

**CAREY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

**STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE: BRIDGING EMOTIONAL CUTOFF**

BY

EDWARD ALLEN HIRD

A Doctor of Ministry Project submitted

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

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**CAREY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend for acceptance a  
Doctor of Ministry Project entitled

**STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE: BRIDGING EMOTIONAL CUTOFF**

Submitted by **EDWARD ALLEN HIRD**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **DOCTOR OF MINISTRY.**

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## ABSTRACT

How bridging emotional cutoff can strengthen marriages was the focus of this Doctoral Thesis Project. A four-evening workshop over one month on Strengthening Marriages was conducted with five currently married couples who had been previously divorced. The method for evaluating potential marriage strengthening and bridging cutoff was done through a qualitative interview conducted in person with each couple first before and then after the four-session workshop. A newly-developed Strengthening Marriage manual for the four-session workshop was produced which is transferable to other church and non-church contexts. Participants indicated that the workshop strengthened their marriage and reduced emotional cutoff through 'fresh thoughts' (43%) and conflict appreciation (19%). This research finding connects with the Family Systems Theory emphasis on clear original thinking and facing conflict as ways of strengthening marriages and bridging cutoff. There was also self-reported growth in the area of self-differentiation (11%) and marital learning (20%). This qualitative research on strengthening marriages adds to a growing body of research-based analysis, showing the benefits of Family Systems Theory. Bridging emotional cutoff through a covenantal approach is explored with particular reference to Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

Strengthening marriages through bridging cutoff has potential to bring benefit to marital life. A Family Systems Theory approach to strengthening marriage may reduce emotional cutoff through discovering strengths, honouring differences, appreciating conflict, and balancing closeness with personal space.

This Doctoral Thesis project is focused on strengthening marriages by bridging emotional cutoff. The concern is that in divorce and remarriage, people may be set up for further emotional cutoff, resulting in marital instability. Family Systems Theory holds that emotional cutoff increases future marital instability. The thesis is about the area of strengthening marriages because of the suffering and devastation on the North Shore of Vancouver when marriages disintegrate and cut off. While the North Shore represents three cities of West Vancouver, North Vancouver City, and North Vancouver District, there is a strong geographic, historic, and cultural alignment, heightened by our being separated from the rest of Greater Vancouver by the Burrard Inlet. The North Shore population is a transient culture that often increases instability to marriage. Marital pain is a deep pain that potentially affects everyone in the family emotional system. The goal of the Doctoral Thesis Project is to enable pastors and congregations to come along side people who quest for more stable and satisfying marriages. Marriage ministry is a normal part of Church life. Marriage Preparation, conducting weddings, and strengthening marriages is both part of our Church's heritage and our Church's future. Birth, marriage and death are three key transitions in life for which the Church historically has developed rituals. Weddings are times of significant life change in which clergy and the Church can be pastorally supportive. The hope is that other clergy may be able to make use of this material in pastoral coaching of married couples and those considering marriage in their congregations and community. Through strengthening marriages, genuine



hope is given to a new generation that faith and God's covenant community can make a difference in their relationships.

The covenant of marriage is God's own idea. God, as a covenant-maker, is passionate about strengthening the marriage covenant. While covenant-breaking increases marital cutoff, covenant strengthening reduces marital cutoff. God has for many years gifted our North Shore congregation in helping struggling marriages, often seeing them strengthened and restored. Taking time to strengthen marriages is good marital stewardship. Marriages are worth investing in with the best that we can offer of our time, talent and treasure. Because there is no quick fix, strengthening marriages is both costly and messy. Strengthened marriages can help strengthen families, church and society. St Simon's heart for emotionally cutoff marriages comes out of our own brokenness as a church. The St. Simon's Church family has seen much emotional cutoff over the years in our marriages. God in the last number of years has been healing us and releasing a fresh conviction that in the words of Genesis 50:20, what was meant for evil, God has meant for good. This great marital pain has not been wasted. In standing with the emotionally cutoff and covenantally-broken, there has been a rediscovery that God is good, faithful and kind. God, as covenant-maker, rescues, renews, forgives and heals, taking what is broken and making it whole. God is for the emotionally cutoff and the covenantally-broken, and not against them.

The ministry problem is an examination of the emotional cutoff of marriages on the North Shore of Vancouver. The interest in strengthening marriages began with observing declining marriages on the North Shore among both Christian and other couples. A number of the St. Simon's elders are people from divorced, remarried, and blended family backgrounds. Some of these have gone through marriage crises, then did Christian-based marriage counseling which aided in the restoration of their first or second marriage, and later became church leaders. This has given hope to other struggling marriages. It seems

like someone has to go first in working on their marriage, in order to give courage to other struggling couples. People often tragically hold back from getting marital help out of shame or fear. Strengthened marriages can give hope to the emerging generation, some of whom are ambivalent about even becoming married. Their parent's emotional cutoff and divorce are often mentioned as part of their marital hesitation. Marriage seems so uncertain and painful to them. Numerous North Shore couples are high-functioning or over-functioning at work, but are far less functional in their marriages, often resulting in emotional cutoff. The very skills that make a successful entrepreneur often backfire in the bedroom and the living room, with such people being "totally lost when dealing with intimate relationships." Bowen commented:

In another group, a section of the intellect functions well on impersonal subjects; they can be brilliant academically, while their emotionally-directed personal lives are chaotic.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of counseling agencies and practitioners on the North Shore. Some have been impacted through the Living Systems Centre (formerly called the North Shore Counseling Centre) involving Ron Richardson's pioneering work in Family Systems Theory. Also involved in marriage-related family crises on the North Shore are police, courts, schools, North Shore Family Services, and social services. The churches on the North Shore conduct weddings and marriage preparation. The stand for 'traditional' marriage' by St. Simon's North Vancouver Church, in the midst of the historic Anglican realignment, has given the St. Simon's congregation a visible platform and presence regarding strengthening marriages. As the Communications Officer for the new Anglican movement, there have

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Anderson and Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 1985), p. 85; Ron Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind* (Self-Counsel Press, North Vancouver, BC, 1984, 1995), p. 39; Murray Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," in P. J. Guerin. (Ed.), *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice* (Gardner Press, New York, NY, 1976), p. 75.

been many opportunities to reflect on TV, radio and newspaper on the meaning of marriage. St. Simon's North Vancouver has developed a reputation of being a place where many marriages have been restored over the years. Despite the high profile instability and cutoff of many current marriages, studies indicate that marriage can bring greater overall health than its relational alternatives:

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) reviewed health data gathered from more than 127,000 adults from 1999 to 2002. Regardless of age, sex, race, education, income, or nationality, married adults were least likely to be in poor health, suffer serious psychological distress and smoke or drink heavily.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, there has been the opportunity to write many marriage-related articles in the North Shore Newspapers. For 25 years in the Deep Cove Crier, there has been a monthly column to an audience of 34,000 people, and also for ten years in the North Shore News from the year 2,000 to 2010. North Shore friends and readership have given much feedback about the importance of strengthening North Shore marriages. When told that the doctoral thesis project was about strengthening marriage, they universally said that this is what the North Shore Church and pastors should be investing in.

Murray Bowen, the founder of Family Systems Theory, called emotional cutoff the "process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family". He is widely recognized even by his critics as one of the key founders of the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. In 1975, the emotional cutoff concept was added by Bowen as the second last of the eight Family Systems Theory concepts. The emotional cutoff concept was created by Bowen in order to "include details not stated elsewhere, and to have a separate concept for emotional process between the generations." Until then, emotional cutoff was seen by Bowen as a "poorly defined extension" of the

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<sup>2</sup> J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment, and Intimacy* (IVP Academic, Downer Grove, Illinois, 2006), p. 46 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005)."

concepts of the triangle and multigenerational emotional process.<sup>3</sup> Bowen's integrative creativity kept unfolding during the decades of his systemic theorizing. In adding his 'Emotional Cutoff' concept, Bowen convergently finished well. His coining of the emotional cutoff concept is an example of how Bowen was able to see the invisible systemic connections that most of us miss. The more we understand emotional cutoff, the greater opportunity we have to strengthen marriages in our congregations and communities.

The backdrop for Bowen's concept of emotional cutoff was the many young people running away from home during the 1960s. Parents were seen as the identified problem and getting away as the quick-fix solution. Emotional cutoff however unexpectedly brought the unresolved attachment issues with them to their new settings.<sup>4</sup> Bowen's assessment of the Hippie movement's emotional cutoff from their parents rings true. It may have looked to Hippies as if they were being themselves and differentiating. More often they were being their pseudo-selves rather than their core selves. Their pseudo-selves were emotionally fused to their parent's pseudo-selves; the result was emotional cutoff. The term 'emotional cutoff' was chosen almost reluctantly by Bowen after much reflection.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, Anderson, and Keala, "Is Bowen Theory Valid? A Review Of Basic Research" (Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, October 2004, Vol. 30, No. 4, 453-466, p. 453); David Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love and Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1997, 2009), p. xxii; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 62, p. 84; Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Jason Aaronson Inc, New York, NY, 1985, 1983, 1978, 1992), p. 382; Peter Titelman, Editor, *Emotional Cutoff: Bowen Family Systems Theory Perspective* (The Haworth Clinical Practice Press, New York, NY, 2003), p. 1, p. 3, p. 11, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Roberta Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept: in Leadership, in Life* (Leading Systems Press, Virginia, 2008), p. 57; Titelman, Phil Klever, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 231; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 382; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 2, p. 9, p. 16.

There is disagreement about the theoretical parameters of the term 'emotional cutoff'. Does emotional cutoff only or rather primarily refer to one's relationship with one's parents? Cutoffs are either 1) primary when directly related to one's parents, or 2) secondary, indirect, and inherited when based on interlocking triangles and on the multigenerational emotional process, which can be traced back to the primary parental cutoff. In light of Bowen's use of the phrase "separation of people from each other" to describe cutoff, the term 'cutoff' can also be applied to secondary relationships, rather than just the parent-child relationship. Emotional cutoff therefore is more systemic and multi-layered than just hierarchical. Parental cutoff in one's past shapes the degree and intensity of one's emotional cutoff in present and future relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Family Systems theory brings potential paradigm shifts in which we see previously invisible emotional systems. Rather than speak of mental or psychological illness, Bowen used the term 'emotional illness'. Bowen defined the term 'emotional' to mean 'instinctual'. Steinke said:

Emotionality signifies what is instinctual in human behaviour, what is imprinted in our nerves as innate, and what embraces the deep biological commands on how to live. (Bowen) was not alluding to feelings - love, hate or anger. ... Instincts are quick, sudden, and immediate...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Michael E. Kerr, and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: an approach based on Bowen Theory*, the Family Center, Georgetown University Hospital (WW Norton & Company, New York, London, Penguin Books Canada, 1988), p. 346; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 23, p. 24, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 60.; "Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics," G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: expanding the horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Edited by O.C. Bregman and C.M. White (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York, NY, 2011), p. 48; p. 50; Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: being calm and courageous no matter what* (The Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia, 2006), p. 23.

If one does not understand how Bowen defines emotion, the rest of Family Systems Theory will make much less sense. The term ‘instinctual’ is used by Bowen exactly as it is in biology, rather than in the restricted psychoanalytic sense. In choosing not to define emotion as equivalent to feeling, Bowen admitted that his definition is a minority opinion: “Now most people in the world use emotion as synonymous with feeling. I’ve never done that.”<sup>8</sup>

Titelman elaborated on Bowen’s definition of emotion, saying that it denotes that the family is a system that automatically –below the level of feeling – responds to changes in ‘togetherness’ and ‘individuality’ within and among the membership of the extended family.<sup>9</sup> The emotional / instinctual is a reaction to systemic imbalance between marital closeness and personal space. Enabling this systemic balance through bridging cutoff was the focus of Session #4 of the Strengthening Marriage workshop. Many practitioners from other theoretical frameworks critique Bowen Theory with little awareness that Bowen was talking about instincts in this context, not feelings. Unless people understand this key definition, they will just be talking past each other. Emotional cutoff is not identical to feeling cutoff. Reducing the systemic dominance of the instinctual is at the heart of bridging cutoff.

When people cannot remember when and why their ancestors left another country, it is often a clue to emotional cutoff. Emotional cutoff is the extreme form of unresolved emotional distance. Titelman observes that “the emotionally distancing behavioral patterns of cutoff...includ(e) emotional

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<sup>8</sup> Bowen, *Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy*, p. 58; “Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics,” G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory* (Haworth Press, New York, N.Y., 1998), p.51.

isolation, withdrawal, flight, collapse, and geographic distancing...”<sup>10</sup> The mechanisms for the cutoff process are internal emotional distancing, or a combination of internal and physical emotional distancing. Because cutoff is a matter of degrees, it is often challenging to determine exactly where distance ends and cutoff begins.<sup>11</sup> The degree of cutoff is a combination of the amount of distancing and the current level of anxiety in the relationship. Emotional distance is an instinctual flight reaction from emotional intensity. Without chronic anxiety, emotional distance often does not morph into emotional cutoff. Anxious distance between generations is at the heart of emotional cutoff. Through such distance, emotional cutoff is able to regulate the emotional fusion that often occurs in multi-generational transmission.<sup>12</sup>

The phenomenon of cutoff is not to be judged negatively by the pastoral coach or the married couple as “a pathological relationship process”, but rather is analyzed neutrally to understand its function in the family emotional system. Dropping value judgments helps us observe the systemic functionality of emotional cutoff. This Bowenian neutrality brings to mind Jesus’ insight in Matthew 7:1 about not judging lest one be judged. Premature judgment reduces our ability to see and analyze cutoff. Distance

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<sup>10</sup> Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: a new way of thinking about human interactions* (Chronimed Publishing, Minneapolis, MN, 1992), p. 55; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 24

<sup>11</sup> Ron Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church: Applying Bowen Family Theory to Conflict and Change in Society and Congregational Life* (Create Space, Amazon, 2012), p. 131.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 22, p. 23.; Daniel Papero, “Bowen Family Systems and Marriage,” *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, Edited by NS Jacobsen and A.S. Burman (Guilford Press, New York, NY, 1995), p. 18. Peter Titelman, *Triangles: Bowen Family Systems Theory Perspectives* (The Haworth Press, New York, N.Y., 2008), p. 38; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership* (Leading Systems Press, Virginia, 2006) , p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, “Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff,” p. 230; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, “Marital Fusion and Differentiation”, p. 126; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 128; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 22.

and cutoff are not so much spatial as relational and ethical. Infrequency of contact is one of our most objective clues in assessing the existence of emotional cutoff.<sup>13</sup>

Shann Ferch and Dawn McComb described cutoff, overcloseness (fusion), silence or anger towards parental figures as typical relational responses to generational wounds. A wound is an indication that something has been systemically pierced, cut, or broken.<sup>14</sup> The more wounded we are generationally, the more likely that distance will turn into emotional cutoff. Such cutoff is connected with relationship dissatisfaction:

Both emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff (indices of affect regulation), for example, have been linked to decreased relationship satisfaction (Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) and increased symptoms of negative mood (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) in adult populations.<sup>15</sup>

Cutoff is sometimes a response to nodal events that bring shock waves spanning several generations. Bowen defined nodal events or nodal points as referring to the intersection of the onset of symptoms in the child with dates of nodal events in the parental relationships. Extreme nodal events include disease, unemployment, emigration and death. The lower the differentiation, the more frequent

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<sup>13</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Smith, "Emotional Cutoff and Family Stability," p. 355; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Pamela Allen, "Depression: A Symptom of Cutoff in Relationship Processes," p. 315; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 230; Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2005), p. 219.

<sup>14</sup> Shan Fetch and Dawn Macomb, "Generational Healing: A Client's Experience of an Intervention to Promote Forgiveness and Healing the Generational Bond," *Marriage and Family: a Christian Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2001, p. 173; Scott Hahn, *First Comes Love: Finding Your Family in the Church and the Trinity* (Doubleday, New York, NY, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> M. Wei, D. L. Vogel, T. Ku, & R.A. Zakalik, "Adult Attachment, Affect Regulation, Negative Mood, and Interpersonal Problems: The Mediating Roles of Emotional Reactivity and Emotional Cutoff", *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2005, Vol. 52, No. 1, Iowa State University, p. 15.



and intense will be the shock wave nodal events.<sup>16</sup> The MESI Question #3 “What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?” was specifically designed to help the five couples to look at nodal events and resulting emotional cutoff in their marriages.

