temporarily to work on fish plants or on fishing boats on high seas. In some cases, this results in a tense marriage relationship, which can affect children, and compromise the family unity. Young children tend to get overly anxious about a parent leaving the home even for a short time. It is unfortunate that when a spouse moves away from home in search of temporarily to work, the impact on the spouse staying and children can be overwhelming.

Considering the above, it is important to recognize the efforts that the Hispanic Ministry has been involved with providing pastoral care to wives of spouses gone temporarily. The feeling expressed by wives in some cases is that of frustration, staying home minding the family is a challenging task. The feeling of isolation, resentment, due to the absence of the husband to manage the house or financial matter is huge. In one case, a spouse expressed sentiments of anger, staying home to shoulder the many responsibilities, became too exhausting.

In another example, a wife temporarily separated from the husband due to the husband's seasonal work expressed that: "it is impossible to be supper mom, while keeping the house clean and safe, the kids accountable for school work, medical check-ups," etc. It appears that the disconnect that transpire when the husband returns, after a five-month work assignment, is a painful experience. Further, the re-entry transition seems to be challenging for all, and reconnecting and rescuing each other's trust, can take time.

3.3.2 The problem of cohabitation and its negative impact

Kraft and Johnson (2003:77) contend that in 2002 approximately 5.5 million couples lived together without the benefit of marriage. This tells that instead of choosing marriage many couples don't find it necessary to make a covenant commitment to one another. Cohabitation, need to be addressed regularly at the Hispanic Ministry and from a scriptural standpoint.

The church teaches that the sexual relationships is a privilege reserved for married couples and for the protection of marriages. In some cases, cohabitation seem to be chosen over marriage as a matter of convenience of living together without a binding marriage covenant. Some scholars argue that the increased interest in cohabitation is associated with the fear of divorce and the collapse of the marital union, rather than the fear of the union itself. Jackman (2017) posits that,

People are increasingly opting out marriage altogether, in part due to the emergence of a kind of 'bonded independence' in relationships particularly among the under 25s where the quality of the relationship trumps any obligation to longer-term commitment.

Couples who have chosen, "will you move with me"? over "will you marry me"? need to understand scripturally what the Word affirms. The scriptures declare in Hebrews 13:4. *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.* Kraft and Johnson explain that sexual relationships are not a right open to all, but a privilege to those within the confines of marriage. This is God's design for the protection of marriage. Just living together is not the same as marriage, Smith (2011) of the Heritage Foundation claims that,

When children are born into a cohabiting, unmarried relationship, they arrive in a family in which the parents haven't resolved their most basic issues, including those of sexual fidelity and how to share responsibilities. The moment the first amount of stress appears, things start to fall apart, and the man is soon out the door.

3.3.3 The problem of unrealistic expectations

Some Christian couples wrongly believe that, "once you come to Christ, everything will be resolved in your marriage". While it is true that in Christ, we are more than conquerors, Romans 8:31-39, the follower of Christ is not exempt from life's problems. Some couples, however, after "trying" Christianity for a while, or after having the first real argument, and not finding a solution to their issues, simply move out.

While it is true that Christians are commanded to: *Seek Christ, and his kingdom first, and all things shall be added*" (Mat. 6:33) unrealistic priorities can destroy marriages, when the husband or wife does not understand this important teaching. Unrealistic expectations can cause spouses to be victims of their misguided realities. Furthermore, unrealistic expectation can make it challenging to live in today's culture and not be distracted by wrong priorities that two people place on each other.

For some marriages, their faith in Christianity seems to have disappeared, the love that once guided their relationship is gone. In addition, the cares for this world, hobbies, and other interests, have taken a critical turn for the worst. One should not expect that Jesus Christ will meet every challenge once you marry, this indeed can threaten the marriage covenant. Unrealistic motives in marriage must be guarded against, biblically. Proverbs 4:23 declares: *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

The good news is that marriages can be taught how to deal with unrealistic priorities, and cared for. Gottman and Silver (2015:28) present the following picture over which marriages fight over, and offer practical advice to save a marriage, as they write:

Most of couple's disagreements are rooted in fundamental differences of lifestyle, personalities or values. By fighting over these differences, all they succeed in doing is wasting their time and harming their marriage. Instead they need to understand the bottom-line difference that is causing the conflict, and learn how to live with it by honoring and respecting each other.

Evans (2006:24) expresses that,

Most of us bring multiple layers of false expectation, we carry into our relationships. Hollywood-painted fantasies of bliss and dream of living happily ever after. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that to marry successfully, we must approach the relationship with the right set of expectations.

3.3.4 The problem of misunderstandings towards marriage mentoring.

Some couples feel that mentoring may be somewhat outside their comfort zone, and not part of their culture. However, when difficult situations arise, they are prompt to ask for "pastoral counseling", to request advice from an elder, or anyone that can have an empathetic attitude to their needs.

In other situations, some couples feel they should be mentored by an expert lead pastor first, rather than by lay mentor couples. This idea seems to be tied to a thinking that only a pastor can provide the best mentoring. Given

the time constraints, and the multiple commitments that pastors have, it would be almost impossible and unwise to expect a pastor to meet with mentee couples in the Hispanic Ministry.

A marriage mentoring ministry under the oversight of trained mentor couples can be an excellent strategy to connect mentee couples who want to learn skills to develop fruitful marriages. Lux (2016) states that marriage mentoring programs in the church, require working with seasoned couples, not perfect, whom God can use to become connecting links and come alongside the pastor's work in the local church.

3.3.5 Marital conflicts

Conflicts among marriages can escalate due to unforgiveness, lack of humility, financial problems not dealt with, lack of trust etcetera. These are just a few areas of discord, that couples appear to confront. Unfortunately, not well equipped for, or until problems get out of control, or it is too late to deal with the situation. Often, couples who face conflicts in their relationship feel reluctant to seek help in time. In many instances, a positive affirmation, or a word of correction or encouragement, is what is often missing in couple's lives.

Marriages whose relationship go through difficulties can be cared for and saved, no matter how daunting the situation so that they can serve others. Cordeiro (2007:31) argues that, the twenty first century leaders ought to be the kind of person who see the need to learn from the experience of those who possess insight beyond their lifetime and beyond their own experience.

Parrott and Parrott (2006:14) show disheartening statistics indicating that a considerable number of marriages are struggling, and left unattended. What more can one ask? The dire statistics presented by Parrott and Parrott

should, among other things, challenge the local church to work with struggling couples, and in an environment, that is safe, and healthy.

Another statistics presented by Keller and Keller (2011:15) point out that, “over the last forty years, the leading marriage indicator in the United States, show that marriage’s health and satisfaction is in decline, younger adults believe their chances of having a good marriage are not that great”.

3.3.6 The problem of misunderstanding Jesus teaching on divorce

The biblical teaching of Jesus on divorce is often distorted by those who do not want to obey the scriptures. What does God declare about divorce? Malachi 2:16 is the often-quoted verse that tells how God feels about divorce, “I hate divorce” and God hates divorce because marriage was meant to be a special covenant relationship between a man, a woman and their God. Rainey (2017) references sociologist Nicholli III whom argues that, “Divorce is not a solution, but an exchange of problems”. Further, in a somber note, Rainey refers to novelist Pat Conroy for whom a covenant break-up experience is summarized in these words, “each divorce is the death of a small civilization”.

A few decades before Jesus was born, Jewish rabbis Hillel and Shammai, debated the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 which declares, “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house”. On the one hand, Hillel held that the husband needed not reason whatsoever and could divorce his wife at his pleasure on just about any grounds.

On the other hand, the conservative school of Shammai, allowed divorced only on the grounds of adultery (Laney, Heath, Edgar and Richards: 1990). However, Jesus sided with neither the liberal nor conservative interpretation

of Deuteronomy 24:1, instead he affirmed the perpetuity and holiness of God's ordained marriage covenant. This position Jesus made it clear in Mathew 19:4-6,

Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, and said. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.

While at the time of Moses, the Israelite men were divorcing their wives at will, for whatever reason, Laney (1990) explains that "divorce is not encouraged or ordered in Deuteronomy 24:1. Indeed, the text does not suggest that divorce is necessarily sanctioned under such circumstances". Although some question why God did not forbid divorce and remarriage in the Mosaic Law and ended all future bargaining on the subject. The answer to this question is found in Matthew 18:9 *Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.*

In western culture, it is typical that attraction is one principal driving factor for couples to get married, not necessarily a genuine concern for each other. Nonetheless, as Keller and Keller (2011:64) points out, "a month or two later, couples start to discover how selfish, he or she is". Keller and Keller explain that the alternative to this truce-marriage is neither separation nor divorce, but rather see your own selfishness as a fundamental problem and to treat it more seriously than you do your spouse's.

3.4 Current efforts to enrich marriage relationships

3.4.1 Discipleship training

The Hispanic Ministry offers an ongoing discipleship training which draws approximately 30 adults on weekly basis. This is a combined effort where the church leaders and a considerable number of adults participate. On a practical level, this initiative engages God's people to learn basic discipleship principles to become mature disciples, and passionate about God, utilizing practical learning dynamics.

Furthermore, the weekly classes facilitate fellowship opportunities, time for worship and to pray for one another; more importantly a chance to grow in relationship with God. The weekly classes focus on the fundamental principles of the Christian faith such as: "forgiveness, integrity, reconciliation, responsibility, faith, unity, knowing your call, healing", etc. The classes follow a well-known discipleship curriculum adapted into Spanish. The Hispanic Ministry holds that a church won't grow into a healthy church without an ongoing discipleship ministry.

3.4.2 Leadership development seminars.

Several couples have demonstrated strong leadership potential, and ability to inspire new member to develop a close walk with the Lord. To capitalize on this pool of talents, the Hispanic Ministry has taken the initiative to train these couples through leadership development seminars, which are held in out-of-state locations with remarkable results. The participants graduate, after successfully completing 3 intensive weekend seminars held over a period of one year.

It is worth noting the efforts of the Senior leadership to sponsor leadership development seminars which have trained several couples who serve now in leadership capacities in the Hispanic ministry. The Bible calls Christians

to equip leaders, there is no legitimate excuse for not raising leaders. Paul declares that the work of a pastor is "to prepare the people of God for the works of service" (Ephesians 4:12). The leadership development seminars the Hispanic Ministry has facilitated are equipping a good number of couples with strong potential to help marriages in the local church and serve as future marriage mentors.

3.4.3 Small Groups Ministry

The formation of small groups was part of the strategy of the Methodist Church for the growth of the church and spirituality during the life of John Wesley in the eighteenth-century A.D. Wesley's small groups whom he called "The Class" (12 people, for support and fellowship) and "The Band" (accountability groups of 4 to 6 people) focused on spiritual growth, confession of sins, forgiveness, reconciliation, holiness, and care for one another in love.

Following a similar approach, 5 small groups are currently serving the needs of the Hispanic Ministry providing a critical ministry for discipleship teaching, and midweek fellowship opportunities. These small groups are actively engaged, serving new believers, and non-believers in the community who wish to join for fellowship. The small groups are essential to the Hispanic Ministry; the relational nature of the meetings offer attendees the opportunity to share testimonials and pray for one another. In addition, small groups offer opportunities to invite non-believers who would otherwise not feel comfortable attending the main fellowship on Sundays.

3.4.4 Marriage enrichment seminars

Early in 2017, the Hispanic Ministry of Northwest Church sponsored several -marriage enhancement seminars, following the theme "God's Design for Your Dream Marriage". The seminars gave participants the opportunity to

address their own relational issues, and to express their aspirations to improve their marriage relationships.