Emotional cutoff has been linked to violence. Where there has been generational violence, cutoff functions to increase its replication in the present generation. When cutoff resulting from family violence is not addressed, it may end up fostering the very violence that it is seeking to escape from. Walker’s research with 290 people in treatment centres showed that those reporting greater cutoff are more likely to report at least one instance of relational violence in the past year.<sup>17</sup>

Past fusion become future fusion through the generation mechanism of emotional cutoff. Sadly our running from fusion through distance and emotional cutoff reproduces the very thing that we are anxiously seeking to avoid. Just as separation is overwhelming to the emotionally fused, intimacy is threatening to the emotionally cutoff. Given their fear of closeness, they neither want to be smothered

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<sup>16</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Nichols, “Managing Cutoff through Family Research,” p. 188; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 10, p. 56, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Smith, “Emotional Cutoff and Family Stability,” p. 370; E.A. Skowron, K.L Stanley., & M.D. Shapiro, “A Longitudinal Perspective on Differentiation of Self, Interpersonal and Psychological Well-Being in Young Adulthood”, *Contemporary Family Therapy* (2009) 31:3–18; Michael W. Walker, “Differentiation of self and partner violence among individuals in substance abuse treatment.” *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, Vol. 67(12-B), 2007, pp. 7393.

nor abandoned.<sup>18</sup> The interlocking process of stuck-together fusion and emotional cutoff expresses the two faces of undifferentiation. Marital cutoff is the flip-side of fusion.<sup>19</sup>

An imbalance of marital closeness and personal space elicits either cutoff or fusion. Both cutoff and fusion are at the extreme ends of the closeness – personal space continuum. While fusion is separation-anxiety, cutoff is closeness-anxiety. Hollywood movies often flip back between fused closeness and emotionally cut-off distance. Symbiotic fusion is vividly expressed in the paradoxical claim: “I can’t live with you – I can’t live without you.” Without emotional closeness, marriages are left with a marked emotional distance which Bowen called emotional divorce.<sup>20</sup> Session #4 of the Strengthening Marriage Workshop looked extensively at this area, particularly in balancing closeness and personal space.

Healthy boundaries reduce one’s multigenerational default to distance and marital cutoff. Better marital boundaries allow people to connect with their spouse openly, equally, and with self-definition. Through boundaries, spouses are able to stay in touch when tempted to distance. The healthiest marital

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<sup>18</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 19; Papero, “Bowen Family Systems and Marriage,” *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, p. 18; Elizabeth A. Skowron and Myrna L. Friedlander, “The Differentiation of Self Inventory: Development and Initial Validation”, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1998, Vol. 45, No. 3, p. 236; Peleg, “The Relation Between Differentiation of Self and Marital Satisfaction”, (*Academic Medicine*, Vol. 84(10), Oct, 2009), p. 389.

<sup>19</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 21; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Family Systems Theory*, p. 9, p. 34; Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Alban Institute, Herndon, VA, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Titelman, *The Therapist’s Own Family: Toward the Differentiation of Self* (Jason Aaronson Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, 1987), p. 20; Murray Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy: The NIMH Family Study Project*, edited by J. Butler (Jason Aronson, Lanham, Maryland, 2013), p. 51, p. 160,

boundaries are secure but permeable, allowing spouses to think, feel and act for themselves.<sup>21</sup> In Session #3, the five couples were taught that learning to say no and to set healthy boundaries strengthens marital intimacy and reduces emotional cutoff. Both pursuing and avoiding one's spouse is counterproductive. Sometimes what feels like a lack of connection is actually evidence of too much reactive marital fusion. Depressed spouses are sometimes reactively cutting off from marital fusion. The goal in strengthening marriages is to increase unfused connection which balances closeness and personal space.<sup>22</sup>

Married couples often suffer from a repeating pattern of too much closeness and too much distance. Bowen called it a "closeness –fighting- rejecting cycle." Feeling crowded can be just as painful as feeling abandoned. Being close can be very demanding. Distance is often vital in preserving the pseudo-self.<sup>23</sup> Kerr and Bowen vividly commented that

a hallmark of a conflictual marriage is that husband and wife are angry and dissatisfied with one another...Their relationship is like an exhausting, draining, and strangely invigorating roller coaster ride; people threaten never to buy another ticket, but they usually do...<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 323; Ferch and McComb, p. 174; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 76; Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, a new way of thinking about human interactions (Chronimed Publishing, Minneapolis, MN, 1992), p. 169; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 67; J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 106; Balswick, *A Christian Family*, p. 52; Peleg, "The Relation Between Differentiation of Self and Marital Satisfaction", p. 389.

<sup>22</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Depression: A Symptom of Cutoff in Relationship Process," Allen, p. 322.

<sup>23</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 36, p. 51.; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 8; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 45; J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 49; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 177.

<sup>24</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Stephania Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 290.; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 187; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 54, p. 433.; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 118.

Even when distant, conflicted couples are usually focusing mostly on each other. Distancing spouses often take refuge in overwork, substance abuse, or jobs requiring travel. Sometimes one spouse distances from the other by anxiously focusing on their child. An over-focus on the family and children is often a marital conflict avoidance mechanism. Ferrera holds that “divorcing partners who have been child-focused in marriage will most likely be child-focused in divorce.”<sup>25</sup>

Because of the lack of an adaptive role, conflicted couples often have the most overtly intense of all relationships. The loss of flexibility or emotional reserve causes the marriage relationship to become an emotional cocoon. With conflicted couples, the intensity of the anger and negative feeling in the conflict is as intense as the positive feeling. Bowen described the common syndrome of ‘too much closeness’ as ‘weekend neurosis’ or ‘cabin fever’.<sup>26</sup> Emotional cocooning and cabin fever set the stage for marital cutoff as the ‘solution’.

To reduce symptoms in a married couple, balance is essential, as too little or too much distance creates anxiety. Symptoms and human problems erupt when the relationship system is unbalanced. Any lack of balance in a marital or family-like system can create a sense of threat. Some have even suggested that systemic balance should be included as a future Bowenian concept. Unless the distance is right, married couples cannot hear each other. The right amount of emotional space increases accurate marital

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<sup>25</sup> Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 86; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 81 ft 22, p. 197.; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 54.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, “The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce,” p. 307; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, “Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy”, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 82; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 296; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage*, p. 145; “Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 443.

hearing.<sup>27</sup> Unbalanced distance can lead to polarization and even emotional cutoff. Systemic unawareness increases marital polarization. The more cutoff we are, the more blind we become to our polarized relationship. Polarization easily happens when married couples are convinced that an issue must be immediately resolved. Winning the marital battle becomes everything, as sadly illustrated in the tragic movie *War of the Roses*.<sup>28</sup> Polarization is marital homeostasis, pretending to be a morphogenic revolution. Bowen said that marital polarization increase symptoms and prevents change:

...for some reason the human brain is open to polarities – to opposing viewpoints. And the human struggle wants to argue these viewpoints.... So the human being is set up for arguing polarities. There is a never ending supply of polarities.<sup>29</sup>

Emotional cutoff is the mechanism for managing anxiety related to the connection with one's original family. The emotional anxiety and loss of self connected with fusion results in some married couples wanting to run away, to distance, to cut off. Emotional fusion is inherently painful, and increases our alienation from others, including our spouse.<sup>30</sup> Generation gaps are fusion-based family cutoffs.

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<sup>27</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 186.; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 28, p. 35; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy, p. 71; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 305.

<sup>28</sup> Priscilla J. Friesen and Cheryl B. Lester, "A Systems View of the Training Program at the Bowen Center: Guiding Principles (1990-2003), *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, Eds., p. 92.; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 188.; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 7, p. 77, p. 89-90, p. 91; *The War of the Roses* DVD (1989), Danny Devito, Director, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098621/> .

<sup>29</sup> Murray Bowen quote, from *Bringing Systems Theory to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*, edited by Bregman and White (Routledge Publisher: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010); also quoted in Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 3, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Priscilla J. Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and The Brain," p. 83; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Anne McKnight, "The Impact of Cutoff in Families Raising Adolescents," p. 276; Roberta Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: a new way of thinking about the individual and the group* (Leading Systems Press,

Watching functioning is key to family systems breakthroughs. The more thorough our understanding of human functioning, family functioning and self-functioning, the greater is our opportunity for morphogenic change and reducing cutoff. Fusion and cutoff are two key temptations in human functioning, which include the pulls to dominance, dissolving, or absence. Cutoff is often a way of overfunctioning in an attempt to achieve self-sufficiency. The anonymous voices of 1 Corinthians 12 which say 'I don't need you and I don't belong' represent self-sufficient, overfunctioning cutoff. This helps explain how some people do exceptionally well after generational cutoff, only to have their next generation flounder and underfunction due to fewer relationship resources.<sup>31</sup> Overfunctioning will often triangle the next generation into underfunctioning.

Fusion can evolve into cutoff, which inevitably evolves back into fusion. Cutoff has been linked in several studies to marital discord and long-term marital dysfunction. Michele Denise Akers-Woody commented that "emotional cutoff has been found to predict marital discord and may harm the marriage in the long term."<sup>32</sup> Cutoff can take many forms with married couples, such as physical distance, or avoidance of emotionally charged subjects. Often those who were overly fused in their childhood are

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Virginia, 2004, 2006), p. 59; Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (The Guilford Press, New York, NY, 1985), p. 301; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Patricia Hanes Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 72; Peter Steinke, *A Door Set Open: grounded change in mission and hope* (The Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia, 2010), p. 118; Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Alban Institute, Herndon, VA, 2006), p. 34; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Eva Rauseo, "Migration and Emotional Cutoff," p. 419.

<sup>32</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 17; Michele Denise Akers-Woody, *Understanding the attitudes toward marriage of never-married female young adult children of divorce using Bowen Theory*, Psy.D. Dissertation (Alliant International University, San Diego, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; 2003), p. 36 (Gottman and Levinson, 1992; Heavey, Christiansen, and Malamuth, 1995)."

most prone to emotional cutoff in marriage. Cutoff is frequently a matter of trading one highly fused rigid triangle for another highly fused rigid triangle which has no room for the former triangle.<sup>33</sup>

Distance and fusion play off of each other. The most universal mechanism for dealing with marital fusion is emotional distance from each other. This method is found in a high percentage of marriages to a major degree. Bowen admitted that he unsuccessfully used distance, time, and silence to cover up his emotional fusion. Contemporary Bowen therapists are paying more attention to gender issues. Ora Peleg and Meital Yitzak uncovered gender differences in married couples coping with fusion and separation anxiety:

A significant relationship was found among men between fusion with others and separation anxiety: a high level of fusion was found to correlate with a high level of anxiety. Among women, a high level of emotional reactivity was related to a high level of separation anxiety.<sup>34</sup>

Emotional fusion initially relieves anxiety for the married couple; then it increases anxiety because of the loss of self which then in turn causes one spouse to use distance as an anxiety-reducer. While distance temporarily reduces anxiety, it then brings anxiety-inducing loneliness. Indications of transmissible multigenerational marital anxiety are marital instability, separation, divorce and never marrying. Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen described the two fusion/cutoff polarities as crowdedness

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<sup>33</sup> Michael E Kerr, "Family Systems Theory and Therapy," in *Handbook of family therapy*, Gurman and Kniskern, Editors, chapter 7, (Routledge, New York, NY, 1981), p. 249; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 377, p. 491.; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 79; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 45.; Ora Peleg and Meital Yitzhak, *Differentiation of Self and Separation Anxiety: Is There a Similarity Between Spouses?* (Contemporary Family Therapy (2011) 33:25–36), p. 1.

and loneliness. 'Heavy' fused environments are more challenging than 'light' environments.<sup>35</sup> The basic problem in families may not be to maintain relationships but to maintain the self that permits non-disintegrative relationships. Anxiety pops up with every dysfunctional response. Only healthy, calm, unfused connecting brings lasting reduction of anxiety and emotional cutoff. Individuals who are cut off from their families generally do not heal until they have been reconnected.<sup>36</sup>

What married couples are avoiding with emotional distance is their own fused reactivity to each other. Resentful badgering over the distance only increases the lonely distance. Distance serves as an emotional insulation.<sup>37</sup> Hiding and distance is found in both compliant and conflictual marriages. Emotional distance is a high price for tense peace. A lot of marital conflict is ironically fostered by attempts to avoid marital conflict. Bowen noted three functional 'benefits' of marital conflict which included emotional connection, guilt-free distance, and someone on which to project our anxiety.<sup>38</sup>

The greater the reactive fusion is, the greater the intensity of the marital problems. Bowen believed that fusion was strongest in the 'togetherness' model of marriage, a fusion that is at the core of

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<sup>35</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 14, p.55, p. 102; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 72, p. 128, p. 194; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, "Klever, Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, Page 156; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 137; Susan Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches* (Robert Brady Co., Bowie, Maryland, 1980), p. 49; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 61.; Edwin Friedman, *a Failure of Nerve: leadership in an age of the quick-fix* (The Edwin Friedman Estate / Trust, Bethesda, Maryland, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 243; Daniel Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory* (A Pearson Education Company, Massachusetts, 1990) , p. 53; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 81, p. 188.

<sup>38</sup> Ron Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, 2005), p. 17; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 15.; JC Wynn, *The Family Therapist* (Fleming H Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1987), p. 148; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 189, p. 192; Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts*. (Houghton Mifflin, Boston MA, 1995), p. 143-44.



much marital disruption. With fusion, we give away power to our spouse and end up seeking permission from them just to be our self. Giving away power is giving away self. One of the unintended consequences of emotional cutoff is increased loss of self. Giving up self is the embracing of non-existence for the sake of an unhealthy family system. To give up the core, genuine self is to cease to be, to fully live. When cut offs occur, the person always loses something of himself or herself. In Session #1, the five couples were taught that overcoming a loss of self brings energy and joy to one's marriage, reducing emotional cutoff. To appropriate the power of Easter for our marriages, we need to baptismally die to the pseudo-self, the old nature, the flesh/*sarx*, and rise to our new genuine self in Christ.<sup>39</sup>

#### 1a) Emotional Cutoff and Differentiation

Cutoff is not differentiation. Rather actual differentiation is the antidote to emotional cutoff. High differentiation and low emotional cutoff are linked with marital satisfaction by Skowron's study of 118 couples, Peleg's study of 121 men and women, and Miller's study of 60 couples. Differentiation is the core process in the family emotional system. There are at least four factors that influence one's level of differentiation. These factors include emotional cutoff, reactivity, fusion and taking 'I' positions. At the heart of differentiation is the balancing of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of our humanity. Intrapersonal balance or self-differentiation enables a person to distinguish between one's thinking and feelings. Interpersonal balance or family differentiation brings synchronicity between

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<sup>39</sup> Ron Richardson, *Couples in Conflict: A Family Systems Approach to Marriage Counseling* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2010), p. 28, p. 35, p. 36; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 21, p. 22.; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Phil Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 121; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 248.

closeness and personal space.<sup>40</sup> While differentiation is a theoretical concept, empirical studies are beginning to confirm its accuracy. Peleg and Arnon noted:

Higher levels of differentiation (i.e., less emotional reactivity, emotional cutoff and fusion, and more I-position) have predicted higher levels of psychological maturity and marital satisfaction (Peleg 2008; Skowron and Friedlander 1998; Tuason and Friedlander 2000) and more positive overall alliances (Lambert and Friedlander 2008), whereas lower levels of differentiation have been linked to psychological distress, higher levels of trait anxiety (Skowron and Friedlander 1998), stress (Skowron et al. 2009), physiological symptoms (Skowron 2000), and social anxiety (Peleg 2002; 2005).

Differentiation is sometimes confused with distance. Some people anxiously use distance and cutoff to simulate self-differentiation by looking independent.<sup>41</sup> Bowen said that coaching aims to convert the cutoff into an orderly differentiation of a self from the extended family. Cutoff is standing out *against* others whereas differentiation is standing out *from* others. Standing out *against* others brings rigidity and distracts people from doing their own marital and self work. Steinke observed that “to continue the position of 'againstness', the emotional distancer often becomes dogmatic, opinionated, and doctrinaire.”<sup>42</sup> The less differentiated the spouse is, the more they will be blaming and prone to cutting off the other spouse. At the highest level of differentiation, we grow away from our parents; at the middle level we tear away; and at the lowest level, we cut away, cutting off and

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<sup>40</sup> Peleg, “Differentiation of self and separation anxiety”, p. 27, p. 28; Peleg, “The Relation Between Differentiation of Self and Marital Satisfaction”, p. 389.

<sup>41</sup> Titelman, *Triangles*, p. xxi; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, “Marital Fusion and Differentiation”, p. 135; Maria Teresa Tuason and Myrna L. Friedlander, “Do Parents' Differentiation Levels Predict Those of Their Adult Children? and Other Tests of Bowen Theory in a Philippine Sample”, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 84; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Foreword by Michael Kerr, p. xxi; Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 27.

even collapsing. The first step in differentiation is when one spouse starts taking responsibility for self and reduces the blaming of their marital partner.<sup>43</sup> The five couples were taught in Session # 2 that working on one's own self is the key to raising the level of differentiation in the marriage, thereby bridging cutoff.