The main themes addressed came from Evans 2012, chapters 1-5.

- Who meets your deepest need?
- The secret of a solid marriage
- Overcoming the crazy cycle of the marital relationship.
(Eph. 5:22-33)

Seminars of this nature were intended for couples, but also open to single mothers, divorcees, separated, single parents, and even those who are considering marriage as well. Couples in the Hispanic Ministry felt that healthy marriages contribute to the overall health of the congregation. As such, investing in marriage is rewarding and honours God.

The marriage enrichment seminar intended to teach about God's plan for marriage, from a biblical perspective, looking at what the Bible declares in Genesis 2:24-25. "that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh". Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. In these verses, God instituted the marriage relationship, and ordained the family unit to a successful covenant, and not ever to fail, if couples follow God's plan.

Evans' book *"Marriage on the Rock"* was used, to help couples understand each other and how to solve biblically conflicts afflicting their marriages; including how to deal with the threat of divorce. Evans argues that Christians have the capacity to turn the tide of divorce, and replace bad relationships into fulfilling ones, "if only each couple would follow God's design for marriage". Evans further states that Christians "must build their marriages in God's word". "Jesus told us clearly what we could expect when we choose to build our lives on the foundation of His word". Following the

same teaching, Jesus clearly shows what await marriages when they choose to build their lives on today's unstable world system (Mat. 7:24-25).

The opinion of the couples participating is that it is important to continue training the future lay leaders in an organized and ongoing basis. Additionally, couples felt that the seminar of this nature serve as an opportunity to fellowship and get to know each other better. Participants identified important points worth mentioning.

- The marriage seminar served as an opportunity to start identifying potential leadership traits amongst the participants.
- The Hispanic Ministry should continue to promote more training opportunities for marriages
- It is encouraging to observe strong, faithful couples passionate about God, and about service to each other. It is good to celebrate where God is at work in the Hispanic Ministry
- It is inspiring to see couples stand in the gap and serve others regardless the opposition and the enemy's attacks marriages are under
- Due to the consequences of conflict, strategies to prevent the occurrence of marital problems are a valid concern for the Hispanic Ministry
- Connecting couples with marriage mentor couples is an idea that should be seriously evaluated
- A general suggestion was that mentoring relationships should get fresh look and attention from church leadership and couples as well

3.4.5 Current marriage mentoring practices

Currently there is no formal ministry focused on marriage mentoring in the Hispanic Ministry, however, it seems there is a demand for marriage

mentors. Tucker (2015:235) states that mentoring does not occur automatically. Unless people choose to take decisive action, and become interested in the lives of others as mentors or mentees, mentoring will probably not happen. Tucker correctly points out that "being a mentor or finding an apprentice is a decision of the will" and unless the value of mentoring or having a mentor is appreciated enough or understood, other "urgent" issues will be more important, neglecting the obvious.

Presently, there is no training available in the Hispanic Ministry, to equip mature mentor couples to work with mentees or those considering marriage. Parrott and Parrott (2006:19) state the results of an experiment conducted by Psychologist Richard Wiseman in which participants were asked to count the number of times basketball players passed the ball to each other in a game. What they were not told was that "at some point during the thirty-second video, a man in a black suit would run onto the court, stand in front of the cameras and beat his chest". Interestingly, Parrott and Parrott mention that in such experiment, "most of the volunteers missed the man in the black suit". They were so focused in counting passes, they missed the obvious.

3.5 The divorce threat to marriages

3.5.1 Divorce statistics in the United States

From the Garden of Eden, as seen in Genesis 3, Satan, the "adversary" has tried to lure individuals and couples into his traps, whether through promiscuity, conflict, adultery, deception, and in the last decades through the scourge of divorce. Divorce researchers have found that evangelical protestants divorce rates are as high as the rest of the public, for whom divorce is no big deal. In this regard, Robinson (2015:7) points out that,

The American Psychological Association finds that between 40 and 50 percent of marriages will end in divorce. Think about it because it's a very scary figure and pumps a little bit of reality into the situation. That's a huge amount of people who are not committed sufficiently to each other to make their marriages last for a lifetime.

According to Nock, Sanchez and Wright (2008:6) at the beginning of the twentieth century divorce was extremely rare and carried a heavy stigma for both children and adults. For children, divorce brought uncertainty and the shame of a broken home. For adults, the suspicion of moral indiscretion, and failure. Back then, marriage for the majority was for better or for worse, "until death separates us". However, as Nock, Sanchez and Wright explain the culture was transformed,

The divorce rate in America, increased significantly during the twentieth century, though they had been rising since the mid-1800s. beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing through the 1970s, divorce rate rose at historically rapid rates.

Nonetheless, despite the impulse that divorce has taken in the lives of Christians, there is hope. Evangelical Christians are rightly so placing divorce on their list of concerns and aims. Stanton (2015) states the following,

So, while the 40-50 percent projected rate of divorce risk is true and reliable, there are important personal characteristics that put everyone at different levels of risk, some dramatically so. Many people of serious faith and practice, have a tremendously high likelihood of long-lasting marital success because of the values they hold regarding the sacred and

covenantal nature of marriage, and its importance as a vocation.

Couples don't marry thinking of divorcing one day; unfortunately, many enter marriage unprepared, including Christians. Some view marriage as less rigid today, and take the liberty of looking at marriage as something they can dispose of and consequently, divorce any time and for any reason. God want marriages to be a covenant relationship committed "til death do us part," not "disposable marriages" characterized by its affront to God. Mathew 19: 6 declares "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate".

Parrott and Parrott (2005:19) state that, many couples on a given weekend make it to churches across the country, keeping their marital problems to themselves. What is more, some couples dismiss any form of help, because of the stigma associated with it, or feel that trusting their burdens to another human being will lead to disappointment.

Leventhal (2004) evaluates the spiritual warfare marriages are under and argues that, "from every corner, barrage after barrage is being fired against God's plan for marriage". Leventhal warns Christians that "the ultimate source of the attack is often overlooked". Leventhal further explains that the war against marriages is mainly of a spiritual nature and suggest that, the church must "confront the reality of such a conflict and its attack on marriages".

Ralya (2009:213) helps understand the unprecedented challenges marriages have been under, in recent years. Ralya presents a compelling case for Christians to fight against divorce, stating that,

For the past few decades, marriages have been under attack rarely seen before. You don't have to look very far to see the pain caused by divorce. The staggering divorce statistics make it seem like nothing can stop it. The truth is that Christians couples can fight not only for their own marriages but also for the marriages of others. A couple does not go from being in love to being divorced overnight.

Parrott and Parrott (2005:20) pay close attention to what is now a threat to marriages and proposes that, "with a mighty band of marriage mentors we could surely save half of the 1.2 million marriages that end in divorce each year". Regardless of the situations in which couples are in, the church has an opportunity to act to save marriages. This study proposes that a pastoral investigation directed to the ministry of marriage mentoring can contribute to the development of new alternatives to care for couples in a loving and biblical way.

3.6 Conclusion

Chapter 3 examines the History of the Hispanic Ministry, the concerns of the couples, efforts to enrich marriage relationships, it also examines the divorce and its devastating effect among families Christian and not Christian. Parrott and Parrott (2006:14) state that, based on statistics comprising 2.4 million couples who marry in a single year, in the Unites States, it is projected that 43 percent will not survive marriage. Parrott and Parrott, express that, divorce can be devastating to the point that, "for too many couples, marriage has become till divorce do as part. Every couple marrying is at risk, more than two-hundred thousand couples entering matrimony each year end prior to the couple's second anniversary". This chapter also highlights a number of efforts underway to enrich leadership at

the Hispanic Ministry, such as leadership development, marriage enhancement seminars, and ongoing discipleship training for couples.

In addition, this chapter highlighted the complex threat of divorce. Sherman and Hendricks (1987) claim that good marriages won't happen automatically, however, good marriages, can happen when Christ's church care, and sacrifice for one another. Further, Sherman and Hendricks explain that if the local churches do not influence the culture, as it should, "it may well be because the church has failed to equip workers to do the work of God in the culture".

Chapter 4

Biblical principles on marriage mentoring

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examined Paul's biblical basis for mentoring modeled in 2 Timothy 2: 2, and how this model can be applied to help Christian marriages. Paul's relationship with Timothy was so strong that he called it a father-son relationship. Through this relational model, God provided a valuable biblical format of how to mentor, which can be applied to marriages. Philippians 4:9 declares:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you".

That exhortation brings up the question of how the Hispanic Ministry can help marriages move from the current situation, to where God wants them to be.

4.2 Paul's mentoring model exemplified in 2 Timothy 2:2

2 Timothy, is a personal letter, caring in nature and full of heartfelt instructions, which Paul wrote to a young pastor Timothy, most likely one of his converts. To help understand what Paul is teaching, Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:78) point out that the Scriptures must be interpreted following the Hermeneutical Triad approach that properly balances (1) Theology, (2) History and (3) Literature. According to Köstenberger and

Patterson. These 3 approaches, will do the task “as each have a vital place in the study of the sacred Word”.

In 2 Timothy 2:1, Paul identifies Timothy as his “son”. Why did Paul call Timothy his son? From the Scriptures, one learns that Timothy was not Paul’s son, because in Act 16:1 we see that Timothy’s father was not a Jew and Paul was a Jew. One explanation of what prompted Paul to call him son, is that Paul lead Timothy to saving faith in Christ. By calling him “son”, Paul became Timothy’s "spiritual father" and felt responsible for him and for mentoring him.

When it comes to mentoring, one can hardly find a better example of a healthy mentoring relationship, than Paul and Timothy. Paul was a primary mentor in Timothy's life and leadership. In the Scriptures one finds that Paul mentored other church leaders, one of them Tychicus (Eph. 6:21-22); (Col 4:7). Another example is Silvanus, also called Silas, a companion of Paul, (1Th 1:1), and very likely, others for whom Paul, set priorities to mentor, however, not recorded.

4.2.1 Facts about Paul

Some scholars believe that Saul was born around 10 B. C in Tarsus, in modern-day Turkey. Holman (2008:1200) explains that, before his conversion, Paul then Saul was a “zealous” Pharisee who stubbornly persecuted the early disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem. The Scriptures teach in Acts 9:26-27 that following his conversion, Paul went to Ananias’s house who prayed for him, after which Paul could see again.

Paul, was a tent maker by trade, but more importantly a Roman citizen, which implies he was at least moderately well-off, which granted him a certain respect wherever he went in the empire. After his conversion, he

traveled extensively through most of the Mediterranean world. (B&H Publishing Group 2003).

Philippians 3:5 appears to indicate that one of his parents was a Jew who lived in the diaspora. Nonetheless, he remained faithful to the Jewish language and customs. He received, his education at the feet of Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Paul' dual citizenship, and his double cultural background worked well in his favor, including avoiding degrading forms of punishment inflicted to non-roman citizens in the empire. (B&H Publishing Group 2003).

Upon his return to Jerusalem, the followers of Christ in that city did not trust Paul, he had persecuted them; understandably, they did not believe he had changed. Barnabas, however trusted him, brought him to the apostles and validated the veracity of his testimony. Barnaba's action facilitated a link that changed Paul's life forever. From Acts 9:17-27 one can learn that Barnaba's took Paul under his tutelage; this trusted relationship empowered Paul for ministry as they both worked together to teach the new Christians in Antioch.

Stanley and Clinton (2006:159) are emphatic when they point out that,

Outside Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul is probably the most powerful leader of the New Testament. Yet even with limited biblical narrative, we can see part of his network. Gamaliel and Barnabas as mentors: Timothy, Titus and others as mentees, and numerous partners in the gospel as co-mentors.

4.2.2 Facts about Timothy

A study of the life of Timothy is important to understand another dimension to the father-son relational mentoring process with Paul. From the Bible, one learns a great deal about Timothy, for example, the books Acts 16:1 teaches that “Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jew and a believer but whose father was a Greek”. It was probably at this point that Paul and Timothy caring relationship began (Act. 16:1-3). Even though Timothy, may have heard of Gods’ saving grace during Paul’s first missionary journey, it was six years later during Paul’s second journey that one reads about Timothy.

Timothy would have been one of those who believed God’s message and placed his trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation. However, his relationship with Paul, was a critical component in his transformation and fitness to carry on with the numerous responsibilities related to pastoral work. Without a doubt, Timothy submitted himself to Paul’s counsel, who prayed to God for his faithful apprentice night and day. 2 Timothy 1:3 declares: *I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.* “Timothy’s familiarity with the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures made him an ideal protégé of Paul” (Lioy 2017:64).

Timothy’s familiarity with the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures, made him an ideal protégé for Paul. Often, familiarity with cultures can serve as bridges to shape the path to productive relationships. Timothy’s understanding of Paul’s culture, may have helped start a mentoring relationship with Paul. In fact, a fruitful relation commenced, to shape Timothy’s preparation for ministry. This relationship included Paul’s investment of personal time, in a challenging environment to equip Timothy for the challenges of pastoral ministry that laid ahead.

Tucker (2014:130) cites Pierson's timeline on Timothy's life suggesting that, Timothy, appears in the New Testament as Paul's most trusted assistant, noticing that,

Timothy was probably 16 years old when Paul visited Lystra, which is the probable time when Timothy became a Christian. Following Pierson's timeline, when Paul returned to Lystra two years later, with Timothy turning 18, the young disciple was someone whom the church spoke well of.

The relationship between Timothy and Paul serves as an example of mentoring that existed in the New Testament. It embodies Paul's exemplary life, as well as the challenges that Timothy needed to overcome to emulate Paul's way of life. Undoubtedly Paul's epistles served a priceless purpose in guiding and equipping Timothy in his pastoral work.

Given Timothy's extreme pressures from both inside and outside of the Ephesian church, one could easily wonder if Timothy could have been successful, without the influence of a mentor like Paul in his life. There is no doubt that Paul's intentional mentoring role in Timothy's life was probably a key source of strength for Timothy. At the hands of Paul, Timothy became a recipient of mentoring, and that paid eternal dividends. There is no question that some people need to be mentored, while others need to mentor. Proverbs 27:17 puts this in context, in this manner, *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*

Timothy saw in Paul, the example of an exceptional Christian leader, whom at the same time served as an extraordinary role model to imitate. 2 Timothy 3:10 constitutes a final charge, and encouragement to Timothy, declaring,

You [Timothy] however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

4.2.3 Paul's mentoring process.

The account one finds of Paul's mentoring Timothy comes from Paul's own two pastoral epistles to Timothy. Both letters are accounts of a senior minister at the end of his ministry who is concerned about his successor Timothy in the pastorate. Paul begins his letter with encouragement that reminds Timothy of his life and gifts. In addition, through his letter, Paul demonstrates approaches that serve as examples of his mentoring to his protégé.

A careful examination of Paul's mentoring relationship with Timothy as minister of the gospel reveals several important characteristics to consider in a mentoring relationship, such as:

Paul carefully identified his right successor

Hoehl (2011) comments that, when Paul realized that his life and ministry was coming to an end, he realized how important it was to select a successor to carry forward the gospel message. "In finding his own successor, Paul sought the right man for the job". In finding a successor, Paul relied on the leading of the Holy Spirit, the scriptures declare in Acts 16:2 that "the believers at Lystra and Iconion spoke well of him" and good reputation was a quality that Paul valued highly. Undoubtedly, Timothy was already beginning to demonstrate the qualities of a reliable and trusted protégé, possessing the marks of a respectable minister that Paul was looking out for. It is significant to note, that Timothy, whose faith resided

within his grandmother and mother, was one whom Paul one day could trust, to teach, and equip the saints for works of service.

Paul equipped Timothy for ministry.

Paul recognized how important it was to equip a successor to carry the gospel message after his life and ministry ended. Hoehl (2011) explains, “to leave his earthly ministry without establishing a means for its continuation would contradict his overarching message to Timothy, which was to be strong in the preaching of the Word”. Hoehl, notes that “as soon as Paul and Timothy’s mentoring relationship commenced” Paul became Timothy’s mentor and began equipping him for the task of furthering the good news of the Kingdom on earth. Oney (2007) states that,

The book of 2 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy who was serving as an ecclesiastical leader in Ephesus. The Apostle Paul saw himself as a mentor to Timothy as expressed in his words, [to Timothy, my dear son]. Timothy was an experiential learner who needed the ongoing guidance of a mature leader who could guide both his life and leadership to significance.

The Scriptures declares in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”. In examining this Scripture, it seems that Christians, without exception, need someone who is older, wiser, and deeper in the things of God. At the hands of Paul, it seems clear that Timothy received a significant investment from Paul who was the classic example of a mentor.

Paul empowered Timothy for success

Hoehl (2011) states, that Paul mentored Timothy through empowerment, serving as a faithful “example of what it means to be a messenger of the gospel”. Paul’s strategy consisted in reveling to Timothy that he had been chosen by God, to be a minister, emphasizing that he was called to “serve as an example of what it means to be one of God’s workers” Hoehl elaborates,

Paul empowered Timothy by directing his attention toward the goals of ministry. Paul was focused in instilling ministry goals in his younger protégé to motivate him to endure hardships he might encounter.

Paul's strategy for empowerment included the development of relationships. As such, he succeeded when he took Timothy under his tutelage, just as he did with Titus, Luke, Silas, and Onesimus, whom Paul introduced in his letter to Philemon, not as a slave but as his “son”

Stanley and Clinton (2006:133) argue that “The scripture validates Paul’s modeling style as a means of empowering others”. Paul, who was considerably older than Timothy, his son in the faith, made a significant investment in Timothy’s life and his pastoral ministry by being an example to him.

It is worth noting that Paul’s strategy for the church was focused on training the saints for the work of ministry. In Ephesians 4:12 Paul exhorts the church to, “equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”. Often, one fails to realize how important are healthy marriages for the church, the family and the community. In trying to address healthy marriages, Tucker (2015: 223) states that "having a spiritual mentor

is something every Christian need," but one must be honest in recognizing the need for mentoring and act.

Paul's passion was to see Timothy fulfill his call.

Oney (2007) suggest that the Apostle Paul may well have had fundamentally two driving motivators in his life. "His first and foremost passion was to live intimately knowing Christ his Lord (Phil. 3:7-11) and secondly to see everyone completely in Christ (Col.1:28). Paul's love and passion was to see Timothy fulfill his life's call and ministry.

Tucker (2015:224) expand on these principles, explaining that, without a doubt Paul provided Timothy an amazing platform for his life and ministry. Explaining him, that after meeting Jesus, his whole life had been woven with his desire to imitate Jesus, especially during a time of first century Mediterranean standards that did not value people for what they had become, but by the place in society into which they were born.

Paul modeled transparency

Paul was a transparent leader; in every aspect of his life, Paul developed authenticity, thus his faith and values were taken seriously (1Th 2:8). As Paul was willing to be transparent, modeling authenticity was an empowering tool he used to mentor Timothy efficiently. In Philippians 4:9 Paul teaches that the Christian life is a system of values that emerge from God's Word and the practice. God's Word declares: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you." As Paul traveled extensively, throughout the Roman world, he clearly emphasized the sharing of the good news, and the example of his own life. Evidently, he backed his preaching with his life's example.

Lea and Griffin (1992:200) argue that Paul modeled Timothy an example of moral behavior, and morality is best learned by observing such commitment in others. As an example, children learn morals from parents, and new Christians learn from older Christians. Lea and Griffin, put this in context expressing that, ultimately, moral behavior cannot be taught by character building courses in public schools. Lea and Griffin further elaborate, that Paul was not ashamed to present himself approved. Paul had no doubt that his behavior was worth imitating. "Christian leaders need to have a commitment to Christ, in a way that they can say in humility, if you want an example to follow, look at me".

Paul challenged Timothy

Tucker (2015:224) elaborates that, in many instances, throughout the relationship Paul urged Timothy to step to the task. Undoubtedly, that must have been overwhelming for Timothy, his hero had grown older and probably near his last days. As one can observe, 2 Timothy, contained Paul's last words to a faithful worker, Timothy. Just as Joshua stood up to the test to enter the promise land; life after Moses (Jos 24). This time, Timothy was going to step up to his biggest challenge yet; life after Paul.

Paul identified himself with the real-life problems concerning the church in Galatia and urged them "to bear each other's burdens". In like manner, Paul continually expressed individual attention for his protégé. One can see that Paul's concern is evident in his first pastoral letter, 1 Timothy 4:15 declares, "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress". Paul challenged Timothy to pass onto others the matters of faith especially as it relates to faith in Jesus Christ, and urged him to prove himself a true servant of God. To accomplish this, Timothy needed to be an example in life or conduct, love, purity, faithfulness, unlike those whose lifestyle was not honoring of the Lord.

Paul poured out his life, to involve Timothy relationally and as his spiritual father he needed to imitate. Paul longed to see Timothy develop into a fine young leader 1 Timothy 4:14-15. Paul wrote to Timothy,

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

Paul devoted personal time to Timothy and urged him to practice genuine faith in Christ, to hold fast, to remain faithful and inspire others to do the same. 2 Timothy 2:2, *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Paul urged Timothy to equip leaders who would be faithful to God's truth, teaching them to be faithful, as he had been taught. Paul had directed similar instructions to Titus in Titus 1:5-7

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Titus 2:2 is an examination of how men ought to live, this become apparent when men do follow God's instruction in his Word. Titus 2:3 is a call to mature women to powerfully affect the church one person a time. Paul's directive urges adult women not to wander away as if they have no responsibility in the church. Paul's urgent appeal to Titus gives ample reason to believe that mentoring has always been part of God's blueprint

for weaving together the lives of his people. The passage gives the picture of Paul entreating Titus, to teach older women so they can teach and train younger women in “what is good.” Mentors can bring perspective and objectivity into one’s life specially at times when personal difficult decisions need to be made. Titus 2:2-4 declares:

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children.

In view of Paul’s teaching, older women ought to become mentors and teachers to the upcoming generation of women by setting an example of moral principles of godly living, regarding family and home. Paul’s exhortation indicates that teaching godly living to future generations is not an option, it is rather a primary responsibility. Titus 2:5 declares, “so that no one will malign the word of God”. Titus 2:8 “so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us”.

Evidently, Paul’s mandate to Titus is to train the godly mature women of the church, not all women, to devote themselves in a very personal way to the modeling of principles and respectable conduct that only a woman can pass onto another woman. Duncan and Hunt (2006:161) point out that Titus 2:3-5 goes beyond the action of pairing older women and younger women. Paul’s directive should be part of a covenant life. “it is a part of the strategy for the Christian education of the church”. Duncan and Hunt explains: the term “older” does not necessarily refers to age, it also implies a spiritual maternal maturity.