Cutoff paradoxically reflects a problem, 'solves' a problem and creates a problem in terms of reducing and increasing anxiety. Running away from anxiety is impossible, because it is chained like a ball (or a pet rock) to our ankle. It always comes along for the ride. The anxiety of life, as with Jonah's whale, has a way of chasing us until we stop running from who we are and are called to be.<sup>44</sup>

One cannot cut one's self off from multigenerational anxiety, but rather only from the knowledge of the sources of this anxiety. Such cutoff causes anxious people to 'fly blind' relationally without any generational, emotional map. The loss of multigenerational connection through undifferentiated cutoff produces an unhealthy excessive dependence on the present generation. Overdependence raises our anxiety level, making us more likely to cut off our spouse. Cutoff causes us to minimize our past and exaggerate our present.<sup>45</sup> This is too great of an emotional load for one generation to bear alone. The present marital moment was never meant to be the full weight of life in isolation. Putting the full weight

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<sup>43</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 84; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Foreword by Michael Kerr, p. xxi; Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 27; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 47; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 129; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Peleg and Arnon, p. 325; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 249; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 16, p. 18; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Patricia Comella, "Observing Emotional Functioning in Human Relationship Systems," *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, Eds, p. 19; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 87; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Allen, "Depression; A Symptom of Cutoff in Relationship Processes," p. 334; Peleg and Arnon, p. 333.

on the present marital moment is like driving a three-ton tractor onto a frozen Canadian lake intended only for amateur hockey. Multigenerational connectedness is the healthy marital alternative to multigenerational fusion or cutoff. In Session #2, the five couples were taught that the high road to marital growth and bridging cutoff is through a deeper understanding of the family we were raised in.

Self-differentiation honours differences and otherness. Homeostatic fusion demands sameness. Cutoff is pseudo-separation. Fusion, rooted in unresolved emotional attachment, often presents itself in the guise of cutoff. Marital and family cutoff can be subtle or more dramatic. The compliant non-present spouse may simultaneously pretend through his / her pseudo-self to be present. The pseudo-self is an actor, a pretender, and an imposter. For this reason, the pseudo-self can be very persuasive in its acting as if it is engaged and maritally connected. That is why husbands have sometimes said that they didn't know that there was any marital problems until the moving truck arrived. Both those cutting off and those being cutoff feel powerless. They mistakenly think that the other spouse has the power. Their cutting-off is often a reaction to their own perceived marital powerlessness. When spouses insist on their own way, marriage becomes a dreadful place of vying for power.<sup>46</sup> We should never underestimate our capacity to embrace the darkness of revenge with those whom we have loved and are still fused.

The lower the level of differentiation in married couples, the more they will use cutoff to reduce the anxious symptoms of emotional fusion. Cutoffs are liable to occur when the conforming demand overwhelms the drive for differentiation. Our people-pleasing and conflict avoidance can drive us to cutoff places that we never intended to go. With cutoff, we lose the opportunity to face, to process, and

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<sup>46</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 32; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 33; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 68; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 33; J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 64.

to grow through our conflicts and differences inherent to marital relations. At the lowest level of differentiation, cutting off results in emotional collapse, accompanied by internal cutoff as a way of denying the ongoing parent-child attachment.<sup>47</sup> Low differentiation increases marital cutoff.

#### 1b) Emotional Cutoff and Multi-generational Transmission

Ignorance is not bliss. The more cutoff, the less the awareness there is of one's multigenerational reactivity. We lose both the facts and the emotional patterns. Cutoff increases reactivity. The more cutoff, the more reactivity.<sup>48</sup> Two sure signs of emotional cutoff are denial of the importance of the family and an exaggerated façade of independence.<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Lambie and Debbie

Daniel-Mohring commented:

Choosing friends of which parents disapprove (as adolescents), getting in trouble with the law, and abusing substances are way adolescents try to cut off from parents. This declaration of independence from family is not the same as differentiation of self. It in no way resolves the emotional fusion with the parent.

Like with many teenagers, emotional cutoff is about "acting and pretending to be more independent than one is". Both pretending and exposing our pretending is a significant Bowenian theme.

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<sup>47</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 24; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Stephanie Ferrera, "Bridging Emotional Cutoff from a Former Spouse", p. 386.

<sup>48</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 23, p. 56; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 297; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Harrison, "Reproduction and Emotional Cutoff," p. 248; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods* (Pearson Education, Inc., 2008), p. 127, p. 145; Adorney, *The Relationship of Emotional Cutoff to Marital Function and Psychological Symptom Development*, p. 1; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 236.

One of the greatest problems with multigenerational cutoff is that it impedes healing until unfused reconnection occurs. Cutoff creates emotional stuckness, solidification, and stagnation.<sup>50</sup>

Without nonfused extended-family support, there will continue to be increased marital instability and cutoff in this present generation. Reduced marital reproduction has been linked with emotional cutoff and the absence of extended-family support. With the decrease in social complexity that accompanies emotional cutoff, there is a generational loss of flexibility and diversity in our marriages. With multigenerational cutoff, the person perceives that there are fewer choices in their marriage. Emotional cutoff reduces the social complexity and increases systemic rigidity in marriages. Sometimes covert marital cutoff is hidden behind a cozy togetherness which masks an internal cutoff.<sup>51</sup> Cutoff thinking is more rigid, narrow and polarized, with differences and personal issues being avoided.

Kerr and Roberts have experimentally explored and demonstrated the link between cutoff, poor functioning, and greater marital conflict:

This finding supports Bowen's theory that individuals who are emotionally cutoff are less well adjusted in their marital relationships and are lower functioning as illustrated by their lower scores on the marital communication directory.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rosemary Lambie and Debbie Daniel-Mohring, "Theoretical Underpinnings of Family Systems Approaches," *Family Systems with Educational Contexts: understanding students with special needs* (Denver, Love Publications, 1993), p. 267; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 60, quoting Murray Bowen, 1974.; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 68, p. 73; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 7; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 129; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 184.

<sup>51</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Allen, "Depression: A Symptom of Cutoff in Relationship Processes," p. 317; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Harrison, "Reproduction and Emotional Cutoff," p. 259.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 92, p. 106; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 232

<sup>52</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Kelly, "Toward Undoing Cutoff," p. 144; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 231, p. 232; Dillard and Protinsky, "Emotional Cutoff: a

Abby Adorney's research confirmed the Family Systems Theory hypothesis that emotional cutoff measurably impacts marital functioning. Cutoff is also closely related to the level of gossip and evasiveness. When we elusively avoid the discussion of certain family of origin issues, we maintain marital toxicity.<sup>53</sup>

### 1c) Bridging Emotional Cutoff

Can emotional cutoff be bridged? Facing our own multigenerational marital cutoff can be a daunting prospect. It is encouraging to know that cutoff is not an emotional death sentence that we are fatalistically doomed to endure. As Christ-followers with a strong theology of hope, this is good news. Richardson wrote that emotional cutoff can be reversed through 1) bridging cutoff, 2) gaining knowledge about the functional facts in the emotional system of our family and our part in it and 3) then managing self in the midst of having close contact with members of the system. Rigorous self-examination and family evaluation are vital in reversing cutoff. In order to bridge emotional cutoff, one must define self through 1) working toward person-to-person relationships, (2) becoming a better observer and managing one's own emotional reactivity; and (3) detriangling self in emotional situations.<sup>54</sup>

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Comparative Analysis of Clinical Versus Nonclinical Populations," p. 540; Dillard and Protinsky, p. 346; Dillard and Protinsky, p. 348.

<sup>53</sup> Abby P. Adorney, *The Relationship of Emotional Cutoff to Marital Function and Psychological Symptom Development*, Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology Dissertation (California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles, 1993), p. xiv; Van Yperen, *Making Peace: a guide to overcoming church conflict*, p. 129; Ferch and McComb, p. 173.

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 64.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 311.; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 132.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 54.

Neutrality and curiosity reduces cutoff. The greater the multigenerational marital cutoff, the more challenging it is to integrate Bowen theory. Anxiety may reduce the couple's desire and ability to learn. Simultaneously those who are most maritally cutoff may be the most motivated to learn Bowen theory.<sup>55</sup> Being emotionally cutoff can cut either way: either making couples more defensive or more desperate for a better way. Bowen made use of parables and displacement stories about parallel couples as a way of indirectly teaching highly anxious couples. Bridging cutoff requires recognition of the existing marital fusion. It is often difficult to recognize emotional fusion because it feels so normal. It may be all that we know. A first step in bridging cutoff might be to name our blindness about how maritally fused we probably are. When we first attempt to bridge multigenerational cutoff, some may see us as betraying our family homeostasis and going over to the enemy. Naively attempting to bridge cutoff without a clear family systems understanding can bring more distance and tension in the marriage and family relationships. If we rush in looking for a quick fix, we just make multigenerational cutoff worse.<sup>56</sup> In Session #3, the five couples were taught that marital conflict is best resolved when we say no to quick fixes and take the long-term perspective.

The goal in bridging marital cutoff is to replace fusion and reactive distance with "a reasonable degree of separateness with contact". Reducing both emotional cutoff and fusion requires that marital closeness needs to be a choice rather than a pressurized obligation. Playfulness and appropriate humour

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<sup>55</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 55.; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Kelly, "Toward Undoing Cutoff: a Twenty-Five-Perspective," , p. 145.; Priscilla J. Friesen and Cheryl B. Lester, "A Systems View of the Training Program at the Bowen Center: Guiding Principles (1990-2003), *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, Eds., p. 93.; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 56; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 48; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 87; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 238; p. 239.



help us become close while simultaneously reducing marital cutoff. As our marriages become more goal-oriented and future-focused, both closeness and bridging of cutoff become more possible. Self-reflective detachment enables us to gradually bridge the emotional gap. It is challenging to bridge cutoff and enhance closeness without giving up on self.

Bridging marital cutoff changes the adaptability of the brain and physiology of the bridging individual. As part of bridging cutoff, one can bring greater flexibility through increasing self and other-awareness, examining one's mindset, reducing immature expectations and blaming, and generating options for alternative responses. Rather than being a quick fix, bridging multigenerational cutoff through Bowen Theory is a long process that needs to be worked on throughout one's marriage and life. We will never outgrow the need to keep on restoring these multigenerational bridges. Viable contact with the past and present generations, both living and deceased, brings higher functioning.<sup>57</sup> Calm multigenerational contact helps bridge and reverses the patterns of avoidance, blame, withdrawal and cutoff. Thoughtful observing and controlling of one's reactivity reduces the generational tendency to cut off through withdrawal. Multigenerational dialogue brings cleansing from cutoff, fusion, rigidity and emptiness. Because cutoff instinctively shrinks our definition about who is included as family, it is best when bridging cutoff to contact all family members rather than a narrow subset.<sup>58</sup> Whoever is excluded from the family becomes a marker, pointing to traumatic cutoff. Emotional cutoff solves nothing.

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<sup>57</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," Friesen, p. 91; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 241; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 56, p. 135, p. 146, p. 155; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Eileen Gotlieb, "Emotional Cutoff and Holocaust Survivors," p. 430; Titelman, Gotlieb, p. 437.

<sup>58</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 57., p. 141.; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 53. Ferch and McComb, p. 174; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 87, p. 88.

From a Family Systems Theory perspective, emotional detachment rather than emotional cutoff is the effective way to reduce emotional attachment or fusion. To detach is to be freed from unbalanced attachment that lacks individuation and personal space. Unresolved attachment reflects our lack of core self. Our unresolved attachments are usually parental, but affect every other relationship. The marital past remains the unresolved present until we bridge cutoff. Unresolved parental attachment is closely linked to numerous undesirable symptoms and problems. Bowen said that there are people who never separate from their parents and – all things being equal – will remain attached forever.<sup>59</sup> As Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5 teach us, marital cleaving is dependent upon parental leaving.

The greater the unresolved attachment, the less one can be a self with one's spouse and with one's parents. Unresolved emotional attachment is linked with chronic anxiety.<sup>60</sup> The chronically anxious are highly vulnerable to both multigenerational cutoff and fusion. Unresolved emotional attachment is equivalent to the degree of undifferentiation in a person and in a family. No one becomes an adult without some unresolved emotional attachment.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 1, p. 9, p. 22, p. 24; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 184; "Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics," G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 46.

<sup>60</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Illick, Hilbert-McAllister, Jeffries, and White, "Toward Understanding and Measuring Emotional Cutoff," p. 204; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Foreword by Michael Kerr," p. xix; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 123.

<sup>61</sup> Papero, "Bowen Family Systems and Marriage," p. 14; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 196; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. xix, Foreword by Michael Kerr; Dillard and Protinsky, "Emotional Cutoff: a Comparative Analysis of Clinical Versus Nonclinical Populations," p. 339.

We are all an emotional work in progress. Unresolved emotional attachment defines the relationship between emotional and intellectual functioning, bringing a rigid, dependent fusion dominated by the automatic emotional system. The more rigid we are, the more vulnerable we are to loss of self and / or loss of our marriage. Defensive rigidity is emotional death, often resulting in marital death. Emotional cutoff is the universal mechanism for dealing with unresolved emotional attachment.<sup>62</sup>

Bowen held that

One of the most important functional patterns in a family has to do with the intensity of the unresolved emotional attachment to parents, most frequently to the mother for both men and women, and the way the individual handles the attachment. All people have an emotional attachment to their parents that is more intense than most people permit themselves to believe.

The more we deny our unresolved emotional attachment, the greater the power of emotional cutoff in our marriages. The centrifugal intensity of cutoff using its emotional booster rocket to leave the earth's atmosphere is connected to the gravitational intensity of fusion, trying to keep us on planet earth. The degree of emotional fusion is equal, primarily, to the degree of emotional attachment to one's parents.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> D. Dillard and H.O. Protinsky, "Emotional Cutoff: a Comparative Analysis of Clinical Versus Nonclinical Populations" (citing Bowen, 1977), (*International Journal of Family Psychiatry*, 6, 1985), p. 339.

<sup>63</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 433; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 21, p. 22; "May 17th 2012 Interview with Randy Frost, Executive Director of Living Systems Counseling, about his connection with Murray Bowen" (Appendix vii, *Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff* Doctoral Thesis Project).

#### 1d) Emotional Cutoff and Coaching

Coaching reduces emotional cutoff and strengthens marriages. The Bowen model prefers the term 'coaching', shifting from couch to coach. Papero described the coach as more of a consultant and teacher than a therapist. As Bowen put it,

"Terms such as 'supervisor', 'teacher', and 'coach' are probably best in conveying the connotation of an active expert coaching both individual players and the team to the best of their abilities.<sup>64</sup>

Longevity rather than frequency of coaching is linked to impacting family of origin issues and reducing marital cutoff. The maturing of marriages and families is a natural biological process that takes time. It takes years to bring lasting systemic marital and family change. In western society, people often want fast results, including reducing emotional cutoff quickly through strengthening of marriages. Individuality is slow to emerge and easily suppressed underground. Bowen warned against the solution that becomes the problem.<sup>65</sup> Reducing cutoff through coaching doesn't mean telling married couples what to do, but rather asking questions that help them understand their own emotional processes and how they function within them. Greater clarity is key. As pastoral coaches, we must resist the pressure to collude with the couple by finding answers for them. A basic premise of Bowen Theory is that marriages and families can find their own answers if they work on it. The pastoral coach, like a sports

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<sup>64</sup> Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 77; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 540; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 154; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 159, quoting Murray Bowen, 1975; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 151.

<sup>65</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 162; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 45; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 71; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 117 quoting Murray Bowen, 1975; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 120; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p.76; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 2.

coach, may diagram the patterns or plays, and assists in developing a game plan or goal-oriented marital vision. But it is up to the couple to implement the marital game plan.<sup>66</sup>

The couple is encouraged in Bowen Theory to talk directly to the pastoral coach rather than to each other. Through externalizing the thinking of each spouse in the other spouse's presence, emotional cutoff is reduced as marital curiosity increases. In coaching a couple, Bowen used to say: "Give me a few minutes of your most objective thinking." Ideational thinking about our thinking is the Bowenian way forward: who has been thinking, how much he/she has thought, what were the patterns of the thoughts, and what kind of working conclusions came from the thinking.<sup>67</sup>

When the pastoral coach has mastered the family systems theory concept for his / her self, the orientation and very self of the coach communicates the transformative marital vision. Marital coaching is about focusing on the structure rather than the symptomatic 'IP negative' (Identified Person Negative). The coaching challenge is to defocus from the symptomatic focus, and refocus on the emotional field.<sup>68</sup> Most reduction of marital cutoff is intended to happen out in the field rather than in the pastoral coach's office. The pastoral coach is a calming presence who reduces the tendency of the married couple to vent, dump on each other, and emotionally cutoff. A pastoral coach needs to believe one's position enough to be calm for it. It is easy to regress while bridging cutoff without the encouragement of a

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<sup>66</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 69.; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 151; Ron Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational life* (Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, 1996), p. 160; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 44.

<sup>68</sup> Murray Bowen in E. Carter and M McGoldrick (Eds.) *The Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy* (Gardner Press, New York, N.Y.), p. xviii.; Titelman, *Clinical Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 38, p. 42; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 314.

coach. Pastoral coaching of married couples is vital for strengthening marriages and bridging cutoff, both on the North Shore and beyond.<sup>69</sup>

### 1e) Emotional Cutoff and Symptoms

Emotional cutoff produces noticeable marital symptoms. When coaching married couples, it is important to pay close attention to symptoms, not so much to relieve the symptoms, but rather to use the symptoms as “a pathway into the emotional system.”<sup>70</sup>

The Freudian model tends to see symptoms as indications of intrapsychic diseases within the patient. The Bowen model instead sees symptoms as indications of a wider emotional system that transcends the mere individual. Symptoms are multigenerational. The symptomatic spouse does not necessarily need to be the focus of pastoral coaching, as the aim is to modify the whole unit, acknowledging reciprocity between functions. Symptoms like marital distress usually develop during periods of heightened or prolonged family or group tension.<sup>71</sup> One of the major Family Systems Theory learnings has been to watch for how people catch and transmit their emotional flu symptoms within their family system triangles. Because symptoms are a product of triangulation, the symptoms themselves tell us who is absorbing anxious undifferentiation, and who is projecting this onto another member of the

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<sup>69</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 169; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 32, p. 58, p. 70; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 24; Gilbert, <http://www.hsystems.org/4.html> The Ten Percent Solution. “

<sup>70</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 62.; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p.71; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 146.; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 125, P. 127.

<sup>71</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 1988, p. 319; Tuason and Friedlander, “Do Parents' Differentiation Levels Predict Those of Their Adult Children? and Other Tests of Bowen Theory in a Philippine Sample”, p. 28.; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. viii, quoting Kerr,”.

triangle. Sometimes when one spouse successfully sets boundaries, the other spouse will reactively develop physical symptoms. Thomas Murray, in a study of 201 patients with fibromyalgia, has significantly correlated higher levels of emotional cutoff with more severe fibromyalgia symptoms.<sup>72</sup>

Bridging cutoff is closely linked to lasting symptom reduction rather than the temporary symptomatic relief that comes with emotional cutoff.<sup>73</sup> Bowen said that maintaining and / or reestablishing viable emotional contact with one's family of origin will make symptoms softer and more manageable. Quick symptomatic relief of anxiety is not the same as long-term marital change.<sup>74</sup> Some psychological researchers are primarily measuring symptomatic change rather than the more significant long-term systemic change. As such, the quantitative marital research results may be misleading. One of the signs of marital cutoff is strong homeostatic resistance to change. Even failed marital change has unexpected benefits. The good news is that by valuing and observing our initial failures to change, we are more likely to experience lasting marital change.<sup>75</sup> Friedman suggested that marriages should not be measured by longevity or happiness but rather by being symptom-free in three locations: 1) in the marital relationship (as conflict, distance or divorce), 2) in the health of one of the partners (physical or 'mental'), or 3) in one of the children (though this last could also be placed in the space between the

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<sup>72</sup> Murray Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol.7, No. 5, October, 1966, P. 371; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 131; Murray, T.L., Daniels, M.H., Murray, C.E., "Differentiation of self, perceived stress, and symptom severity among patients with fibromyalgia syndrome." *Families, Systems, & Health*, Vol 24(2), Sum, 2006, pp. 147-159.

<sup>73</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Allen, "Depression: A Symptom of Cutoff in Relationship Processes," p. 325.

<sup>74</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 86; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 149.

<sup>75</sup> Ona Cohn Bregman, Preface in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, p. xx; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 74; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, "Strategies to Explore Cut-offs", p. 194.

parent and the child).<sup>76</sup> Marital symptoms are intensified by emotional cutoff and reduced by family of origin work.

The presence of symptoms is linked with a lack of marital flexibility and an inability to recover from emotional arousal. The relationship between chronic anxiety and the resulting symptoms may vary significantly.<sup>77</sup> Kerr and Bowen viewed symptoms like over / under eating, over / under achieving, excessive alcohol / drug use, and affairs as indicators of having given up too much self, often absorbing anxiety within the marital relationship system. The symptomatic situation is sometimes seen as a 'no exit' position. Ironically, conflicted couples sometimes have fewer symptoms, because their conflict can provide a very strong sense of emotional contact with the other spouse.

Chronic symptoms are sometimes a diversion from the most challenging relationship problems of the couple and / or family. Facing one's relational anxiety is often more threatening than addressing one's relational symptoms. Many couples blame all their marriage problems on a lack of communication. While this claim makes common sense, it may be misdirected. Communication is less a problem than a symptom. The actual problem is the relationship position or posture itself. Predominant relationship patterns shape how one symptomatically expresses one's anxiety. The symptom of marital conflict

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<sup>76</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 137.

<sup>77</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 38; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 311, quoting Bowen (1978, p. 383); Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 98; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 172; Friedman 1991, p. 140.



occurs when one spouse externalizes their anxiety onto the other spouse; in contrast if the predominant pattern fosters dysfunction, then high anxiety is characterized by symptoms in the spouse or child.<sup>78</sup>

Who is most vulnerable to developing symptoms? The compliant or adaptive spouse picks up the anxiety projected from the dominant spouse, becoming more anxiously at risk for a symptom. The dominant spouse engages in will conflict, trying to will another to adapt to them, resulting in a loss of self and an increase of symptoms like anorexia, suicide, schizophrenia, abuse, violence, and many chronic physical diseases.<sup>79</sup> Domineering attitudes, rather than fostering healthy marriages, encourage emotional cutoff. Domineering is not the way of the servant King.

Focusing on the symptoms of the married couple tends to obscure the strengths of the couple and increases emotional cutoff. Married couples often come for coaching with a sense of failure. By focusing on what is right with the couple rather than on their pathological symptoms, one decreases the anxious reactivity and cutoff of the couple. Focusing on strengths is rarer than one might expect.<sup>80</sup> Symptoms remind us that “the human power for preservation, healing and change are already resident in the (married couple).” The resources are already there in the emotional system of the couple. They just need to be discovered and tapped into. We can choose to step out of the anxious worry loop when

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<sup>78</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 87, p. 163, p. 192; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 476; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 84, p. 104; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 125; Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 182; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 162; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 2; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 379; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 11, p. 160; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 17.

major regressive symptoms are adding to the anxiety of the married couple's emotional system.<sup>81</sup> When we choose to address our symptoms, we can pull out of the cutoff spiral. Symptoms need not have the last word in our marriages.

#### 1f) Emotional Cutoff and Observational Blindness

Emotional cutoff is directly related to observational blindness. Reading the original works by Bowen removes much observational blindness about how marriages function. The more we nonjudgmentally observe, the less we maritally cutoff. Observational blindness is rooted in the difficulty of seeing things that do not fit one's theoretical frame of reference. We underestimate how difficult it can be to perceive things that we do not want to see. Bowen held that one has to become an observer before it is possible to see. The less that we see, the more we disconnect. The more we see, the greater neutrality. Conversely the greater the neutrality, the more we see. The ideal neutrality, said Papero, is like quietly watching the ripples of a mountain pond. Kerr and Bowen commented that "the closer we get to ourselves, the greater the pressure to see what we want to see or, at least, to see what we have always seen." Observing requires a robust self-regulation of one's emotional reactivity.<sup>82</sup>

The five couples were taught in Session #2 that objectivity about one's self and marriage increases marital satisfaction. Gilbert and Bowen described such observing as being like putting on a lab

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<sup>81</sup> Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 2; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 379; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 11, p. 160; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 17; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 402, p. 480; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 54, Kerr and Bowen, p. 154; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 74.

coat like a scientist or watching from a space craft. In Bowen's 1959 Prospectus, he compared this to moving from a playing field to the top of a stadium to watch a football game.<sup>83</sup> This observational discipline could be compared to that of going to a gym over an extended period of time, pushing through discouragement while making use of a personal trainer. Learning to become an observational scientist is just as challenging. It takes time to retrain and develop those observational marital biceps. This is in fact a lifetime project till death does us part.

Objective marital change requires an objective change in how we observe our marriages. When we maintain objectivity, we are able to "think about subjectivity, feelings, and emotions without triggering more subjectivity, feelings, and emotions." Through developing our observational biceps, we have feelings but they don't have us. They don't control our life decisions or define our core self. This is not about being a 21<sup>st</sup> Century unfeeling Dr. Spock of Star Trek fame. It is rather about being aware of our feelings, while choosing which feelings to act upon.<sup>84</sup> When coaching married couples, observational objectivity is vital as it helps protect us against fusion and passionate collusion. Objectivity will be lost if we focus with couples on content issues like sex, money and children, especially on issues of right or wrong, fairness and rights. Note-taking helps us avoid taking marital sides.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 18; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 71; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 121; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 159.

<sup>84</sup> Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 122; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 153; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 150; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 28; Kerr and Bowen, p. 67; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 68; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 53; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 113; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 74; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 83.; Randy Roberts, "Two Distinct Approaches to Family Therapy: The Ideas of Murray Bowen and Jay Haley," *The Family*, p. 42; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 155

Reducing emotional cutoff through increasing one's marital objectivity is very demanding. The greater our awareness of marital triangles, the more objective we will become. Bowen was convinced that the only person we can change is ourselves. Are we willing to own our part in the marital system? If a person can discover and correct the part that one plays, all the others will automatically correct their parts.<sup>86</sup> Owning our marital part is very challenging because we are often so remarkably homeostatic, blind and defensive. As Jeremiah 17:9 painfully reminds us, our hearts are deceitful above all things. Bowen taught that it is never really possible to change another person but it is possible to change the part that self plays.<sup>87</sup> Reducing marital cutoff requires a radically objective assessment of one's self, not just one's spouse.

Intentionality is key in bridging cutoff through observational objectivity. It is very easy to lose objectivity, either as a spouse or as the pastoral coach. Thoughtful assessment of the marital system increases objective effective treatment. To maintain objectivity, we must be careful what we promise as results.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 53; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. xi, quoting Bowen, p. 2; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 199; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 37, p. 72.

<sup>87</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 448.

<sup>88</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 250; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. vii, p. 203; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 137; Nichols, p. 138; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 293.

## 1g) Emotional Cutoff and Emotional Reactivity

The higher our emotional reactivity, the higher is the likelihood of marital cutoff. The higher the marital conflict, the higher is the emotional reactivity. Kerr and Bowen saw a) the husband's marital reactivity as connected to feeling unloved, pressured to change, and unappreciated and b) the wife's marital reactivity as connected to feeling unloved, ignored, and taken for granted. As a spouse increases awareness and control of their own emotional reactivity, emotional cutoff is reduced. The more we understand, the less we react. The emotional rainbow of reactivity may look very different in marital cutoff from "bitter rage to lingering sadness, from abrupt rejection to imperceptible distancing, from vivid intensity to apparent indifference." Distant, formal marriages produce cutoff that looks different than the cutoff found in highly intense, fused marriages. The essence of marital cutoff is reactive conflict avoidance, and rigid repetitive homeostatic thinking and behaviour.<sup>89</sup>

Reactivity is the opposite of thoughtful responsiveness where one retains the power of choice. Emotional reactivity in married couples is associated with rigid inflexibility and demanding the other person to change. When reactivity takes over, we lose a sense of proportion, such as when to drop an argument. In our reactivity, we end up trying to control our spouse in order to regain our sense of personal control. Bowen emphatically said that one of the greatest diseases of humanity is to try to change a fellow human being.<sup>90</sup> Our futile attempt to change our spouse indicates self-serving

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<sup>89</sup> Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 53; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 127, p. 189, p. 190; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 541; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 99; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, Ellen Benswanger, "Strategies to Avoid Cut-offs", p. 192.

<sup>90</sup> Kerr and Bowen, p. 83, p. 188; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 115; "Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics," G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 43.

nonacceptance, which will likely be resisted on principle. The more that we reactively push our spouse to change, the more likely is marital cutoff. Changing emotional reactivity in a married couple is a long process. The more differentiated we are, the less urgent is this desire to change our spouse. To know the blessing and telos of creation frees us from both the frantic pursuit of controlling our spouse and the opposite danger of reactively escaping our spouse through distance and cutoff. Many nowadays are attempting through techne and gnostic religion to escape from their bodies, their spouses, and creation itself.<sup>91</sup>

The single greatest impediment to understanding one another is our tendency to become emotionally reactive. Sometimes a spouse, who is not feeling listened to, will anxiously chase their spouse until they get a reaction. The rugged individualist's determination to be independent often stems more from his reactivity to other people than from a thoughtfully determined direction for self. Rugged individualism and compliance are often two sides of the same marital reactivity.<sup>92</sup>

Behind our stubborn reactivity is the fear of loss of self, that we will be swallowed up and disappear. Such reactive fear causes us to maritally cut off rather than become a non-person. We reactively see ourselves as victimized by our stubborn, unloving, illogical spouse.<sup>93</sup> Ellen Benswanger observed that emotional cutoffs perpetuate the dichotomy of good / bad, rejector / rejectee, and victim /

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<sup>91</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 261; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 35; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 46; J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 52; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 105, p. 195.

<sup>92</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 147; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 64, ft. 3, p. 188; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 26, p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 40; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 22, p. 72; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 53; Ronald W. Richardson, "Differentiation of Self as a Therapeutic Goal for the Systemic Pastoral Counselor," *Journal of Pastoral Psychotherapy*, Vol. 1(1), Fall 1987, The Haworth Press, Inc., p. 36.

victimizer. We often see ourselves as having been treated unfairly, and we are not going to give in. Marital cutoff often brings emotional stuckness, denial of issues, frozen anger, and conflict avoidance. Bridging marital cutoff reduces hostility and blame of our spouse. As we accept appropriate responsibility for our life, we decrease the marital cutoff linked to our victim identity.<sup>94</sup>

Marital reactivity is like an auto-immune dysfunction. The pastoral coach has the potential to function as an immunological system. By being nonreactive and focusing on marital strengths, we set the emotional thermostat in the room.<sup>95</sup> By being nonreactive with married couples, the pastoral coach functions as a catalyst or enzyme for change and bridging marital cutoff. The pastoral coach also incarnationally models the process of nonreactivity in a way that can give a template to the couple.

What limits us as pastors from being nonreactive in our ministry to married couples? Perhaps it is the vicious cycle of our personal emotional reactivity which limits our ability to think clearly, which then limits our ability to be nonreactive with couples. In order to best help married couples, we need to become more aware of our own personal reactivity and our own tendency to cutoff. Undertaking a comprehensive guided self-examination is vital for pastoral coaching. It can be very difficult to see our own defensiveness. Being counter-intuitive can sometimes help with responding to emotional reactivity.

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<sup>94</sup> Abby P. Adorney, *The Relationship of Emotional Cutoff to Marital Function and Psychological Symptom Development*, Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology Dissertation (California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles, 1993), p. 67, quoting Benswanger, 1987; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 243; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 78; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, Benswanger, "Strategies to Explore Cut-offs", p. 193.

<sup>95</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 160; Ducklow, *Conflicted Church/Conflicted Leader Course*, Carey Theological College, Fall 2011; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationship*, p. 106.

Rather than fight a couple's reactive blocking, the pastoral coach can initially concur with their marital assessment and nonanxiously explore the emotional content of their claimed non-reactivity.<sup>96</sup>

Married couples may sabotage our nonreactivity as pastoral coaches to see if we really 'love them' enough to emotionally fuse with their pseudo-selves. Some will even react to any suggestion of nonreactivity, claiming that their feelings are being disregarded and invalidated. If we stay on track, the reactivity and sabotage will die down. Time is on our side when we do not emotionally fuse with the married couple. One of our best ways to stay nonreactive with couples is to good-naturedly say no to "the urgent, important and serious". Our nonreactivity to a married couple's reactivity is vital in reducing marital cutoff.