4.3 Biblical foundation for marriage mentoring

The Old Testament teaches that God created man not to be alone, but to have a companion to whom join as husband and wife. The Scriptures affirm that God caused a deep sleep in Adam, and out of Adams' side God took a rib and formed his wife Eve. Gen. 2:21 states,

So, the LORD caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

Evans (2012:30) explains that, God created Eve from Adam's rib, a bone near Adam's heart, which speaks of affection and companionship, and not from a bone anywhere else in Adam's body. (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). After God created the first couple, a key principle one must understand is that God commanded man to leave his father and his mother. This does not mean abandon them, but rather that in a covenant marriage relationship a wife takes priority over any other relationship.

Similarly, the New Testament also speaks of the marriage covenant and admonishes husbands to love their wives and live with them in understanding ways. (1Pe. 3:7). To that end, Ephesians 5:32-33 sets a strong biblical principle for marriages declaring:

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

What this informs husbands and wives, is that marriages can thrive when wives are respectful of their husband and husbands love their wives. In

addition, the book of Romans teaches that sin is the single greatest hindrance to any relationship, including marriages. Romans 5:12 declares

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

Further, the Bible in numerous occasions offers counsel for any relationship degraded by sin including marriage relationships. This is encouraging for Christians who want to build their marriages in the word of God, in the midst of a system of values that is not only contrary to the word, but which welcomes sin.

Biblical principles to consider when developing a marriage mentoring strategy

- Marriage mentors should be well grounded and have a strong personal relationship with God.
- Marriage mentors should guard their own marriages and make it a high priority to seek counsel themselves when necessary.
- Marriage mentors should focus on being disciples of Christ their priority.

What is a marriage mentor?

A marriage mentor isn't necessary a pastor, a counsellor, or a marriage expert. Marriage mentors are couples with a heart for marriages who understand that it is vitally important to model biblical principles to their mentees to demonstrate Christianity in action. According to Parrott and Parrott (2006:40) in marriage mentoring, it all comes down to having a relatively healthy marriage; they further argue that,

Both you and your spouse need to be in a healthy place to be effective. After all, your relationship is the most important

ingredient of the mentoring process. If one of you is suffering from anything that is preventing your relationship from being as healthy as it should be, you should need to give it more time.

In a marriage mentoring relationship mentors can play an important role in bridging the gap between mature experienced couples (mentors) and the less experienced couples (mentees) facilitating empowerment, growth and development. In this partnership, the marriage mentor usually sets the agenda around the pupil's needs, and goals, and in the process, guide such couples to higher levels of development and accomplishment. A mentor is one who knows life, and uses his or her skills to sharpen others. Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:18) claim that no matter where one is today, one will find men looking for a guide, a trainer, a model or an advisor of some sort, "someone who knows life".

Evans (2012:30) affirms that marriages that are standing are those built on the foundation of God's word. 1 Corinthians 10:4 declares. *For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanies them, and that rock was Christ.* The world around continues to change, but Jesus never changes. When couples submit to the Word, their marriages can find deeper and meaningful relationships with God and withstand the test of time. In the words of Engstrom and Rohrer (2005:94)

In every act of mentoring, we aren't helping anyone if we are conveying to them something that isn't scriptural, something distorted, or something from the top of our heads. A scriptural mentoring must be on track with the word of God.

Evans and Evans (2012:31) argue that every marriage has a 100 percent chance of success, because marriage is a divine institution ordained by

God, and everything that God has ordained can't fail, provided God's design for marriage is followed. This however, implies that couples must work hard, at "caring for and cherishing your spouse, it means doing what you have promised". On the other hand, if couples reject God's design, marriages will fail, because "marriages work if couples do them God's way".

To prevail in a culture of low morality, low values and "disposable marriages" one must first and foremost anchor one's marriage in the rock who is Jesus. Matthew 7:24 declares: *Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.* Rainey and Rainey (2008) argue that having a sound biblical Christian perspective of marriage is vitally important as couples fight the current trends of a society which at all costs tries to redefine the institution of marriage. A biblical Christian perspective is also crucial for couples who want to preserve and strengthen marriages and turn the tide of brokenness into successful marriages and healthy families.

Keller and Keller (2011:28) point out that "the Bible begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve, and ends in the book of revelation with a wedding of Christ and the Church". The biblical marriage is God's idea, it happens when a man and a woman become one, for fellowship, partnership, and procreation of mankind. Genesis 1:28 declares:

God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Evans and Martin (2012:19) argue that,

Any couple, regardless, the baggage they bring to the table, can rebuild a strained and broken marriage, into a love affair that is stronger and more passionate than the days of their honeymoon.

Further, Evans and Martin argue that couples can experience a biblically based marriage that is “divorce-proof, affair-proof, boredom-proof, and even Satan-proof”, if they follow God’s biblical principles in Genesis 2:24-25, which are repeated by Jesus in Mathew 19: 5 and Mark 10:7-8.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined Paul’s mentoring model as demonstrated in his mentoring relationship with his “son” in the faith Timothy. From the study, it was learned that Paul’s primary concern was to, 1) identify the right candidate for the pastoral task God had deposited in Timothy. Next, 2) Paul made sure he empowered and equipped Timothy. Subsequently, when Paul realized that the time of his departure was near, it was necessary to equip a successor, “to walk in Paul’s shoes was no simple task”, he needed to equip a successor.

Paul served as an example of accountability, in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 Paul challenged the Corinthian church, to see him as their model, when he wrote:

Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Chapter 4 also examined the biblical foundation for marriage mentoring. It was learned that Genesis teaches that “marriage is designed by God to be

a total sharing of life between a man and a woman". Evans (2012:65) elaborates that, unfortunately, Adam's sin of disobedience marred the marriage experience and man's relationship with God and others. Today, marriages are under a constant spiritual warfare; the Christian community at large, must be aware that Satan's strategy has not changed.

Chapter 5

Marriage mentoring strategy

5.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the theological support for marriage mentoring, from the perspective of men and women of God who gave others the benefit of their experience. As an example, Paul and Barnabas, Nahomi and Ruth in the book of Ruth, Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:1. Further, this chapter highlights key elements of the data collection process, followed by an analysis and interpretation of the empirical results reported by participants through the interviews and survey questionnaire. Additionally, elements of marriage mentoring that would serve the needs of the Hispanic Ministry were examined. God's will for marriages expressed in Genesis 2:24-25 was also addressed.

5.2 Theological foundation for marriage mentoring

From the beginning of creation, God ordained marriage to be a holy union between a man and a woman. Once God created all things pertaining to the heavens and earth the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

Genesis 2:18 declares: The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Right after God's creation, one finds God in Genesis 2 engaged in a mentoring relationship with Adam. Undoubtedly, God anticipated Adam's limitations, provided him guidance

and brought him a help meet, equal in status, to set an example for a teacher – protégé relationship.

God's will for marriage was clearly revealed to mankind in Gen 2:24-25. These words are so fundamental, that Jesus quoted them when he was confronted by the Pharisees, concerning his standing on divorce, in Mathew 19:8-9. Likewise, Paul cited the same words, when he addressed the Ephesian congregations concerning marriages, Ephesian 5:31. *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.* It is unfortunate, however, that the propagation and escalation of sin in humans has spoiled the marriage experience, as well as the rest of the creation. Thus, matters went from bad to worse when sin spread, wounding creation and all things in it.

Evans and Martin (2012) illustrate the purpose of marriage from God's perspective, that is, to be a long-lasting covenant relationship. Evans and Martin postulate that God established marriage at the beginning of human history. Gods plan was and always will be, that marriages succeed. In sum, whatever God divinely ordained is destined to triumph, if marriages follow God's design for marriage expressed in Genesis 2:24-25.

When God instituted marriage, He wanted it to be a bond in which husband and wife would work together in harmony and unity to preserve and maintain the prosperity of the institution of marriage. In a sense, God desire that husbands and wives, become teammates not opponents (Gen 24:25). Marriage mentoring can be an alternative for couples to be teammates, to grow closer and stronger in their marriages. Marriage mentoring offers a connection, between mentor couples and mentees couples, to build up stronger marriages.

Beaubelle (2008) views highly the spiritual value of the marriage covenant suggesting that, for God's people, marriage carries an even greater significance. God has elevated marriage beyond its original human purpose by using it as a symbol for the relationship between Christ and His church. In both the Old and New Testament, Christ is represented as the husband or bridegroom, and the church, or Israel as his bride.

The importance of marriage to God's spiritual purpose cannot be understated. Dettman (2010:11) observes that, "developing a healthy marriage starts with a promise to grow a well-built union with God through Jesus Christ". Dettman continues to affirm that, to experience a sense of closeness in marriage, "it is vital that couples understand the very heart of the Gospel message". Murphy and Dettman (2011:11) evaluate models of mentoring found in the Bible, as an example, Jesus and his disciples in Matthew 4:19, Paul and Barnabas in the book of Acts 13-15:35, Nahomi and Ruth in the book of Ruth 1:11-18, Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:1.

Parrott and Parrott (2014:235) claim that it is worth the effort getting involved in marriage mentoring. This means that in addition to helping a couple who is going through difficult times, something wonderful happens. That is, the mentor couple benefits as well. Parrott and Parrott comment that, "there is also an overwhelming sense of having done good, of helping a couple build a love that will last a lifetime". This is what Parrott calls: "The boomerang effect of marriage mentoring" which means that once you take the time to listen the concerns of another couple, you will be refreshed by the mentoring relationship. "Almost by osmosis, the vitality for marriage that a new couple enjoys will begin to rub off on you". Parrott and Parrott comment that, simply being around their energetic spirits "will revive and rejuvenate your own marriage".

Genesis 2:24 reveals the phrase that helps understand God's mandate to man to leave his father and mother. *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*". Evans (2012:31) points out that these words are "so important concerning marriage that Jesus quoted them to the Pharisees, when they confronted him concerning his view of divorce". Christian couples should be reminded that marriage is not a contract with an institution; it is a covenant, first with God and second, with another person. Those who ridicule the institution of marriage and declare it old-fashioned, have yet to understand that marriage comes from God as the strong bedrock of successful societies. As Evans explains, "in a covenant relationship you say to your spouse I take you because God brought you to me"

Evans (2012:56) claims that, when couples enter a covenant of marriage, they take an obligation to their covenant partner. "The two become one and are promising, symbolically, that what happened to those sacrificial animals belonging to Abraham will happen to either of them if they don't keep the marriage covenant". What is more, the witness to this holy promise, is none other than the covenant-making and keeping God. Mark 10:9 declares: *Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate*. That is, once you make a marriage commitment you are, in a covenant, selfless, permanent, interdependent, and mutual relationship.

God's view about marriages, compels the church to keep marriages ministries in the right perspective. God ordained marriages; the first couple united in matrimony, was clearly God's biblical case for marriage, and the pattern for humans to follow. Paul's biblical mandate of "teaching what is good" (Tit. 2:3) is a good reminder for the church to look at marriage with fresh eyes. If the Hispanic Ministry want to energize and equip marriages with the tools needed to take other Christian "under their tutelage", it must invest in marriage ministries teaching what is good. Paul writes in II

Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ".

5.3 Data collection process

The overall purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative study to examine more deeply the issues impacting marriages, their life experiences, challenges, their triumphs, as well as to discover ways to strengthen marriages in the Hispanic Ministry. The guiding research question for this study is: How can a marriage mentoring ministry in the Hispanic Ministry address the challenges couples face to strengthen the institution of marriage?

Data collection method

The methods used for data collection for this qualitative study consisted primarily of:

- **Interviews** were conducted with selected participants who were unable to respond to the questionnaire in writing.
- **A questionnaire** was distributed to 16 couples. The purpose was, to obtain the stories behind the participants' experience in relation to the 15 questions of the survey.

Sample participants frame

Northwest Church, Hispanic Ministry count with about 25 married couples, who share significant things in common, like: language, culture and faith. For this study, however, it was decided to collect information from a representative sample of 16 couples. The pool of participants included older, and younger couples, divided in two groups: the relatively inexperienced couples and a second group formed by seasoned and more experienced couples, who have shown a solid Christian walk and a healthy

marriage relationship. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:294) in qualitative research “*purpose sampling or purposive sampling*” is important to determine approximately how many participants will participate in the study, also to assess the criteria selected, such as level of education age, sex, race etcetera.

5.4 Data analysis and data interpretation

Process:

In qualitative research, the analysis of data is a step necessary to summarize the information collected. In this study, 3 recommended interactive steps were followed: (1) Become familiar with data through reading of the material. (2), Examine the data in depth to provide detail description of the setting and participants. (3) Focus on new information, and new ideas that emerged from the participants. (Faharul 2017)

The first objective of the questionnaire was to examine some of the problems that affect marriage relationships in the Hispanic Ministry and assess to what extent a ministry of marriage mentoring can be a useful tool to support married couples to enrich their relationships.

Data analysis

Summary of key findings.

This summarizes the information collected and reports the meaningful findings, collected from the survey. In this summary, each response was translated as accurately as possible. A few questions were left unanswered, while a few unintelligible. Some direct quotes from the participants support the summary of the data thus described below. The full questionnaire is available in presented as an appendix.

- a. **Egocentrism.** Egocentrism seem to be a top concern for the couples. Some couples felt that they find themselves in a constant

struggle to overcome the evil of selfishness. Typically, to make changes from a life of self-centeredness requires lots of work, sacrifice, and constant prayer from both spouses.

- b. **Unrealistic motives.** A significant number of church members, including couples, were not born in Christian homes, as a result, they come to church with the world view established by their ancestors. “some husbands feel that they are entitled to be served by their wives, and share little or no responsibility in the house chores”. One couple commented that “unfortunately, these are traits, some spouses learned from day to day interaction with their parents and passed on into married life.” Though this is not generalized pattern, but some few isolated cases, education is needed to correct this way of thinking, that affect marriages.

- c. **Stronger discipleship.** Training is imperative in the Hispanic Ministry. One couple remarked that: “in dealings with couples and especially with families, we have become acquainted of the need for mentoring assistance. “liberalism is a big problem”. Another spouse commented: “my wife and I have always tried to share the Christian values starting within our family, and then to others”.

- d. **Structured or unstructured mentoring.** There is no apparent preferred method of mentoring that would work for all. Some couples indicated that “they favor structured mentoring while other feel that casual unstructured mentoring would work for them”.

- e. **Mature couple’s** (not necessarily in age). For mature couples, the preference is structured mentoring, example: “mentoring which involves structured meetings, specific goal setting for example, would work for us, over an unstructured or casual style of mentoring”.

- f. **Confidentiality and mutual trust are key factor.** Both spouses need to trust and respect each other, and keep to themselves sensitive information about their personal life. One key factor of marriage mentoring which preferred by couples is “honesty and transparency”.

- g. **Mentoring needs to be promoted.** One finding is that even though almost all participants feel that mentoring is a useful tool, some believe that unless mentoring is promoted by higher levels of leadership, this ministry will have difficulty getting started. One participant mentioned that "we are accustomed to doing what leadership promotes." Another couple pointed out that, "we move slowly, if leadership does not promote mentoring, rather urgently, the motivation could slow down".

- h. **Ongoing discipleship for couples.** The Hispanic Ministry is a relatively new church, some couples believe new believers, need ongoing discipleship classes. Couples also feel that “consolidations classes are necessary to stablish the biblical foundation for couples to succeed as followers of Christ”.

- i. **Men’s retreats.** Further, the data found that “participation and attendance to men’s retreats, women’s retreat, are key to flourish as new Christians”. Couples feel that these elements are essential, prior to understanding the values of the biblical marriage and its purpose for mankind.

- j. **Gods’ plan for marriage.** According to the data collected, couples are interested in learning how to develop meaningful relationships with the Lord, and how to understand the marriage from God’s

perspective. Couples believe that it is “important to be trained, with scripture in hand. For those skeptical, “reinforce even more God’s plan for marriage as laid out in Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:18-24”.

- k. **Training for couples to develop close relationships.** According to the data collected, couples expressed that, “they are interested in learning how to develop meaningful relationships with the Lord and how to understand marriage from God's perspective”.
- l. **How to develop strong families.** Further, couples felt that God expect them to be good examples in the local church. Couples felt that they are “open letters”. They feel that the rest of the congregation are watching them closely. Couples also felt that, “when marriages struggle, the families will struggle as well, strong marriages translate to strong families, and consequently strong churches”.
- m. **Understanding of God’s plan for marriage.** One couple pointed out that “without understanding of God’s plan for marriage, nothing will stand. Mathew 7:24-29 teach about the wise and foolish builders. That gives a strong lesson to marriages”. “If our marriages are built on the rock, which is Jesus, our marriages will stand, on the contrary, if our marriages are built on sand they will perish”.
- n. **Marriage mentoring must be Bible based.** In general, the couples felt that a mentoring program that is “aligned with the teaching for marriage in the Bible and include prayer for God’s hand of guidance, will certainly meet the needs of couples, especially those whose marriages are in need”.
- o. **Foster reconciliation.** In summary, the couples felt that without understanding God’s plan, marriages will break apart. More

importantly, is to take ownership of God's mandate for marriages. What that means according to couples is: love one another, respect one another, reconcile with one another as many times as necessary.

- p. **Marriage mentoring is welcomed.** For the most part, the data collected revealed that marriage mentoring is very welcome. "As a ministry, it would add another dimension of specific care to the needs of marriages in the Hispanic ministry".

Data interpretation process

In qualitative research data interpretation is an attempt to find meaning and sense of the data once it has been analyzed. Silverman (2011) offers simple rules for data analysis as follows:

- 1) Get down to analysis as early as possible and avoid 'busy' work
- 2) Avoid too early hypotheses and seek to see where your analysis is leading in order to establish a hypothesis
- 3) Do not look for telling examples but analyze your data thoroughly and fairly
- 4) Initially, focus on a small part of your data and analyze it intensively; there will be time later to test out your findings on your data set as a whole
- 5) Try to focus on sequences (of talk, written material or interaction)

Based on the interpretation of the data provided, a series of ideas and concerns were highlighted, listed as follows:

Data interpretation:

- Data collected suggest that couples welcome the idea of connecting stable couples as marriage mentors with mentee couples in need of support to generate understanding and solutions to issues impacting their marriages and to foster successful marriage relationships.
- Data collected suggest that there is significant interest in marriage mentoring that is biblically based and done wisely. Data revealed that couples who were skeptics about mentoring admitted that for marriages to find a path to success, connecting with other marriages is critical.
- The consensus of the participants indicates that before launching a mentoring ministry within the church, keep in mind that it must be done within a framework that includes biblical principles. Most importantly, understand that outside of God, spouses are the most important relationship.
- The data revealed that marriage seminar and conferences are critical alternatives to educate marriages. “The Art of Marriage”, which is a video conference available in Spanish would be a tremendous tool to strengthen marriages. Something must be done to educate couples; cohabitation is on the rise, only education can spare couples from this form of sin.
- Freedom to select model of mentoring: The data revealed that one of the elements of marriage mentoring that would serve the need of marriages in the Hispanic Ministry is the opportunity to freely select the model of mentoring of their choosing.
- Mentoring should be an empowering process, in which mentor couples facilitate the development of a less experienced couple to

overcome their problems. Mentoring couples should aim at empowering their mentees while helping them to overcome their marital difficulties. “Mentees couples should also aim at empowering others, once they have succeeded in overcoming their problems and have developed skills to succeed as mentors themselves”.

- Mentoring is welcome in view of the church’s growth. Another reason why marriage mentoring is highly welcomed, is that the participants felt that the Hispanic Ministry is growing at a rapid pace and that a mentoring ministry, would significantly enrich marriages and as such the life of the Hispanic Ministry in general.
- Some couples feel that it is important to have one-to-one teaching with couples going through these challenges, or else it will be difficult to have healthy members in the congregation, and families who can freely serve God.

Below are some of the most widely used words expressed in the questionnaire, or shared in during the interviews. These are indicative of patterns that seem to be common or resonated among couples in the Hispanic Ministry.

- Biblical marriage
- Marriage relationships
- Marriage workshops / seminars / conferences
- Connection / connecting
- Struggle, strife.
- Mentor / mentee / marriage mentoring
- Communication skills
- Separation / divorce
- Empower / empowering process

- Casual mentoring / structured mentoring

5.5 Conclusion

Chapter 5 informs primarily the story that emerged from the data, and the theological support for marriage mentoring. This study set out to investigate a concern and responded to the question. “How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages?”. The theological support for marriage mentoring was examined and it was found that though the term “mentor” or “mentoring” does not appear in the Bible, there are many examples addressing the covenant marriage as blessed and affirmed by God. In Genesis 2:24-25 God specifically affirmed the union of a man and a woman. It was also learned that God has a heart for mentoring, and that would include marriages. Keller and Keller (2011:6) claim that marriage stands apart from any other institutions addressed in the Bible. Keller and Keller explain that marriage is first and foremost a covenant union, for life, and for the “welfare and happiness of mankind”.

After conducting a survey through questionnaires and interviews to obtain a better perception of marriages, it can be said that the study answered the research question. Finally, this chapter expressed the story that emerged from the couples regarding the potential for developing a marriage mentoring strategy at the Hispanic Ministry a daughter church of Northwest Church, in the city of Falderal Way, WA.

Chapter 6

Research Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The research problem for this study originated from a valued concern that needed to be investigated-- The development of a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church, Hispanic Ministry--. This led to the research question: *How can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages?* Stanley and Clinton (2006:160) argue that, it is regrettable that many leaders “fail to identify the need for a network of significant relationships until something serious happen that reveals their aloofness and vulnerability”. A survey through questionnaires and interviews was conducted in chapter 5. The next task in this research was to present recommendations for further research. The research concluded with a list of practical recommendations to strengthen and support the marriages in the Hispanic Ministry. In the end, it would be up to the Hispanic Ministry to establish the road map and goals for marriages, and therefore determine the strategy to make marriage mentoring part of a long-term program, including time frame, resources, and knowledge required to launch a program.

6.2 Recommendations for future study

As the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires was analyzed, several focal points that would benefit from additional study were identified:

- a) *Motivation*, can be a catalyst specially for healthy couples to keep them motivated about the vision and their potential to become future marriage mentors. It is important to raise levels of motivation.