#### 1h) Emotional Cutoff and Process Questions

Emotional cutoff is reduced through thoughtful Family Systems process questions. Unlike many family therapy pioneers, Bowen was not a technique-oriented pragmatist. He was exceptionally disinterested in techniques. Titelman said that Bowen was anti-technique. The use of process questions is as close as Bowen came to a technique.<sup>97</sup> There is much ambiguity in Family Systems Thinking regarding its either having few techniques vs. having the most important technique vs. having no techniques at all. This makes it particularly challenging for other Family Therapists to figure out how

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<sup>96</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 434, p. 436; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 260; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 105-106.

<sup>97</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 127, p.140; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 8.



Family Systems Theory works. Syncretistic attempts to blend Bowen Theory with other counseling practices often leave the counselor confused and frustrated.<sup>98</sup>

Process questions with married couples include “Who? What? Where? When? and How?” The ‘reducing cutoff’ benefits of process questions are that they help explore the space between the couple, slow down and diminish reactivity, and encourage self-reflective thoughtfulness.

Psychoanalytic theory concentrates on the why of human actions. Asking why is a much less helpful question to ask, as it leads to cause-and-effect thinking.<sup>99</sup> Bowen Theory carefully avoids our automatic preoccupation with why something may have happened in a marriage. To introduce ‘why thinking’ into systems thinking brings about a reversion to conventional theory. Family Systems thinking focuses on what one does, and not on his / her verbal explanations about why he / she does it. The use of ‘why’ questions cause us to lose our focus on the relationship of the couple. ‘Why questions’ in marriage are often avoidance behaviour.<sup>100</sup> It is not easy to give up asking about the motivation, the why question. Why, one might ask, is it so hard to stop asking why? Asking ‘why’ seems to be a residual, regressive reaction when we are traumatized and grieved. ‘Why’ questions are usually simulated thinking,

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<sup>98</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 127, p. 137, p.140; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 8; Michael E Kerr, “Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self,” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, P. 146; Kerr and Bowen, p. 108; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 152; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 150.

<sup>99</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 140; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*: p. 82; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, p. 175; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 63.

<sup>100</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 360, p. 416; Dennis D. Morgan, Dale H Levandowski, and Martha L. Rogers, “The Apostle Paul: problem formation and problem resolution from a Systems perspective,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Summer 1981, 9(2), 136-143, p. 143; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 61; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 12.

expressing emotional fusion over something that we are angry and anxious about. 'Why' sometimes screams within us, yet answers rarely satisfy the ache.

Insightful questions help protect the pastoral coach from acting like a dependency-causing expert / rescuer with couples. Bailing others out does not strengthen marriages. The pastoral coach is not called to save or change another person's marriage. Thoughtful questions leave the couple in their own quandary, thereby allowing them to potentially own their own marital process. Friedman observed that 80% of his Family Systems Theory counseling was asking questions.<sup>101</sup> The coach, said Bowen, is always in control of the sessions, asking hundreds of questions and avoiding interpretations. One of the opening questions is usually to ask the couple what they want to work on. Questions are intended to be low-key and calm. Rather than being advice-giving, process questions help the married couple see their role in the emotional system. If the process questions do not neutrally connect with the couple's emotionality, marital learning is limited. The more thoughtful the questions, the more effective is the bridging of cutoff through detriangling.<sup>102</sup>

Bowen used nonconfrontational questions to avoid taking marital sides. His goal was to stimulate thinking more than to encourage expression of feelings. Bowen Theory has conceptualized the human as a scientific creature that also feels.<sup>103</sup> When feelings or tears emerged, Bowen encouraged the

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<sup>101</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 72; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 95, p. 105.

<sup>102</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 315, p. 226; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, p. 51; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 42, p. 43, p. 75, Meyer "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy"; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 150; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 120; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 255.

<sup>103</sup> Murray Bowen, *Commitment to Principles: The Letters of Murray Bowen* (National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, Unpublished), p. 22 (quoted in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, Ed., p. 1.)

coach to calmly ask “what was the thought that stimulated the tears, or asking the other what they were thinking when the feeling started.”<sup>104</sup> Frost, in a recent North Shore interview, said:

I think that one of the misunderstandings of Bowen Theory is that it has nothing to do with feelings or that you eliminate feelings or something. At one clinical conference, Bowen declared: “Feelings are the heartland of therapy.” So if you read carefully what he has to say about differentiation, he talks about the integration of the differentiation between the thinking and feeling and emotional systems. The idea is that you can’t really integrate something unless there is a degree of separation, so that you know the difference between when you are operating out of your feeling system and when you are operating out of your cognitive thinking system. Once you are able to tell the difference, then you can integrate them and have access to both. You are aware of your feelings, and at times you might want to go with your feelings. But you also have the counterbalance of the more objective thinking process that you can call on when it is important.<sup>105</sup>

Friedman described this use of questions as being a catalyst, enabling the couple to “bounce off” the coach to each other. Process questions bridge cutoff by reducing the married couple’s reactive anxiety, increase their self-awareness, and enable them to think more clearly. They help us to have a non-anxious presence, and to self-differentiate. The pastoral coach needs to hold his / her questions lightly. Process questions help us overcome the denial that affects married couples. When the questions are paradoxical and mischievous, unexpected morphogenesis and cutoff reduction may occur.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 142; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 314.; Jones, p. 57; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 149; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 95, p. 161.

<sup>105</sup> “May 17th 2012 Interview with Randy Frost, Executive Director of Living Systems Counseling, about his connection with Murray Bowen” (Appendix vii, *Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff* Doctoral Thesis Project.)

<sup>106</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 151; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 72; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 130; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 1988, p. 284.

## 1i) Emotional Cutoff and Over / Under-Functioning

Both overfunctioning and underfunctioning increase the likelihood of emotional cutoff. Therapists sometimes joke that every overfunctioner deserves his / her underfunctioner. With married couples, one is often an overfunctioner and the other a dependent underfunctioner, with reciprocal intensity depending on the floating anxiety in the emotional system. Bowen called this the overadequate-inadequate reciprocity. Almost every relationship is affected by the over / underfunctioning dynamic. Bowen said that overfunctioners can end “being pinned down in the one-up position.” Marital overfunctioners tend to feel trapped by their ‘shoulds’ while underfunctioners tend to feel trapped by their ‘cant’s’.<sup>107</sup>

Over-functioning is about doing too much to gratify one’s need to be somebody. Such ‘do-er’ people have a magnetic appeal to underfunctioners. Unless a pastoral coach learns to stop overfunctioning, this overfunctioning ‘helpfulness’ will be unhelpful, creating functional helplessness in the married couple. Bowen said in order to reduce marital helplessness, the pastoral coach is to “find a leader in the leaderless family.” Overfunctioning may cause ‘dis-integr-ation’ in the underfunctioners, inducing auto-destruction. The over / underfunctioning dynamic can even flare up unexpectedly in marital violence.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Papero, “Bowen Family Systems and Marriage,” p. 17; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 110; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 47; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 240.

<sup>108</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 113; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, p. 135 quoting Friedman; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, p. 157; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 75; Papero, “Bowen Family Systems and Marriage,” p. 17; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 159.

It is vital that we turn the married couple into the systems specialists so that they don't need us when future anxiety inevitably hits their emotional system. As pastoral coaches, we may find ourselves pressured to unwisely accept responsibility for insoluble marital problems. But if overfunctioners accept responsibility for the couple's solutions, then they must also accept responsibility for the outcome of their conflict.<sup>109</sup> If a pastoral coach accepts responsibility for the anxiety of the married couple, they are actually being uncaring and robbing the couple of their opportunity for growth. Pastoral coaches are to promise no benefits except those which come from the couple's own effort to learn about themselves and change themselves. The couple responds best when the pastoral coach is clear about what he / she can or cannot do. By matching people's energy, the coach encourages the couple to accept responsibility for their own change. Overfunctioning by pastoral coaches increases the possibility of the coach's own dysfunctioning and even burnout.<sup>110</sup> We overfunctioners must either willingly let go of overresponsibility or its very weight will force us to do so.

Nothing fuses married couples like one spouse over-functioning in the other's space, whereas nothing creates emotional space like self-definition. Overfunctioning brings emotional death to our spouse.<sup>111</sup> Bowen holds that "...recovery can begin with the slightest decrease of the overfunctioning..." It is much easier to get the overfunctioner to reduce their overfunctioning than the other way around. A

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<sup>109</sup> Murray Bowen, "The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice," *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 7:345-374, 1966, p. 168; David S Freeman, "Family systems Thinking and the helping process: misconceptions and basic assumptions," School of Social Work, University of BC, from *Perspectives on Disability and the Helping Process*, Chapter 12, p. 187; Freeman, p. 188.

<sup>110</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, p. 140, P. 151; Papero, "Bowen Family Systems and Marriage," p. 20; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 32; Bowen, *Family Systems Theory*, p. 246; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 77.

<sup>111</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 56, p. 57; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 75; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 156.

key in reducing marital cutoff is in making oneself small. This can include more self-effacing humour, more balance in being and doing, more peaceful presence, more honesty, more developing of character and virtue, more safe silences, more playful adventure, more creative dating, and less pressuring each other to conform to one's expectations.<sup>112</sup>

Our post-modern context simultaneously marginalizes marriages and raises marital expectations. When a couple has unrealistic expectations of themselves, it fosters unhealthy conflict. These can include the expectation that one spouse has to preserve the peace and harmony, or the expectation that one spouse knows what is best for the other spouse. People nowadays are sometimes pressuring their own spouse to function in superhuman, godlike ways.<sup>113</sup> This can lead to an “anxious hovering” which impairs the other spouse’s ability to function. We will stop overfunctioning when we become accountable for the self and only for the self, communicate for the self and only for the self.<sup>114</sup> Reduction of over- and under-functioning is indispensable in lasting reduction of marital cutoff.

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<sup>112</sup> Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol.7, No. 5, October, 1966, p. 352, p. 168; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 154, p.157; Ron Richardson, *Becoming Your Best: A Self-Help Guide for Thinking People* (Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, MN, 2008), p. 101, p. 102.

<sup>113</sup> J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 24; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 220; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, P.71; Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: a Comprehensive Guide* (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 1999), p. 539 quoting David Elkind 1981:102.

<sup>114</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of Family Therapy*, p. 244; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 64; Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics,” G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 52.

## 1j) Emotional Cutoff and Divorce

Cutoff among married couples is so common that it is almost the air we breathe. For many of us, marital and relational apartheid (the state of apartness and separation) is all that we generationally know. We may dislike it, but there seems no escape. The three marital symptoms that Friedman encouraged us to pay close attention to were distance, divorce, and conflict. Sometimes all three converge together relationally, with marital conflict often resulting in divorce and geographic/emotional distance. Marital estrangement is often a sign of the intensity of unresolved marital attachment.<sup>115</sup>

Cutoff and divorce-related distance can be connected to the anxiety of emotional fusion and resulting loss of self. While there is loss of self in emotional fusion, there is also significant loss of self in the emotional cutoff connected with divorce. The inability of the couple to find a balance between closeness and personal space may predispose them to marital cutoff. Divorce, said Ferrera, is a complex, emotionally intense, multidimensional, multigenerational process. Part of the stress of divorce is that both marital partners rarely agree that divorce is necessary. The one withdrawing from the marriage may have different reactions from the one pursuing. The avoider can always outrun the marital pursuer. Marital cutoff tends to be generationally repetitive. Relational runners tend to keep on compulsively running. Runaway reactivity and unstable triangles go together. Those who run away from their own family will tend to run away in the marriage.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, Benschwanger, "Strategies to Explore Cut-offs", p. 196.

<sup>116</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 62, p. 155; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 137, p. 383; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 289, p. 291, p. 303; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 177, p. 301; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 382; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 84.

All five couples in our Strengthening Workshop, having been divorced, experienced emotional cutoff. The more intense the cutoff, the more he / she is vulnerable to duplicating the pattern with the parents with the first available other person. Bowen described this as “the impulsive marriage”. Such marriages, followed by living together after failed marriages, were seen by Bowen as an expression of emotional cutoff.<sup>117</sup> Females, who were less than sixteen years old when their parents divorced, are 59% more likely to be divorced. Males similarly were 39% more likely to be divorced. Edward Beal said:

Divorce breeds divorce. There is a multigenerational emotional process operating in families, coupled with the societal changes regulating marital relationships, that contributes to the currently higher divorce rates and higher degree of emotional cutoff from family of origin.<sup>118</sup>

Sometimes married couples cut off and divorce over presenting issues such as financial conflict, religious conflict, and even over conflict about other family member’s divorces. Family Systems Theory holds that the issues are rarely the issue; rather undifferentiation is the issue.<sup>119</sup> Cutoff exaggerates the existing family systems problems in the next generation. Ferrera holds that emotional cutoff between parent and child is arguably the greatest long-term cost of divorce. Key stresses that can lead to triangulation are child support, custody, and contact issues. Maintaining a non-anxious presence with one’s ex-spouse is a vital and challenging exercise while negotiating the joint parenting of one’s children. Thoughtful responsiveness rather than “fight, flight, or freeze” reactivity is key in reducing the extent of

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<sup>117</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. xvi ; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage*, p. 22; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, “Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff,” p. 229; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 85.

<sup>118</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, “Marital Fusion and Differentiation”, p. 124; p. 331, Edward W. Beal, “Child-Focused Divorce”, p. 331.

<sup>119</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 61, p. 62.



the emotional cutoff in co-parenting. The greater the difficulty and conflict in the divorce, the more potential it has to stir up reactivity and cutoff in others. Can the tragedy of spousal divorce be contained so that the entire family is not divorced?<sup>120</sup>

Emotional cutoff and sexual anxiety are closely connected in marriage and divorce. Physical intimacy and connectedness in marriage depend on a functioning front-brain cerebral cortex. Without engaging the cerebral cortex, marital sex lacks the intimate power of choice and thoughtfulness. With anxious stress, said Ferrera, sex in a marriage is usually the first thing to go:

Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky (1994) describes the intricate interplay between the physiology of the stress response and sexual desire, and provides scientific undergirding for a fact that most people discover from personal experience: stress is not conducive to sexual desire and arousal for either the male or female...the nature of their sexual relationship changes, usually in the direction of less quantity, if not less satisfying quality...<sup>121</sup>

Triangles are forever, which means that with married couples, new people come along to replace the empty places in a triangle when one person has either died or emotionally cutoff from the triangle. Our epidemic of divorce and replacement dyads could be seen as a reflection of our anxious triangles. Bowen held that a divorce, or threatened divorce, is implicit evidence of an unresolved emotional attachment to the parental families. Approximately sixty-five percent of divorced women and seventy percent of divorced men remarry, with an average three-year window between the divorce and remarriage. Beal said that ex-spousal conflict involving children is the most potentially damaging

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<sup>120</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 87; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 85; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 297, p. 298, p. 299.

<sup>121</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 135; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 293.

triangle. Through the family projection process, an ex-spouse can project their marital anxiety onto their children, either pedestaling them or scapegoating them. The child may be tempted to be the marital rescuer / overfunctioner. The more intense the family projection, the lower level of differentiation the child may develop.<sup>122</sup>

Why does breaking the marriage contract involve so much more time, money and emotion than initially making the contract. Perhaps this is because marriage is not linear and clinical but is systemic and covenantal. Some divorced people deny the significance of their loss and cutoff through anxious busyness. Others bridge their cutoff through greater self-defining and systemic awareness. Ferrera encouraged the owning of the divorce process and constructing one's own future rather than passively allowing anxious polarization to dominate.<sup>123</sup>

Family Systems Theory offers a resource that can either reduce a couple's tendency to cut off or increase their ability to not blame and judge during a divorce-based cutoff. By self-differentiating and clarifying one's core principles, the person is more likely to stay calmer during the tragic intensity of a marriage breakup. Bowen held that a couple's levels of differentiation are usually very similar; if one's level improved, it could be a catalyst for the other spouse. While the ideal is that increased differentiation levels would eliminate or reduce divorce-based cutoff, there is also the potential that increased differentiation would enable divorced spouses to more maturely work out ongoing differences,

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<sup>122</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 135; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 433; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Katherine Baker, "Treating a Remarried Family System", p. 356; E.W. Beal and G. Hochman, *Adult Children of Divorce* (Delacorte Press, New York, N.Y., 1991), p. 334; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera, "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 308

<sup>123</sup> C. Ahrons, *The Good Divorce* (Harper Collins, New York, NY, 1994), p. 167; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera. "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 294-295, p. 300.

particularly in co-parenting. The more that one becomes emotionally neutral and observationally aware, the greater opportunity the ex-spouse will have to bridge cutoff. Ferrera said:

Emotional cutoff can be minimized if the husband and wife and their families work to resolve the many issues and decisions of divorce in ways that are the least costly and disruptive to all involved.<sup>124</sup>

Bowen taught that going back to one's family of origin could help one to mature, thereby reducing emotional cutoff. Sometimes the pain of divorce will motivate an ex-spouse to do the challenging family of origin work. Ferrera observed that few divorcing partners ever ask themselves what family patterns led to their divorce. Through doing their family of origin work, especially using genograms, couples in our Strengthening Marriage Workshop and Strengthening Relationships Group have been able to see previously invisible patterns of emotional cutoff that went back for many generations. It is a joy to see marriages restored. Family of origin work has the potential to increase the level of marital restoration on the North Shore. If embraced widely on the North Shore, such work could raise the level of the North Shore Societal Process, creating a climate where more marriages would reject the quick fix and instead look for long-term morphogenic answers to marital conflict.<sup>125</sup> Doing family of origin work will help divorced couples to better manage their ongoing co-parenting responsibilities.