- b) *Levels of uncertainty*: It is important to dispel uncertainty and anxiety especially amongst future mentee couples skeptical or reluctant to become engaged in mentoring relationships, despite the potential benefits that mentoring would bring to their marriages?
- c) *Trust is necessary to generate interest in future studies*. It is important to develop relationships of trust between future mentor couples and mentees before genuine mentoring relationships can take place.
- d) *Discover other types of mentoring*. It is important to examine other concepts in mentoring. For example, short-term mentoring to address an immediate situation. Group mentoring, which would involve a seasoned mentor couple, matched to several mentee couples. Another potential option for further study would be distance mentoring. This would entail a mentor couple, mentoring a mentee couple in a different location.
- e) *Consider the impact of workplace mentoring*: Participation in workplace mentoring program is “alleged to be associated with a wealth of benefits for mentees and greater perceived career success, job performance and satisfaction” (Rhodes 2015).

6.3 Practical recommendations to strengthen marriages

The data collected in this qualitative study heard the voices of several married Christian couples in the Hispanic ministry. Based on the data, some of the participants felt that often time younger couples feel isolated, and asking: why aren't the older couples teaching and training them? The results showed areas of interest, and possibly the implementation of a mentoring ministry intended at enriching marriages. A growing church like the Hispanic Ministry, should consider raising the level of care for couples, through a visible mentoring ministry appropriate to the needs of marriages.

The following recommendations speak of 7 important areas or principles that can help articulate a vision for a marriage mentoring ministry among couples in the Hispanic Ministry at Northwest Church.

- 1) Identify mentor couples. Look for couples that have shown strong commitment to marriages and have a passion to see marriages enriched.
- 2) Develop mentor couples. Plan that training be provided to couples identified as potential mentors so they can support mentee couples who want to maximize their marriage relationship.
- 3) The survey results showed that couples are open to structured and unstructured mentoring opportunities as well and welcome a mentoring strategy.
- 4) Pre-marital education. Consider a strategy that address pre-marital education as an important ministry intervention. Research results showed that respondents validated the need for a ministry segment focused on pre-marriage education.
- 5) Empower a lead mentor couple to oversee the mentoring ministry as part of a concerted long-term marriage mentoring strategy.
- 6) Consider following Paul's mentoring model in 2 Timothy 2:2 which demonstrates a deliberate mentoring approach from Paul to Timothy. Survey results, showed that respondents would welcome a bible based mentoring ministry.
- 7) Foster initiative. Keep in mind that mentoring won't happen automatically. Tucker (2015:235) argues that, "Unless people

choose to take decisive action, and become interested in the lives of others as mentors or mentees, mentoring will probably not happen”.

6.4 Final research remarks

Murphy and Dettman (2011:5) claim that as more people grow up in broken homes within a culture that increasingly undervalues marriage, couples need mentors who can model strong values and who can impart successful relationship skills. Focus on the Family (2017) report that, marriages stand unique challenges and every situation that couples confront can be daunting. Nonetheless, pastoral models of mentoring relationships can play a valuable role in constructing bridges across generations, among the most experienced and less experienced couples. It is strongly recommended that the Hispanic Ministry embrace its role of instilling a culture of mentoring to empower couples to forge strong marriages with the best possible mentoring experience.

Mentoring for marriages in the Hispanic Ministry can be a realistic alternative to help them navigate the ups and downs of their relationship. It is also important that couples in Hispanic ministry embrace their role in the mentoring process. This can be done by being deliberate and supportive in working hand in hand with the Hispanic Ministry leaders, to identify development opportunities to become effective mentors to empower mentees in need of positive and substantial support.

Churches in the country are joining forces to take on the responsibility of matching younger couples with experienced mentors to help them navigate their marital journey. Bragg and Bragg (2015:162) address this point in the following observation: “churches in the New England region of the US are passionate about integrating marriage mentoring programs as an essential thread in the fabric of their churches, thus, these churches have banded

together to implement a large-scale marriage mentoring ministry that spans multiple churches in their communities”. Bragg and Bragg further comment that “couples who are going through fire, will benefit more from having a mentor couple who has also been through fire, sifted through the ashes, and risen together to heal”.

6.5 Conclusion

Regardless of faith or church affiliation marriages identify with, they all seem to experience problems which affects the family and Christ’s church as well. Studies indicate that the journey of marriage can be a challenge for most couples. The good news is that marriage ministries, have the capacity to empower and inspire. Wooden and Yaeger (2009) claim that, “many people look at mentoring as assignment, something people sign up to do at a local school”. While that kind of mentoring is important, that is only one form of it”. “Mentoring can be any action that inspires another; every time we watch someone and make a mental note about that individual’s conduct or character, we are mentoring”. This statement shows that there are innumerable opportunities for empowerment, and investment in the lives of others, and marriage mentoring is one of them.

Parrott and Parrott (2015:12) claim that “every couple marrying today is at risk. More than two hundred thousand marriages each year end prior to the couple’s second anniversary”. These figures are alarming, and local congregations must do something. Regardless of how the Hispanic Ministry chooses to support couples, a mentoring ministry will require a plan that support the couple's aspirations in the development of stronger marriages.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Objective 1. Examine some of the issues impacting marriages relationships in the Hispanic Ministry. (in quotes find the responses from the participants)

- 1) *In your opinion, what are some of the greatest needs when it comes to strengthen families at the Hispanic Ministry. How would you invest in support of these needs?*

“Families in the Hispanic Ministry need to keep themselves united to avoid internal strife, and separation issues, or children departing away from the faith”

“Facilitation of workshops on ongoing basis is a critical element to keep families united. We don’t have Sunday School, that is something missing for families”

“Attend discipleship classes, as often as the pastor requests our presence, not off and on, at our will”.

“Continually seek God in prayer, reading of the Word, worship. Best of all, lest us not forsake the assembly of ourselves together. Hebrews 11:25 “

“I would commit to study the Word, be an example to my children, and impart to them Christian values”.

“I would commit with my spouse to invest more time with our family and children. Giving priority to God, best of all, then to my spouse, next the rest of my family”.

“Plan vacation together, some couples rarely take vacation, there is no way to connect when families don’t take a yearly vacation”.

“More seminars need to be facilitated and conduct devotions for the men and the women”.

“Conduct conferences and classes focusing on children but from a biblical perspective”.

“Conduct Bible studies by levels. For example, for new believers, and on to the advanced levels of spiritual maturity”.

“During our dealings with couples and especially with families, we have become acquainted of the need for mentoring assistance. There are many reasons why, but primarily since many members in our church were not born in Christian homes”. As a result, they come to church with the customs established by their ancestors, or simply because the values they have assimilated in life, do conform to those of our current society of liberalism or according to the worldview of the system in which we live”.

“My wife and I have always tried to share the Christian values starting with our family, and then to others. We realize that this is a small step, but we wish other families will endeavor to do the same, so the word of God is advanced and gets permeated through all families in the Hispanic Ministry”.

2) *What would you say are some of the challenges impacting marriage relationships amongst couples? How do you envision coming along in support of these issue?*

“Some couples ought to show more Christian commitment, and devotion, not just show up at church when things are going bad in the home”.

“To be taught how to communicate in a healthy way”.

“Understanding each other and improve communication. Encourage others to seek help”

“Poor communication, which can cause misunderstanding, continuous friction and selfish accusation in the home”.

“Another point to consider involves wrong expectations placed on one another, fights, and strife, over insignificant matters”.

“Consider the issue of selfishness, since marriages can easily be drawn into the sin selfishness. Couples need to learn from each other and seek mutual interest”.

“Discussions, fights, intimidation, abandonment in the home, separation, including divorce”.

“One way that I would like to get involved is helping couples in the HM understand God’s plan for their marriages, or by teaching discipleship classes, with emphasis in serving others, how to pray, witnessing for Christ”.

“Motivate couples about opportunities to reach the youth, especially at-risk youth in the HM”.

“Divorce can become a detractor of the family; as is often the case, children are the first casualties from a family impacted by divorce”.

“Lack of motivation to fight against the greater destroyer of families, divorce. Young married couples going through difficult time, tend to opt for separation or worse, divorce”.

“Isolation is never the solution for couples going through tough times. The Bible commands us to fight the good fight, that includes fighting for our marriages”.

“Understanding between couples is important. When couples cohabit, communication can be a challenge among couples in this category”.

“Poor conflict resolution skills. It is well known that the issues are not conflicts, but how we handle them. Education and workshop are necessary to advance couples understanding on issues impacting their marriages”.

“Lack of communication, finances. If the couples share their problems connect them with mature couples so they can get help in those areas”.

“Lack of communication between couples, understand that marriage is one of the basis through which Christ fulfills His purpose in this world”.

“Facilitate personalized support to couples with problematic marriages”.

“Ongoing egocentrism in couples is a negative factor, impacting marriages, another is lack of respect, lack of communication, lack of commitment to the spouses”.

“It is imperative for us to have one-to-one teaching with couples going through these challenges, or else it will be difficult to have healthy members in our congregation, and eventually, families who can freely serve God”.

“Culturally, we tend to move at a slow pace, and have gotten used to do what the leadership promotes. The Hispanic Ministry can have good future but it will depend on the visibility given by the leaders”. “We are used to doing what the Leadership promotes”

3) *Do you think that trained marriage mentor couples could provide mentee couples a safe and reliable environment to discuss marriage relationships problems?*

“Yes, but mentor couples must have capacity to build good rapport with mentees and ability to develop a biblical mentoring philosophy”.

“Yes, we are currently working with a marriage mentor, with the Anglo church. Also, because it helps with accountability”.

“I think mentor couples would be very helpful to mentees couples, however mentees couples need to realize that there is no perfect couple and placing too much expectation on mentors couples isn’t realistic. Regarding the issue of trust, I think it is possible to build an environment of mutual trust”.

“Provided there is an environment of trust on both parties, and mutual respect, I think mentoring can become a secure space to discuss marital issues”.

“Yes, I think so, but the mentor couple need to assure the mentee couple that they will be in a safe and secure environment always. For example, a male must never provide mentoring to female mentee alone, nor discuss his personal marriage problems with a female mentee”.

“Mentor couples need to establish a good foundation of trust and respect to allow the mentee a safe and secure environment through the mentoring process”.

“We don’t trust people that we barely know, let alone, share our marriage problems with them. They need to gain my trust first, and if they are not trained mentors, I’d rather be helped with prayer and occasional advice”.

“We don’t have trained mentors. Do we? If we have some, I’d like to meet them”.

“Yes, I think a mentoring program would help a lot. Many Christian marriages in America seem to end in divorce, the evil of divorce, does not make exceptions”.

“Yes, because all marriages often go through tough challenges. In our opinion it is possible that mentor couples provide an environment of trust to a mentee. By the grace of God, we can do it, but you need to build an environment of trust and vulnerability to do so.

Objective 2. Examine some key elements of marriage mentoring that would serve the needs of marriages at the Hispanic Ministry.

- 4) *What key elements of marriage mentoring do you think would serve the needs of the Hispanic Ministry? Please explain.*

“Confidentially and mutual trust is a key factor, both parties need to trust and respect each other, and keep to themselves sensitive information about their personal life”.

“Mentoring should be an empowering process, where mentor couples facilitate the development of a less experienced couple to overcome their problems”.

“Mentor couples should aim at developing their mentees while helping them to overcome their marital problems”.

“Mentees couples should also aim at empowering others; once they have succeeded in overcoming their own problems and become able to develop the skills to succeed as mentors themselves”.

“Empathy is essential, mentor couples must find ways to put themselves in the mentee’s place if they truly want to be effective mentors”.

“Marriage mentoring should be about lending a listening ear to a mentee couple who need someone to listen to their challenges and concerns”.

“One key factor of marriage mentoring is honesty and transparency. Mentor couples should never present themselves as saviors, therapy providers, trained counselors, social workers or something like that”.

“Marriage mentoring must encourage mentee couples to take ownership of their mentoring progress, so they can develop and mature and look at some point to mentor other marriages”.

“Training is important, but it must be according to the Bible, if we are not properly trained, how can we be successful? that will be impossible. We don’t think people is naturally born to be mentors. Personally, we are not aware of who has been trained in marriage mentoring, though we may be wrong”.

“It is important to have clear direction on what this is about and what we are supposed to accomplish in this ministry”.

“Marriage mentor couples have struggles of their own as well, they need to be supported and valued as well. They are humans and have no perfect marriages, so it is important to cover them in prayer regularly”.

“If possible, mentees should have a choice, with whom to be paired, in a mentoring relationship. Random matching won’t work well, in our opinion”.

“That the couples be provided with seminars and workshops on marriage, this would help a lot”.

“Marriage mentoring must be biblical, if we depart from biblical teaching it will not be successful. We must seriously consider addressing mentoring from a biblical perspective, not from the secular angle, that would be a mistake. If couples are cohabitating, they need to be told that such behavior is not right. They need to marry, and follow the Bible. Couples need to understand the importance to keep the sanctity of marriage. Mentoring can be a tool to push that thinking into perspective”.

“Understand the role each spouse has as an individual in the marital relationship”.

“Teaching the couples considering marriage, what marriage covenant entails, before being married, this will translate to healthy families and better societies”.

5) In your judgment, what are some of the important concerns worth confronting to strengthen marriages in the Hispanic Ministry?

“Apathy and lack of interest of couples in trouble to look for help when the marriage relationship is going sour, or is too late”.

“Absence of spiritual direction by the husband who don’t understand his role as a leader of the home”.

“In the context of the Hispanic Ministry it would be worth considering a long-term strategy to enrich marriages, not necessarily marriage mentoring. Nonetheless, marriage mentoring is a good way to start, not everything”.

“Overwork, some spouses seem to distance from each other due to overwork, or due to working over the weekend, missing the fellowship of the believers and the impartation of the Word”.

“Misconceptions and misunderstanding around minor issues which can escalate. Misconceptions, can also contribute to the wrong perspective on each other”.

“The in-laws. Disproportionate attachment to in-laws causes friction in marriages. By nature in the Hispanic culture, in-laws are almost revered, this can cause friction in some marriages if the relationship with in-laws is not managed appropriately”.

“People shop church often. They come to our church, stay here for a while, and if they see something they don’t like they leave, for apparent no reason”.

“Low church attendance. This is an issue, if couples don’t make a habit to attend church regularly, their spiritual lives will be poor as well. I notice the church filled sometimes, but other times to my amazement, couples are absent. That is understandable since some couples have jobs that force

them rotate shifts on weekends, or their job schedules change without notice”.

“Inform the couples that are having problems, that there is hope, that they can reestablish their marriage, with some extra help. Moreover, with the help that comes from God”.

“Recognize the true purpose of the family, that Jesus designed the family to impact society”.

“Recognize and embrace God's plan and design for marriages, join in God's purpose for marriages, work in agreement to strengthen and equip marriages”.

6) Do you think that a formal and structured marriage mentoring program would work in the context of Hispanic Ministry? Please explain why.

“No, an effective program is one that would combine elements of both formal and informal mentoring relationships”.

“Yes, a structured mentoring program can work, but it will take the cooperation of husband and wife to work”.

“Sometimes, what couples need is support to grow spiritually and affirm themselves in the Lord, either in a formal setting or in an informal lunch after service. Another method of mentoring could be through daily conversations over the phone, or more formally through Bible study in a small group”.

“I don't think a structured program is the answer, Hispanics by nature are not inclined to structure, that is painful to admit. Further, a challenge with

the couples is that couples are busy with their works, raising their families. Personal issues like health, financial issues, immigration issues which in some cases include fear of what the future holds for some couples”.

“For some marriages structured mentoring would work. Some folks like structure, not everyone. However, some couples are too preoccupied with lots of things and there isn’t time for structure”.

“I think it would, but it would need to start with education. Culturally we tend to be casual people and for structured programs to work, we need to see good examples of what a structured marriage mentoring looks like”.

“It does matter to me if we do something for marriages, couples will have different preferences. I personally can adapt to both dynamics, provided you select good marriage mentors, that know what they are talking about and understand the basic needs that some couples are struggling with. In my opinion, marriage mentoring is still a rather untested dynamic, but I think it would improve marriages, regardless the structure. I observe that some couples are in dire need to have someone to talk to, or to get an advice from the Bible on marriages. It short, marriage mentoring would be a life saver”.

“We have never been a culture that advocates for structure, we prefer to handle matters in a less rigid way. That is only our opinion, we may be wrong. However, things change overtime, and cultures are not immune to changes too”.

“Yes, of course, because by sharing our own experiences, a structured program could be enriched”.

“Once a structured program is formally established, the couples in conflict, would know where and how to appeal in case problems in their marriages arise”.

“We believe that the potential of such a program is very good and could work depending on the kind of value and commitment that is given”.

7) In your opinion, would marriage mentoring that takes place casually, unofficially or spontaneously, serve better the needs of the Hispanic Ministry? why?

“Probably, but for casual mentoring to work, couples need to be truly valued and provided with the support they need. If mentees don’t perceive that they are valued by their mentors, they won’t open their hearts to share their problems”.

“Yes, I think it would, we both like spontaneous mentoring, because it doesn’t feel rehearsed, it feels natural”.

“To some degree, casual mentoring could work for some even better, but in general, couples aren’t too familiar with marriage mentoring at all”.

“I am confused to some degree since I’ve been hearing the word mentoring thrown all over. It looks like any type of teaching or discipling here is called mentoring. So, what exactly is marriage mentoring?”.

“Yes, it could be better, because we don’t have time for too much structure, at least for now while we look for some form of structure in the future”.

“I wouldn’t be surprised, culturally we are inclined to casual settings, plus we don’t have time for too much structure”.

“Provided we stick to it, and follow up, otherwise we never get to do anything”.

“We are well-known for getting too involved, and am afraid that even casual mentoring would have some problems of its own, lack of ownership and not knowing where to start”.

“No, because there must be a structure, and a follow-up that allows enriching and extending the program”.

“We believe that something casual, unofficial and spontaneous mentoring only helps temporarily to serve the needs of Hispanic Ministry marriages. The needs of marriages are daily and involve a lifetime to serve them”.

Objective 3. Help marriages understand the value of the biblically based marriage, so they can remain committed to their marriage covenant.

8) In Genesis 2:18-24, the Bible gives a high place to the covenant marriage, what do you picture in your mind when you think about the biblical view of marriage?

“From the Scripture we learn that God, honors the marriage covenant, between a man a woman, this is important to understand. There is no other model. Biblically speaking, God stablishes in Genesis 2: 18-24 the only model for marriage”.

“The Hispanic Ministry is rather new; some couples are new Christians. Myself for example, need more basic discipleship classes. Nonetheless, I

have participated in several retreats, and attended several discipleship classes. One thing for sure is my belief in the biblical marriage of a man and a woman. I cannot conceive any other model that will be biblical, unless as indicated”.

“Coming from catholic background, it was taught to me, even before having a personal relationship with the Lord, and not married yet, that the marriage covenant is between a man and a woman. I was also taught, as a single person, that cohabitation was not oaky. That said, when I reflect on the biblical marriage the idea that comes to mind is what God stablished in the book of Genesis Chapter 2, nothing else”.

“To me, the biblical marriage is what count, we were married by the justice of the peace as unbelievers, several years back. Now, as believers, we made the choice to marry with the blessing of the church and the body of believers. This was a great step, as it truly made us feel that what we were missing came to pass. We needed to witness to other couples that are in the same situation, married by a judge, but now have become believers in Christ, and want to be married in the church and experience God’s blessing.

“To me, marriage seen biblically is more that the union of a man and a woman, is a covenant that can’t be broken. A covenant is not a business contract. A contract can be nullified, or replaced, that is the big difference”.

“For our marriage is important. In Genesis 1:28 and 2:24 Jesus provided the foundation of marriage. What Jesus says is that since God has joined us together we should not separate, because God hates divorce. Malachi 2:16”.

“That it is the greatest relationship given by God to humanity after a personal relationship with Him. If we want to triumph in our marriages, we

will have to give a great esteem to this covenant relationship and not take it lightly. This covenant exemplifies the relationship of Christ with His church”.

9) *How important is it for your marriage that couples understand God’s special plan for marriages? In your opinion, what does God expect of marriages?*

“It is very important. If couples don’t appreciate God’s plan for their marriages, they are missing a key truth necessary to build a godly marriage and a robust family”.

“It is very important, without understanding God’s plan, marriages will break apart, but more important than just understanding it is important to take responsibility of God’s mandate for marriages. Love one another, respect one another, reconcile with each other, as many times as needed. God expect that couples be examples in the local church, we as couples are key factor for developing robust families. When marriages struggle, our families will struggle as well. Strong marriages translate to strong families, and consequently strong churches”.

“First and foremost, what God expects of my marriage is a commitment to keep my marriage vow, which I pronounced at the altar when we promised each other to be faithful in richer or poorer, until death do us part”.

“What God expects from marriages is commitment for one another, “until death do us part. Some Christians can’t stand the challenges, when things go wrong they divorce. Divorce is going on like never before, not in the HM, but some couples separate”.

“Without understanding of God’s plan for marriage, nothing will stand. Mathew 7:24-29 teaches about the wise and foolish builders. That gives a strong lesson to marriages. If our marriages are built on the rock, which is

Jesus, our marriages will stand. On the contrary, if our marriages are built on sand, they will perish”.

“God expects that our marriages grow in love, care for one another, stay committed to each other. Ephesians 4:32 encourages us to forgive one another, just as Christ forgave us”.

“We need seminars on marriage, the “Art of Marriage” for example and given in Spanish. Cohabitation is on the rise, only education can spare couples from the sin”.

“It means that couples commit to each other ‘til death do us part” Roman 7:2-3; Mathew 19:4-6; Malachi 2:16”.

“It is important to understand God’s plan for marriage, because this translates into a genuine and solid church for the future”.

“It is of great importance in the times in which we live, where the institution of marriage has been underestimated and despised among Christians themselves. God expects strong marriages set in the Word of God, flourishing to be a light amidst the confusion and obscurity that the world has adopted, bringing fruit and glory to the kingdom of God here on earth”.

10) Do you think that the biblically based marriage and the well-being of couples are closely linked? How?

“In my opinion, there is a direct relationship between the wellbeing of couples and the Bible based marriage. The marriage between a man and a woman is the only model that God bestows eternal promises, no other model brings glory to God”.

“Biblical marriage works, because this is the way God planned it. It is the only marriage that works”.

“The biblical marriage is Gods original plan and is God’s channel to procreate children, raise a family and bring happiness and stability to the family nucleus”.

“I gather that there is a linkage, I think any effort to enhance marriage relationships will help. Though marriage mentoring is a rather untested dynamic, I think it would improve marriages. I observe that some couples have an imperative need to have someone to talk to, or to get an advice from the Bible on marriages. It short, marriage mentoring would be a life saver”.

“In my opinion, this is obvious, there is no other way. If you keep God’s commands for marriage, your marriage will stand in solid ground. If you break them, your marriage collapses, or worse, end in divorce”.

“In our opinion, the only path to marital satisfaction is the biblical marriage. No marriage on earth is perfect. The closer marriages get to God, the better the chances of a fulfilled relationship, not necessarily a perfect one”.