In the post-interview, Lloyd Lindsay said that the most important turning points/times of change were getting married again to each other after being divorced: "that was a real big shift. I think that was the biggest one of all. And from there, it was a lot different. That was a big change." Linda Lindsay said

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<sup>124</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Ferrera, "Bridging Emotional Cutoff from a Former Spouse.", p. 391.

<sup>125</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Ferrera. "The Continuum of Emotional Cutoff in Divorce," p. 308, p. 309.

that their time apart when divorced help them realize what value they had in the other person. Both Lloyd and Linda were people of few words who know clearly what they value in the restoration of their marriage after six years of divorce.<sup>126</sup>

#### 1k) Emotionally Focused Therapy's Approach to Attachment and Emotional Cutoff

Does Emotional Focused Therapy inadvertently make people more vulnerable to marital emotional cutoff? Emotionally Focused Therapy is the only couple therapy explicitly based on attachment theory.<sup>127</sup> This therapy holds that rigid interactions in distressed couples restrict accessibility and responsiveness which are the basis of a secure sense of attachment and emotional connectedness.<sup>128</sup> Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg, authors of the article "The Emotionally Focused Approach to Problems in Adult Attachments," taught that

In terms of bonding theory, marital distress may generally be considered to represent the failure of an attachment relationship to provide a secure base for one or both partners. The basic attachment needs for security, protection, and closeness have not been met.

Where Family Systems Theory encourages thinking about our feelings, Emotionally Focused Therapy encourages feeling about our feelings. Kerr said that feeling-focused therapists see Family

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<sup>126</sup> Appendix ix: Analysis of the Interviews with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop Couples.

<sup>127</sup> Susan M. Johnson and Leslie S. Greenberg, "The Emotionally Focused Approach to Problems in Adult Attachment," *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, p. 121.

<sup>128</sup> Johnson and Greenberg, "The Emotionally Focused Approach to Problems in Adult Attachments," *Clinical Handbook on Couple Therapy*, p. 121.

Systems Therapy as faulty in not drawing out feeling in a counseling session.<sup>129</sup> Does focusing on feeling about our feelings heighten emotional fusion? Emotionally Focused Therapy also contrasts with the strong focus on behaviour and cognition that has been so popular with the Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy. There seems to be similarities between Emotionally Focused Therapy and Family Systems Theory in their emphasis on the marital pattern of pursuit-avoidance.<sup>130</sup> Schnarch contrasted Attachment Theory with Family Systems Theory, suggesting that we've "mistaken a part for the whole":

Fifty years ago, child development specialist recognized the importance of infants' drive to bond (attach) to their caregivers. Unfortunately we've erroneously assumed this is the dominant and overriding drive for children and adults, and popularized the image of infants being helpless and terrified when there is no one to comfort them. We've applied this same image to marriage and concluded our partner is supposed to soothe us and not do things that make us insecure.

John Bowlby, an Attachment Theory pioneer and author of *Attachment and Loss*, strongly emphasized the importance of the mother-child bond and the trauma of its disruption through separation and loss:

What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Johnson and Greenberg, "The Emotionally Focused Approach to Problems in Adult Attachments," *Clinical Handbook on Couple Therapy*, p. 121, p. 123, p. 124; Michael Kerr, "An Obstacle to 'Hearing' Bowen Theory," *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 63.

<sup>130</sup> Johnson and Greenberg, "The Emotionally Focused Approach to Problems in Adult Attachments," *Clinical Handbook on Couple Therapy*, p. 122, p. 125.

<sup>131</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 43; John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 1, Attachment* (Penguin Books, London, England, 1969, 1973, 1980), p. xi; p. 378.

Disrupting the mother-child bond can make it hard to trust as an adult. While this Attachment Theory insight makes common sense, there are unexpected downsides, involving increased fusion and overattachment. While both Bowen and Bowlby emphasize the attachment to the mother, Peleg and Arnon's research indicated that a differentiated attachment to the father is just as significant.<sup>132</sup>

#### 1) Family Systems Theory's Approach to Attachment and Emotional Cutoff

Family Systems Theory takes a different approach to attachment and detachment. We are not as fragile as we think. Bowen said: "Do you have to go on treating each other as fragile people who are about to fall apart?" Resilience and self-repair are inherent within us. Attachment Theory, said Schnarch, has underestimated the ability of infants to self-soothe and recover.<sup>133</sup> Schnarch said that we need to stop thinking of ourselves as mere infants. Attachment Theory has "ignored our basic capacity to self-soothe and stabilize ourselves" and over-emphasized infants' drive for attachment (social connection). Attachment or togetherness is only one half of the picture, from a Family Systems Theory perspective. We need to hold in dynamic tension our desire for closeness and togetherness with our need for our personal space and self-differentiation. Frost observed that

if you look at Bowlby and Ainsworth and some of the others that have come along since, basically the critique is that there isn't enough attachment of a certain kind, whereas in Bowen Theory the focus is on too much attachment, the failure to gradually resolve the emotional attachment established at birth when it is entirely appropriate and needed...Bowen Theory calls attention to

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<sup>132</sup> J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 42, P. 76; Peleg and Arnon, p. 333.

<sup>133</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 118; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 43, p. 347, p. 348.

the overinvolvement, overdoing of attachment whereas people in Attachment Theory worry about the lack of attachment, or the lack of the right kind of attachment.<sup>134</sup>

The Achilles heel of Attachment Theory is that it may inadvertently leaves us stuck in the very emotional fusion, reactivity and unresolved attachment that will push us into emotional cutoff. Over-attachment brings unsustainable loss of self that causes many to anxiously flee. Many Marriage Retreat models are emotionally-fused hothouses that lack self-differentiation and personal boundaries. The very intimacy that some marriage retreats celebrate may become the seedbed of later anxious marital cutoff. Strengthening marriages comes in resolving our unresolved emotional attachments through unfused connections rather than emotional cutoff. We don't have to disengage. We can maritally re-engage without losing self. Some call this positive fusion. It is less confusing to call it unfused connecting and engaging.<sup>135</sup>

Emotional cutoff does nothing to solve our unresolved emotional attachments. It only makes the intensity of the attachment grow temporarily dormant. The antidote to unresolved emotional cutoff is in developing a more objective sense of reality, refocusing our expectations, and reducing fusion. Our marriages are best strengthened through reducing emotionally fused attachment.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 44, p. 348-349; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 21; "May 17th 2012 Interview with Randy Frost, Executive Director of Living Systems Counseling, about his connection with Murray Bowen" (Appendix vii, *Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff* Doctoral Thesis Project).

<sup>135</sup> Diana R Garland, *Family Ministry: a Comprehensive Guide*, p. 539.; Peter Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 121, p. 125.

<sup>136</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Foreword by Michael Kerr," p. xix; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 45; p. 132; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 191.

## **Research Question**

The research question was: In what ways might a four-session Strengthening Marriage workshop strengthen participants' marriages? The method for evaluating any potential strengthening was done through a qualitative analysis comparing the results of the MESI Interview Protocol done with the couples before and then after the four-session workshop.

## **2) Methodology**

A Strengthening Marriage workshop was conducted over four sessions with married couples who have been married more than once, and either live or have lived on the North Shore. By the term “married more than once” is meant those who have been divorced, separated, widowed. The workshop was conducted over one month, in agreement with the doctoral advisor, in order to lengthen the impact of the teaching and give the couples more time to process the material in their lives. Evenings were selected because it worked better for those working during the day. Four sessions, lasting 2.5 hours each, were chosen as a reasonable time commitment for North Shore couples. Given the busyness of many North Shore couples, this time commitment worked well, resulting in no dropout rate by the five couples.

The specific focus on remarried couples who had been previously separated, divorced or widowed was decided upon in consultation with the doctoral advisor. Such a focus brought a greater clarity in researching and understanding emotional cutoff, which is foundational to the Doctoral Thesis Project. While it was more challenging to recruit such a specific subgroup, the data collected in terms of emotional cutoff was of higher value. With all five couples being divorced and remarried, the research was able to connect with a vital target group of North Shore residents who had all experienced emotional



cutoff. One of the couples divorced and remarried each other. The other four couples were divorced and then remarried to new partners. Through conducting the pre-interviews and post-interviews, there was opportunity to learn from the wisdom of these five couples about common patterns of habituation related to divorce and emotional cutoff. While the research focus was on previously divorced, remarried couples, the concern has been for strengthening marriages more generally, including people preparing for marriage and those wishing to improve their marital stability and satisfaction.

To obtain a more representative sample of North Shore couples, there was intentional advertising primarily in the wider North Shore community setting rather than in uniquely church settings. This included advertising in the Deep Cove Crier, North Shore News, North Shore Outlook, Craigslist, Facebook, Twitter, and with posters posted in over 200 North Shore stores, Recreation Centres, and libraries. Married couples who had been married more than once were invited to participate. In the workshop, Family Systems Theory was taught on selected topics on strengthening marriage, including emotional cutoff as related to family of origin issues. Each session had a unique focus, related to the Family Systems Theory goal of bridging marital cutoff: 1) Session #1: Discovering Strengths 2) Session #2: Honouring Differences 3) Session #3: Appreciating Conflict 4) Session # 4: Balancing Closeness and Personal Space.

Confidentiality was enhanced, on the advice of the Doctoral Advisor, by randomly selected new first and last names for each of the five couples from the North Shore phone book: 1) John and Julie Jones 2) Burt and Bev Buchanan 3) Sean and Susan Sutherland 4) Richard and Rose Reid and 5) Lloyd and Linda Lindsay. Choosing anonymous names, rather than Couples #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, helps bring each of the five couples to life for the reader. The face-to-face interviews were very helpful in getting the emotional tone. Each couple was interviewed in person in one-hour conjoint interviews before

and after the workshop, using the same MESI (Marriage Emotional System Interview Protocol) interview protocol and format.

There was one final three-part question about the workshop added to the post-workshop MESI interview: a) How was the workshop for you? b) How has the workshop strengthened your marriage? c) How could the workshop be strengthened? The seventh three-part question could not have been asked in the pre-interview, because none of the five couples had yet experienced the workshop. The MESI Interview Protocol, found in Appendix V, was specifically developed for the Strengthening Marriage Workshop as a way of identifying emotional cutoff in married couples. It was based on the CFES (Church Family Emotional Systems Interview Protocol) that was designed for the Congregational Engagement Course. Emotional cutoff was defined and examined by the MESI Interview Protocol's intentional focus on 1) attraction, 2) turning points, 3) handling conflict, 4) family patterns, and 5) possibilities for the future. Turning points are recognized in Family Systems Theory as key for understanding and bridging emotional cutoff. Richardson said that he would always ask people about critical turning points in their own lives, who was most affected, and the outcome of these turning points.<sup>137</sup>

The MESI Interview Protocol, reflecting the Family Systems Theory value of being strength-based, was created to be “up and out” in focus rather than “down and in”. This distinction was learned through a Nov 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 conversation with the Doctoral Advisor: “Your questions are ‘up and out questions’...Many people design questions ‘down and in’.” The focus of the Strengthening Marriage workshop was to bring stronger marriages through rediscovering their strengths and helping couples

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<sup>137</sup> Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, P. 85; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 83.

bridge emotional cutoff. Over four evening sessions, couples learned how to bring greater balance in their need for intimacy and personal space. They learned to honour differences as a way of growing closer together. Valuing marital conflict became seen as an avenue to personal and marital growth.

From the workshop, a Strengthening Marriage manual was created which was added as an appendix to the Doctoral Thesis Project. This manual is transferable to other church and non-church contexts. A glossary of Family Systems Theory terms is included in Appendix ix to bring greater clarity for the reader. A transcript of the four-session workshop was produced in order to give transparency regarding the content of the workshop teaching. The transcript of the workshop is available upon email request to ed\_hird@telus.net.

A MESI interview was given before and after the four workshops. The research method was qualitative, looking for meaningful patterns, particularly for measurable differences in the responses of those married more than once. Edward Cook observed that

Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents, and participant observation data, to understand and explain social phenomena. Qualitative researchers can be found in many disciplines and fields, using a variety of approaches, methods and techniques.<sup>138</sup>

Family Systems Theory journals and books provided the theoretical framework for interpreting the data. The target group was married couples who have been separated, divorced or widowed and who either live or have lived on the North Shore. The North Vancouver Lonsdale area has a higher percentage of people listed as divorced (11%) than the BC average (8%). The North Vancouver Seymour area and

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<sup>138</sup> Edward Cook, *Developing Church Planters*, Carey Theological College Doctor of Ministry Project, May 2007, Paddy Ducklow email communication with Edward Cook, January 18<sup>th</sup> 2007, p. 26, ft 68.

West Vancouver has a lower percentage (7%).<sup>139</sup> On the North Shore, there are mostly baby boomers born between 1946-1964 with some of the builder generation, many of whom were married but are now widowed. There is a smaller but significant group of young adults, many of whom are single but interested in potential marriage and couple issues. Many on the North Shore are upper middle class and wealthier, having earned at least a bachelor's degree. There is a large Caucasian population, a significant Iranian population, and a growing Chinese population.<sup>140</sup> The future of ministry on the North Shore, especially in strengthening marriages, will be more multicultural and multiethnic. At St. Simon's, several of our core leaders are in multicultural, multiethnic marriages.

There was a qualitative analysis of the MESI interview results from before and after the four-session workshop. The protocol involved 1) recruiting the couples through the North Shore media, posting of workshop posters, and word-of-mouth 2) meeting each couple in a neutral location: the North Vancouver City Library, a coffee shop, or their home if preferred, and having them sign the Informed Consent form 3) interviewing the couple using the same MESI Interview Protocol before and after the four-session workshop, using an iPhone4 Audio recording 4) transcribing the recording 5) tabulating the results of the findings 6) turning the results into pie chart and bar graph analysis 7) ensuring the anonymity of the couples being interviewed through what is quoted or not quoted, and 8) reporting the results of the interviews in this doctoral thesis project.

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<sup>139</sup> The statistics for these percentages are listed in the Appendix xii.

<sup>140</sup> Statistics Canada. 2007. *North Vancouver, British Columbia (Code5915046)* (table). *2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/index.cfm?Lang=E> ; <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/Census/2006Census/ProvincialElectoralDistricts.aspx>

### 3) FINDINGS

By interviewing the five couples who took the Strengthening Marriage Workshop, it was discovered that taking the workshop made a measurable difference. The interview objective was to do qualitative research, rather than quantitative research. Qualitative research is defined by John Creswell as

A means for exploring understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particular to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data.<sup>141</sup>

Qualitative research is ethnographic and field-work based. Edward Cook noted:

Qualitative research can be conducted by observation of the situation by an outsider coupled with information provided by key informants. This approach is generically designated ethnographic research and is extensively used in sociological and anthropological studies.<sup>142</sup>

The qualitative research method is phenomenological in the sense that I aimed to ascertain the experienced 'truths' and meaning-making of the five married couples. This method is inductive in that it builds theories from the specific to the general. Brian Stelck describes the phenomenological research approach as "interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures or situations."<sup>143</sup>

Finding five married North Shore couples who had been previously divorced, separated or widowed was the greatest challenge. One of the obstacles was busyness. Another issue was privacy and

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<sup>141</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage Publications, Los Angeles, CA), p. 232.

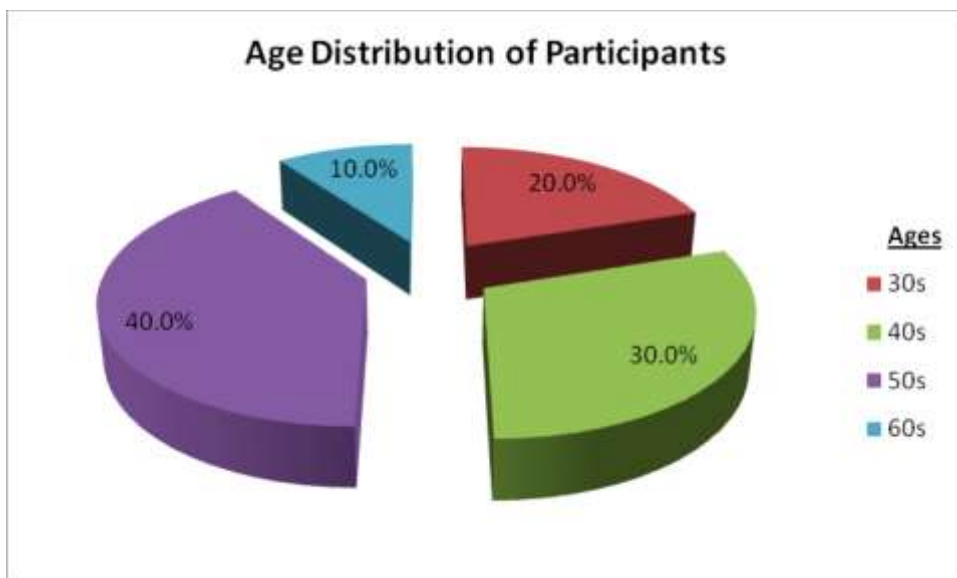
<sup>142</sup> Edward Cook, *Developing Church Planters*, Carey Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project, p. 114

<sup>143</sup> Brian Stelck, DCC901 Carey Theological College course, online video.

insecurity, where some married couples seem reluctant to talk about their marriage or attend a workshop. Assuring them of anonymity and that no one would be expected to publicly talk during the workshop was helpful in getting consent. Part of the anonymity was that, in consultation with the doctoral advisor, new first and last names were randomly selected for each of the five couples from the North Shore phone book.

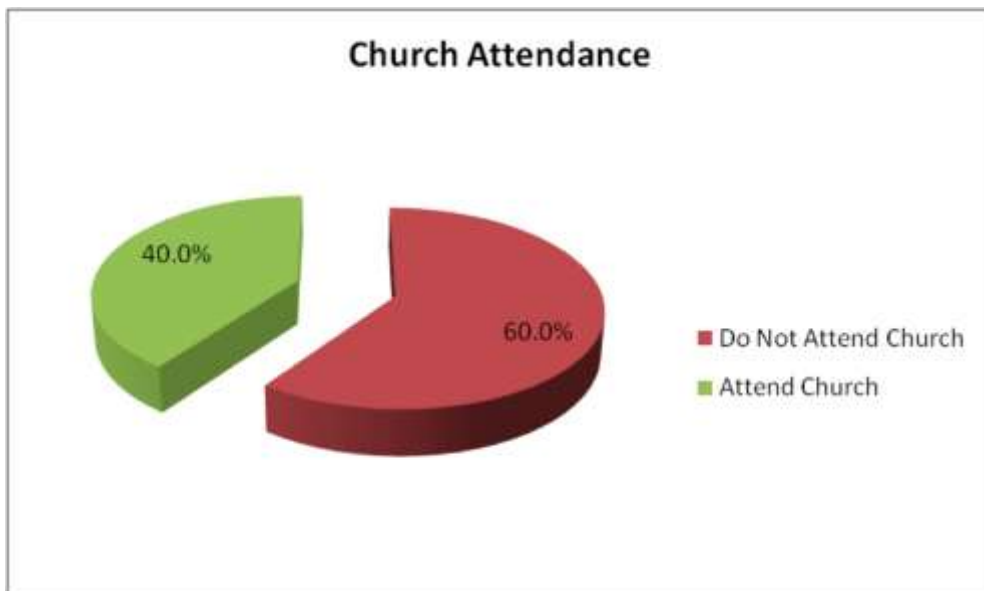
The methodology of data collection involved a pre-interview before the workshop and an identical post-interview after the workshop was concluded. Only the seventh question directly related to the workshop was new. As part of the data analysis, the comparative responses of the couples were assessed regarding meaningful patterns of similarity and difference.

Of the five couples, two of the people were in their thirties, three in their forties, four in their fifties, and one in their sixties. With none in their twenties or seventy and above, the people in the workshop were primarily GenX or Babyboomers.

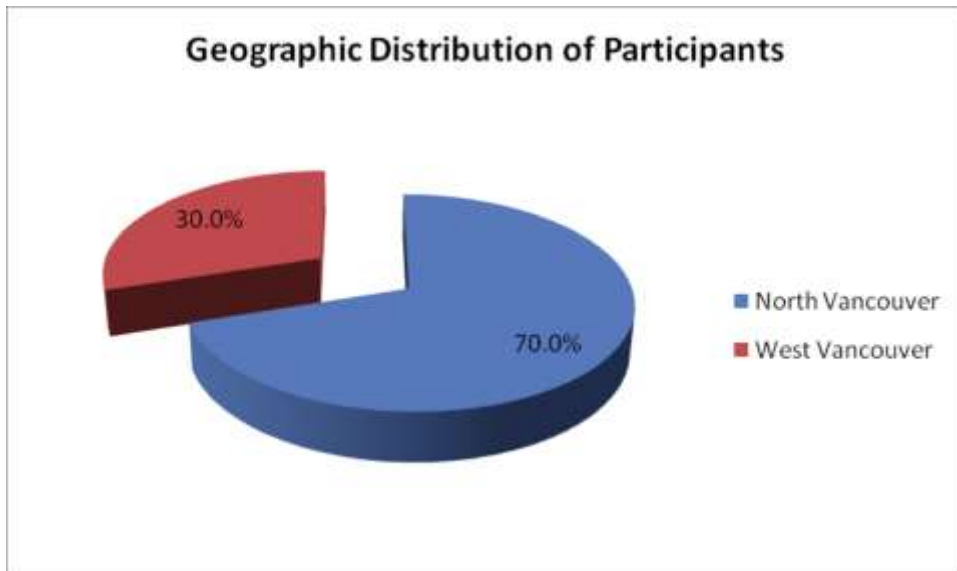


There was a great variation in the length of marriage for the five couples, ranging from seven months to twenty-six years. All the five couples had been previously divorced. None were previously widowed. Two couples had been separated from each other but reunited. Only one of the couples had both been divorced before marrying their current spouse. Three of the five couples (60%) had one spouse never previously married and the other spouse previously divorced. One of the five couples had been divorced once and married three times to each other.

The number of children in these five marriages ranged from zero to six. Three of the marriages were blended families with children from previous marriages or relationships. Children were still living at home in two of the five marriages (40%). Three of the five couples (60%) did not currently attend church, though one of the non-attending couples self-identified as Roman Catholic, and another of the non-attending couples were still members of a congregation.



With all five couples, they either attended church together or did not go at all, which suggested religious / non-religious emotional fusion. Seven of the participants (70%) lived in North Vancouver and three (30%) lived in West Vancouver.

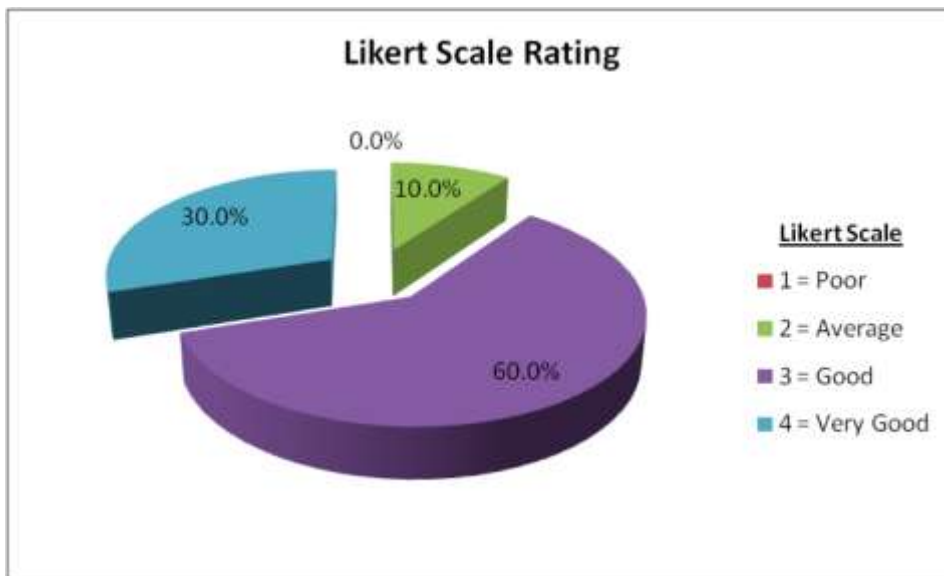


One couple had two residences, with one spouse primarily in West Vancouver and the other in North Vancouver. Both West Vancouver and North Vancouver are expensive in terms of purchasing accommodation, though West Vancouver is more expensive, requiring a higher income level. Two of the five couples (40%) were home owners. All five couples wanted to stay on the North Shore for the rest of their lives, though two couples were uncertain because of job possibilities and in the second case, family who live elsewhere.



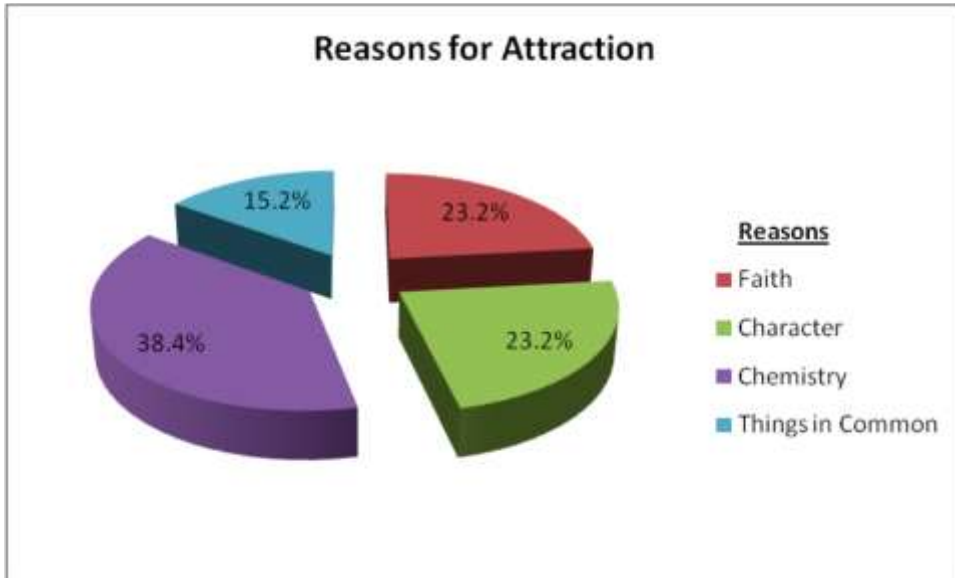
All five couples, in doing the genogram exercise, showed significant emotional cutoff, distance and conflict in both their families of origin and their previous marriages. Genograms are a vital tool in both understanding and bridging marital cutoff. In the follow-up 'Strengthening Relationships' group, there has been experimentation with showing both emotional cutoff and covenant-breaking on marital and family genograms.

Using a four-point Likert Scale (poor =1, average = 2, good = 3, very good = 4) as to how the workshop was for them, one person (10%) said that it was average, six people (60%) said that it was good, and three people (30%) said that the workshop was very good. On this Likert Scale, the Strengthening Marriage Workshop was rated as a 3.4.



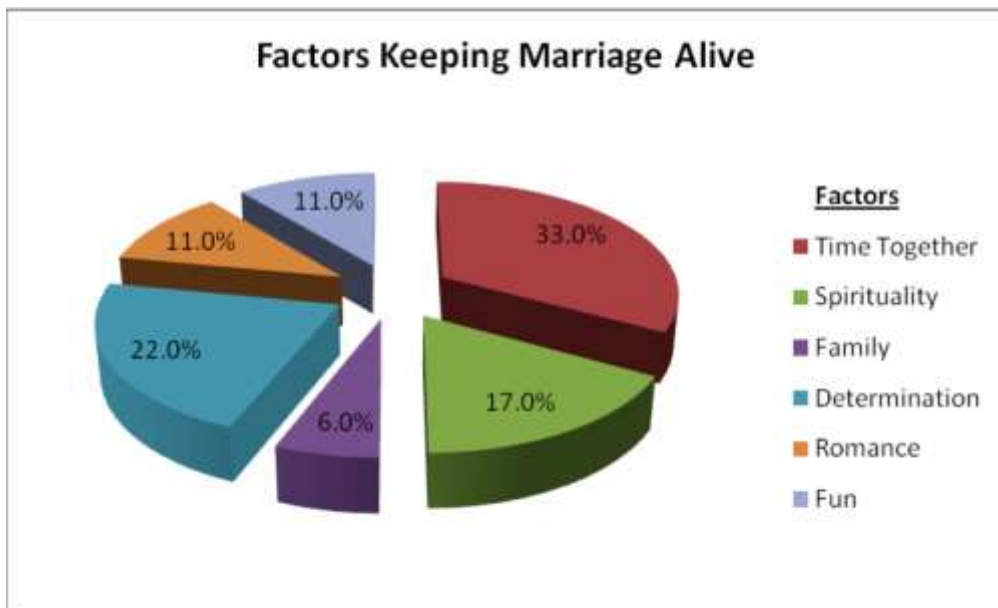
Question 1a) What attracted you to your spouse?

Categories: faith (23.2%), character (23.2%), chemistry (38.4%), things in common (15.2%)



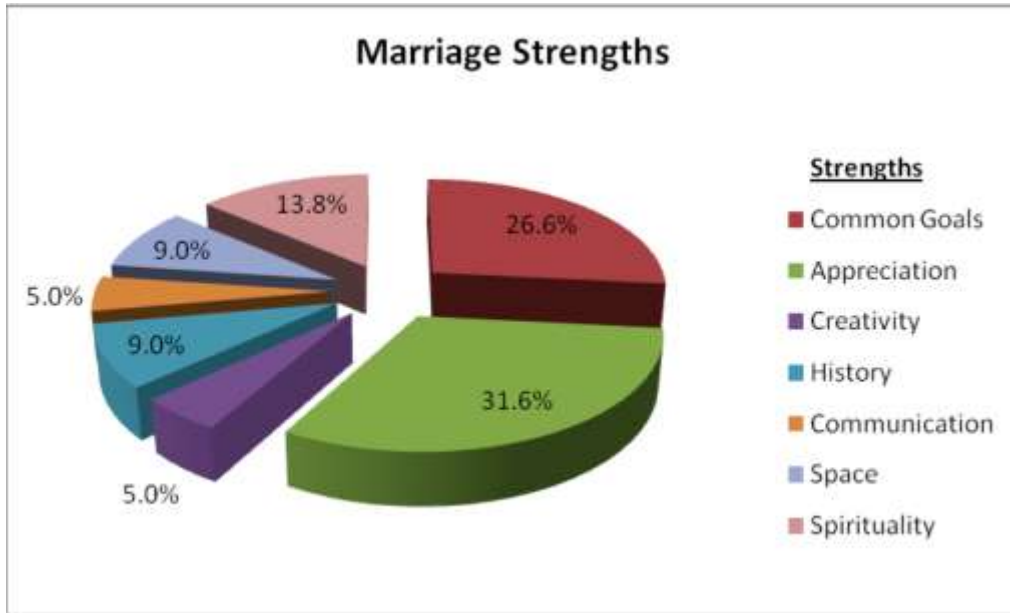
Question 1b) What keeps your marriage alive?

Categories: Time Together (33%), Spirituality (17%), Family (6%), Determination (22%), Romance (11%), Fun (11%)



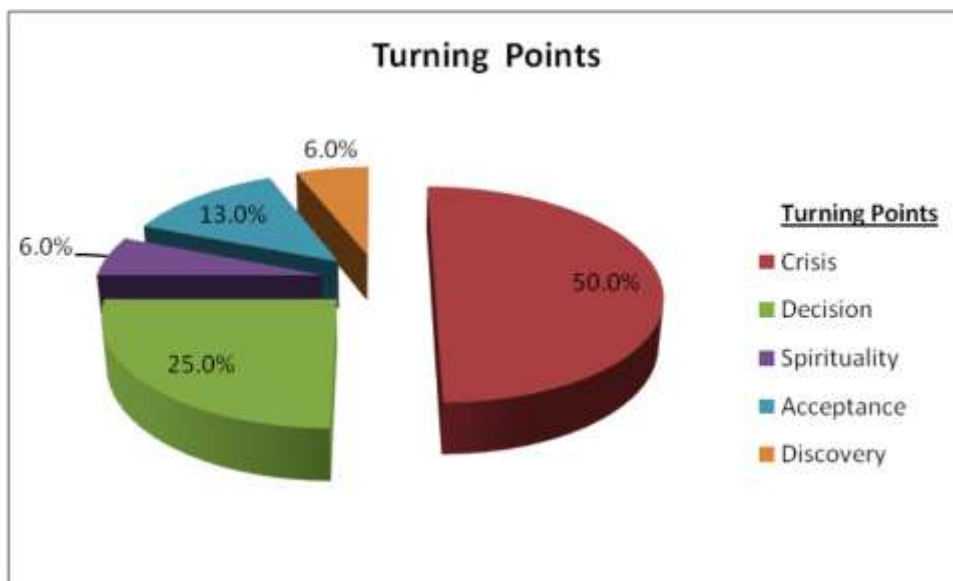
Question 2) What would you see as your marriage's strengths?