“Yes, God made it very clear how a godly marriage must function, specially avoiding the “crazy cycle”. To avoid the crazy cycle of the marriage relationship, one must consider the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:22-33”.

“That is correct, we believe in the biblical marriage and the link to the wellbeing of couples, because from the Bible comes the whole family structure”.

“Of course, we cannot experience the blessing of God by following the example of the world. Only when we accept and live according to the biblical design that we will prosper in our marriages and enjoy well-being as couples”.

11) What do you envision as a successful strategy to guide couples considering matrimony so they can understand the value marriage as a lifetime commitment?

“In my opinion, couples considering marriage should seriously consider pre-marriage mentoring, or counseling, but most importantly education on what marriage is about. This is important especially for couples who have little or no understanding of what the Bible teaches about the marriage covenant. Many couples end up divorcing after a few years into their marriage because they did not grasp, what marriage is about from a biblical perspective, and resort to what the general population is doing, finding an easy way out through divorce”.

“Constantly working and learning how to improve your marriage for the rest of your life. Learning to serve the other person”.

“Couples considering marriage must go through a structured list of classes, primarily with trained Christian elders who dominate the issue of marriage and can provide the basis for an understanding of the marriage for life”.

“One simple strategy would be a study of the Bible in genesis 2:22-4. There is no other passage in the Bible that sets the tone for marriages as a commitment for life”.

“One key strategy would be pairing up the couple with experienced mentors, for a period of several weeks prior to marriage”.

“One key strategy would be to attend a pre-marriage workshop to learn how to save a marriage before it starts”.

“Premarital education is the key, couples considering marriage, ought to go through a premarital education”.

“In addition, mentoring workshops and seminars on marriages are essential for good marriage relationships, we need them. Provide pre-marriage classes”.

“A successful strategy would be one that is Bible based and Christ lead, that is critical for marriages. Further, it would be necessary to facilitate workshops for those considering marriage”.

“Using time well, as in preparation for pre-marriage class, would bring light to those who wish to make that commitment. Teaching and exemplifying the plan God has designed for marriage from the beginning and letting the Spirit of God reveal that plan in a personal, deep, and intimate way”.

Objective 4. Hear the voices of the Hispanic Ministry couples around the potential for developing a mentoring strategy, aimed at helping marriages in the Hispanic Ministry.

Do you see the potential to develop a support network to equip mature couples so they can take on the role of marriage mentors, to help less experienced couples find a solution to their spousal conflicts?

“I honestly see a potential, but that will depend largely on the support of the leadership of the Hispanic Ministry and the education that people received about this ministry. Not many are educated in marriage mentoring, or just vaguely understand it, it gets confused with pastoral care, or counseling and people need to understand the difference”.

“I see potential, there are many good marriages, but personally am not aware of training going on, on this topic, but this is a good eye opener. I'd like to stay in touch and see if there is anything I can do to help”.

“We have some solid marriages, I think if we can impart training to these couples they could potentially be used by God to train others. Nothing is impossible”.

“My only concern is that everybody seems preoccupied in many other things, like leadership meeting, leadership training, men’s retreats, family camping. Not sure we have the capacity and strength to add some more complex ministry. It seems like we have plenty going for now”.

“Yes, the Hispanic Ministry has strong couples who can become marriage mentors. That is an observation since we joined this church”.

“What I see most is need for help, more marriages are in need of some sort of help, but, no interest in training or interest to be trained to help other marriages”.

“I have seen a group of good marriages with many years of married life on their shoulders and a solid Christian testimony. These marriages are valuable to the Hispanic Ministry and can be of great help in any ministry”.

“There is potential, but this must be promoted and encouraged by the higher levels of leadership in the Hispanic Ministry. Without their buy in, nothing will happen.

“The Hispanic Ministry has some strong couples who would help less experienced couples navigate their problems, using their personal testimony and goal setting”.

“There is potential in our church, but real commitment is needed to respond to God's call to mentoring. We also believe that it is a biblical principle to help one another”.

12)What basic recommendations would you propose for a successful marriage mentoring program, and why do you believe your proposal would work?

“It needs to start with the basics, in my opinion that is training. I mean training of couples that have shown maturity in their walk with God and in their marriages”.

“I don’t think we are ready at this point, too many things happening. Married people hardly have time for our families, that may not be the case for all”.

“At this point, I have no recommendations, I need to fix things around my household and then think how to support others”.

“I feel called to help other marriages, however feel insecure and unprepared to engage in a marriage mentoring training. My marriage is not at its best, and would not want to enter something, I rather wait a little. Therefore, I have not committed myself for the moment, but pray for those who will venture into this”.

“I took a marriage enrichment seminar some time back with the Anglo church and though this was not a marriage mentoring training, I feel that I learned some, and would like to put that to work, but evidently need training to become a mentor. My recommendation is that we start with a few couples that feel called to become mentors, have them trained. Let’s start small rather, with two or three couples and progress from there, as God leads us into the future. I think realistically, if we equip 5 couples in a year, that would be a great start. We need to start training marriage mentors, which we don’t have”.

“Stablish a committee formed by strong marriages. We need to start promoting mentoring, so everyone in the church knows that there exists a ministry dedicated to help marriages”.

“My number one recommendation is to identify couples that are truly committed, and with a solid biblical foundation. Because, as we all know, everything that is done according to the Bible is successful”.

“We believe that dedicating time to troubled couples would not only bring healing to their marriages, but also to our congregation”.

“There has never been a greater opportunity than to sow in lives that consider fulfilling one of the most sacred covenants and consequently bring Glory to God”.

“Encouraging the mentoring of marriages in our congregations would bring healing to married couples. We think that, well-structured families who are eager to serve the Lord, and therefore our congregation would benefit by running the vision of God for our marriages”.

14) If implemented, how would a marriage mentoring ministry address the challenges that couples face to strengthen the God given institution of marriage?

“We have hit some problems, especially in conflict resolutions. Marriage mentoring can help mitigate those difficulties and see conflicts with new eyes. That said, we believe our relationship would improve. We also think that a ministry that focuses on marriages, is what can save some marriages from the many conflicts couples encounter”.

“Some couples seem preoccupied with the affairs of these world, social media, or working two jobs. Some are gone from church for no apparent reason. A mentoring ministry could trigger an interest in the family and straighten the priorities in life: God, the family, church, work, etcetera”.

“A mentoring ministry is a practical step in the right direction to enrich marriage relationships, nothing can go wrong”.

“I am not sure how, there are several other ministries that can keep the families untied, and strong. However, a ministry dedicated to marriages precisely, would really lift some couples up, especially those that are having conflicts and relationship issues”.

“Our marriage relationships would have a new way for the management of our conflicts, and a guide on how to overcome them. This, of course, would be possible when marriage mentors are equipped to help other marriages”.

“It would release the pastor to dedicate himself to the main calling of his ministry. Currently, we have a tradition in the HM, that when issues arise people run to the

pastor. The responsibility of the pastor, however, is not precisely to deal with every marriage situation. The pastor has a family to attend, a message to prepare, it is impossible for him to handle everything”.

“A mentoring ministry would play a vital role in mitigating marriage issues, even the difficult cases, that sometimes lead to separation or even divorce”.

“I would recommend that those people that become marriage mentors, open their hearts to the problems some marriages face. Also, that they be open to share their own experience with the mentee couples. That said, I see a feasibility for the mentoring program, but we need to keep the momentum going. If we don’t promote the vision, any excitement present now will go away”.

“Seeking and asking for the wisdom of God, providing spiritual and personal support. Dedicating time and service to the well-being of others”.

15) If a marriage mentoring program is implemented, how would you be willing, or wanting to get involved to help marriages whether in an informal or formal mentoring setting?

“At this point, we are interested, however on a wait and see mode. My job carries me continually to various parts of the state and staying committed to something new, would not be realistic, not healthy or in the best interest of the family. We are raising children now. However, as time permits, we would prefer to back up for someone, especially on a casual form of marriage mentoring”.

“We would like to get involved, sharing our story with other married couples about how God helped us”.

“We would very much like to be involved. If you train us to be marriage mentors we will be happy to help other marriages. One area of our calling has been helping marriages and my wife and I feel the ministry of marriage mentoring is rather overdue. We are open to work in either setting depending on the situation and on

the need of the couples we would be ministering. We'd like to start on a casual setting, and as we progress in confidence and experience, move to a structured setting".

"For a ministry to thrive, people need to get involved, I am open to get involved in mentoring, the setting does not matter for now. That said, since this is new to our marriage, I would prefer to be equipped as a mentor, so I can mentor others".

"We don't want to be put into something we don't feel called now, though mentoring ministry seems like a good option for mature marriages. At this point, I must care for my family".

"I would like to do a soul-searching first, our marriage is not on solid rock yet, but the idea of helping other is something we are considering. We can't stay idle and expect others to hold the load. The pastor is too busy with the important things in the ministry. Helping the marriage is the primary responsibility of the laity, not the pastor".

"For quite some time I have wanted to work with marriages, but don't know how. I have thought about volunteering, but this talk about mentoring is keeping us excited. It shows to me that the Hispanic Ministry is determined to help marriages. With that in mind, I am open to help. I have been married for some time, and want to share my experience, that is all I can comment for now".

"Attending seminars on marriages would be a good start. Few seminars are available in Spanish".

"Formal mentoring should include a training or orientation session for both the mentor and the mentee. It's necessary to clarify roles and expectations and to give both mentor and mentee a roadmap for success".

"Formal mentoring (structured) would work better. Casual mentoring does not involve due follow up and there is the risk that it will not be taken seriously".

“We would be willing to do so; we are already facilitating a small family group at home. Although this is not mentoring, it is contributing in some way to keep some families connected”.

“We would recommend starting with a casual program, after all mentoring is a new culture for us. Connecting with a marriage mentor that we don’t know can be stressful to start with. We are not that familiar with this entire concept of mentoring, but the intention is a good one”. End of questionnaire.

Appendix B

Questionnaire cover letter

October 1, 2017

Dear Participant

Christian Greetings!

I am conducting a short survey to better understand the value of marriage mentoring.

As such, I am focusing on four main objectives, so I will appreciate your collaboration with your responses to the 15 questions in this questionnaire. You are among several couple in the Hispanic Ministry that I have identified to complete this brief survey. Your answer will help me to examine marriage mentoring proactively and determine the best ways to serve couples in the Hispanic Ministry.

Please know that your complete questionnaire is very important to be successful in this effort, therefore, your cooperation is greatly appreciated. When you have completed the questionnaire, please send it to me by email, or in person by _____ at the latest. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Ariel A. Nolasco

Appendix C

Letter requesting permission

September 25, 2017

To the Hispanic Ministry.

Senior leadership

Dear Church Leader, greetings.

I am engaged in a research project with the South African Theological Seminary, my research focuses at investigating directed at “how can a marriage mentoring ministry at Northwest Church Hispanic Ministry support couples in building skills to develop stronger marriages”?

To that end, I have written a questionnaire consisting of 15 open-ended questions, which I attach, along with a cover letter. I would like to ask the couples in the Hispanic Ministry those that are willing to cooperate, to responds to the questionnaire or meet with me in person to go through the questions in case they feel more comfortable to discuss verbally.

I am requesting permission to distribute the attached questionnaire to the couples in order to advance with the data collection phase of my study. I am hopeful that the data collected will provide valuable information toward this study and in turn to help marriages. Thanks in advance for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Ariel A. Nolasco

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