Categories: Common Goals (26.6%), Appreciation (31.6%), Creativity (5%), History (9%), Communication (5%), Space (9%), Spirituality (13.8%)



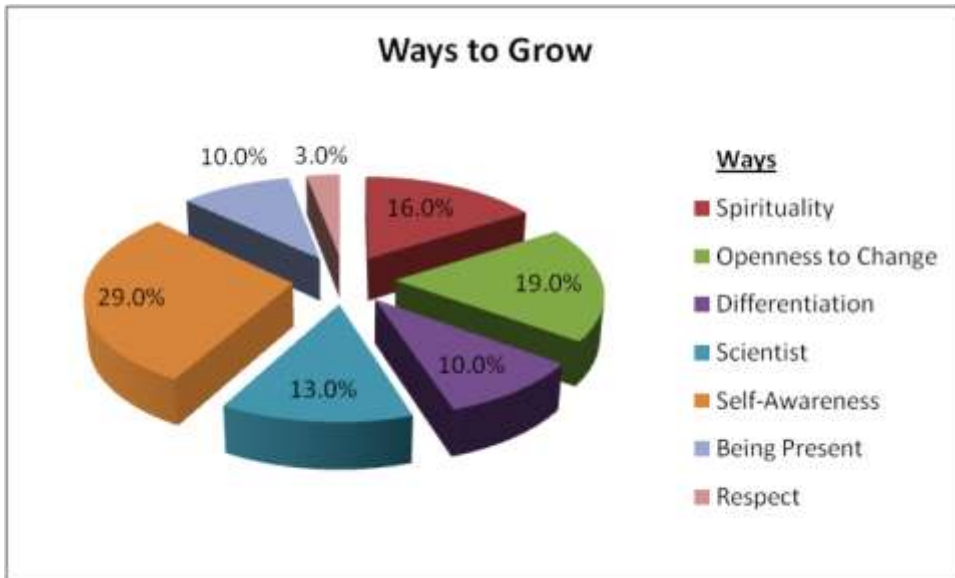
Question 3: What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?

Categories: Crisis (50%), Decision (25%), Spirituality (6%), Acceptance (13%), Discovery (6%)



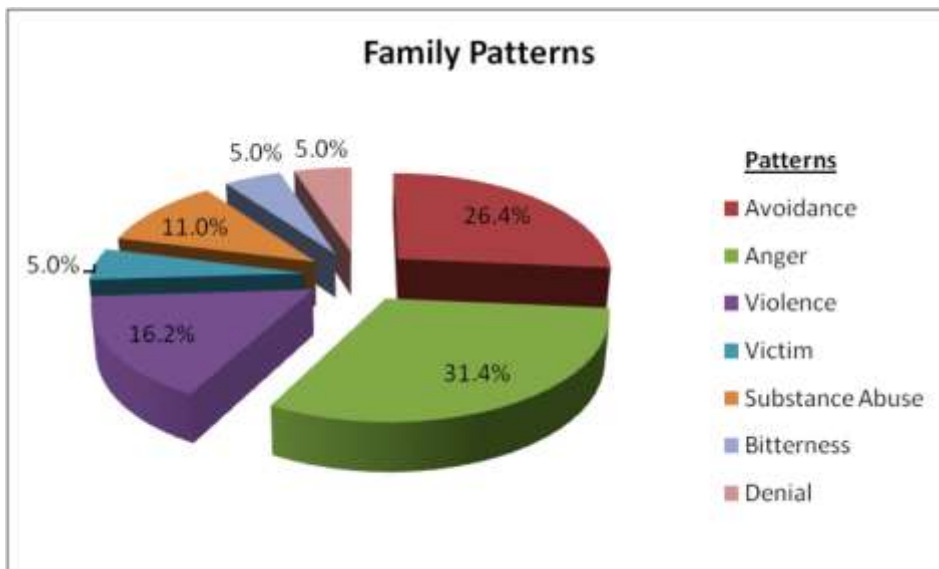
Question 4: How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years?  
What are ways to grow in that area?"

Categories: Spirituality (16%), Openness to change (19%), Differentiation (10%), Scientist (13%), Self-awareness (29%), Being Present (10%), Respect (3%)



Question 5a: What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain?

Categories: Avoidance (26.4%), Anger (31.4%), Violence (16.2%), Victim (5%), Substance Abuse (11%), Bitterness (5%), Denial (5%)



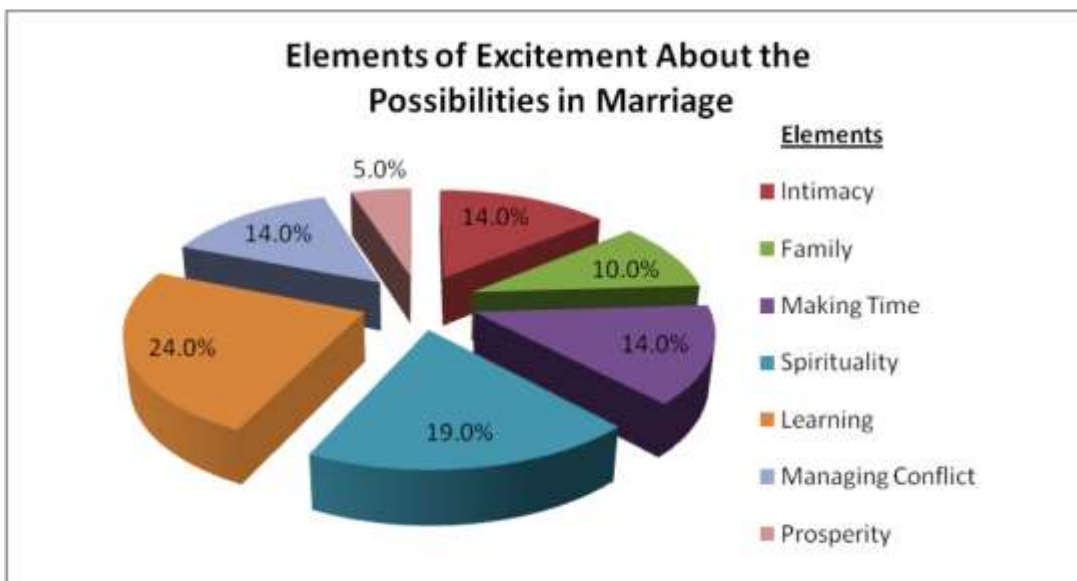
Question 5b: How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?

Categories: Compromise (5%), Learning (14%), Scientist (10%), Self-control (14%) Differentiation (33%), Spirituality (10%), Fighting / Rescuing / Expressing Feelings (14%)



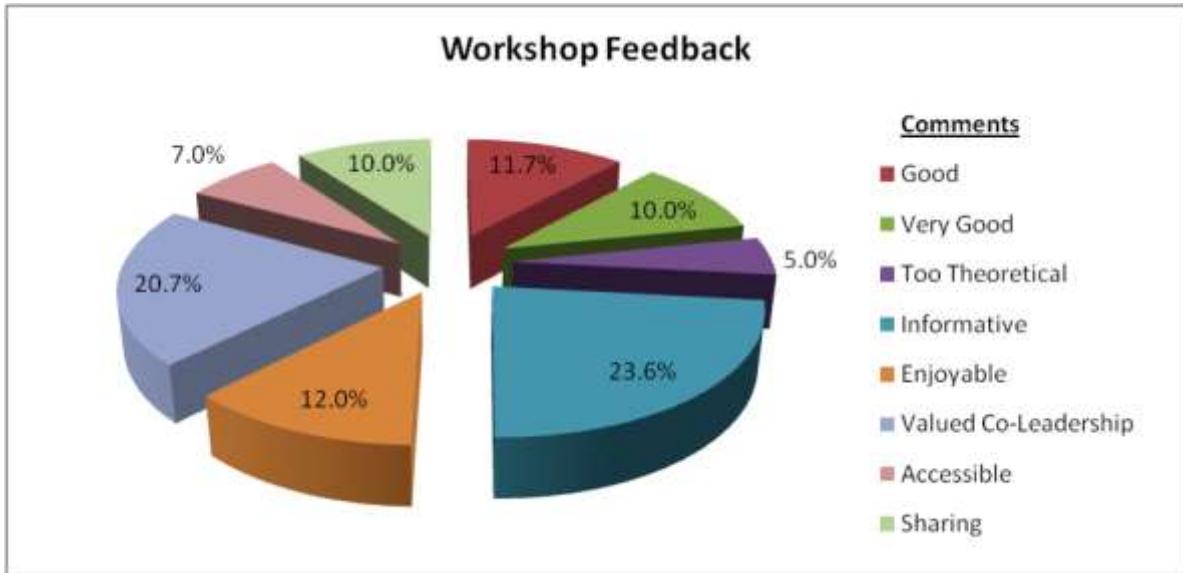
Question 6: What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?

Categories: Intimacy (14%), Family (10%), Making Time (14%), Spirituality (19%), (24%), Managing Conflict (14%), Prosperity (5%)



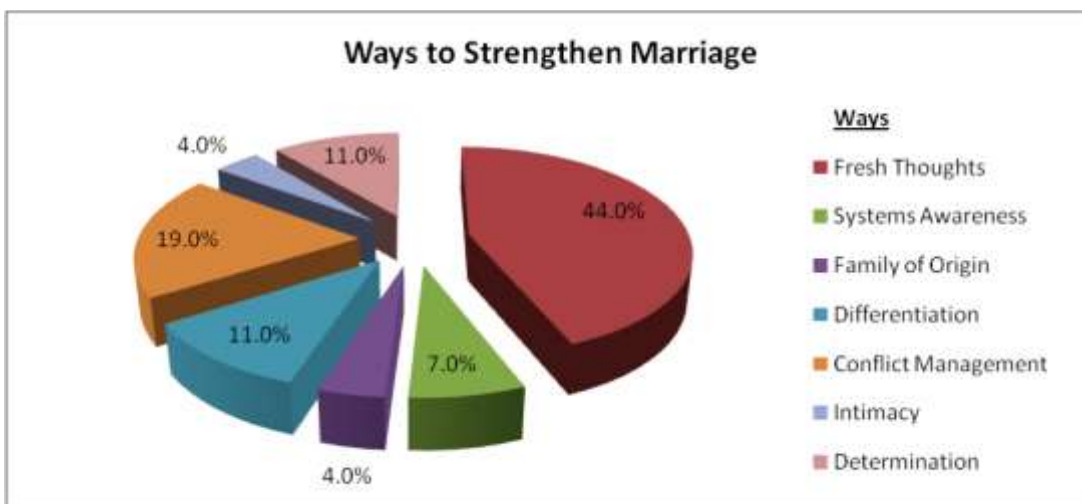
Question 7a) How was the workshop for you?

Categories: Good (11.7%), Very Good (10%), Too Theoretical (5%), Informative (23.6%), Enjoyable (12%), Valued Co-Leadership (20.7%), Accessible (7%), Sharing (10%)



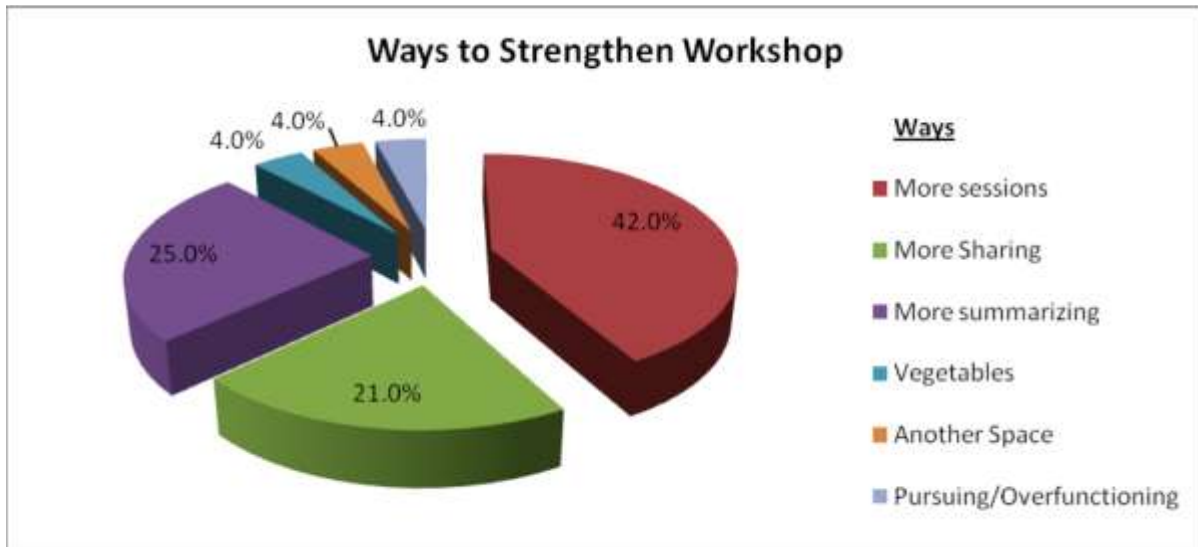
7b) How has the workshop strengthened your marriage?

Categories: Fresh thoughts (44%), Systems Awareness (7%), Family of Origin (4%), Differentiation (11%), Conflict Management (19%), Intimacy (4%), Determination (11%)



Question 7c) How could the workshop be strengthened?

Categories: More Sessions (42%), More Sharing (21%), More Summarizing (25%), Vegetables (4%), Another Space (4%), pursuing / overfunctioning (4%)



**Pre-interview/Post-interview Statistical Comparisons**

Bar Graph Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Data

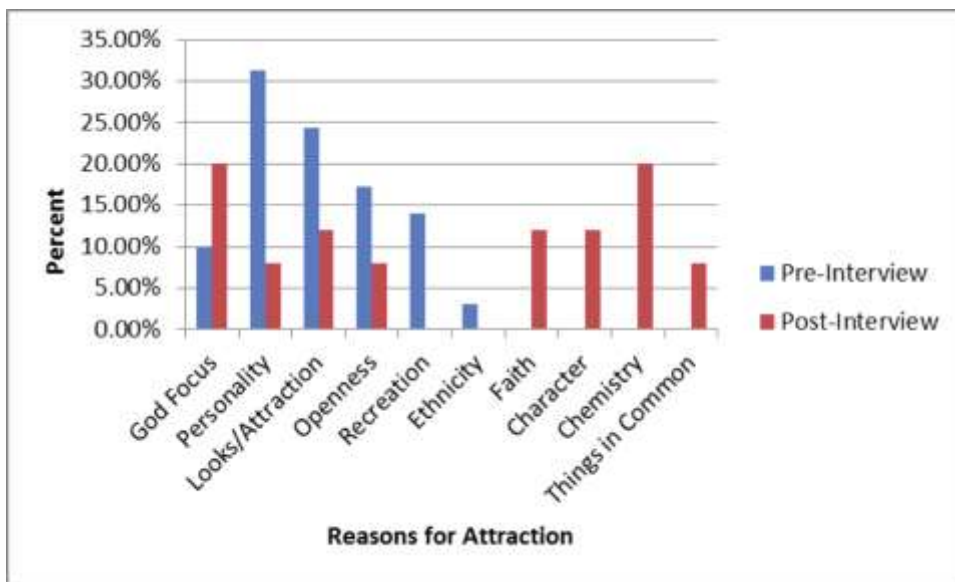
1a) What attracted you to your spouse?

**Pre-interview Statistics:** God-focus 10%, personality 31%, looks/ attraction 24%, openness 17%, recreation 14%, ethnicity 3%

**Post-interview Statistics:**

Same: God-focus 20%, personality 8%, looks / attraction 12%, openness 8%

New: Faith 12%, character 12%, chemistry 20%, things in common 8%





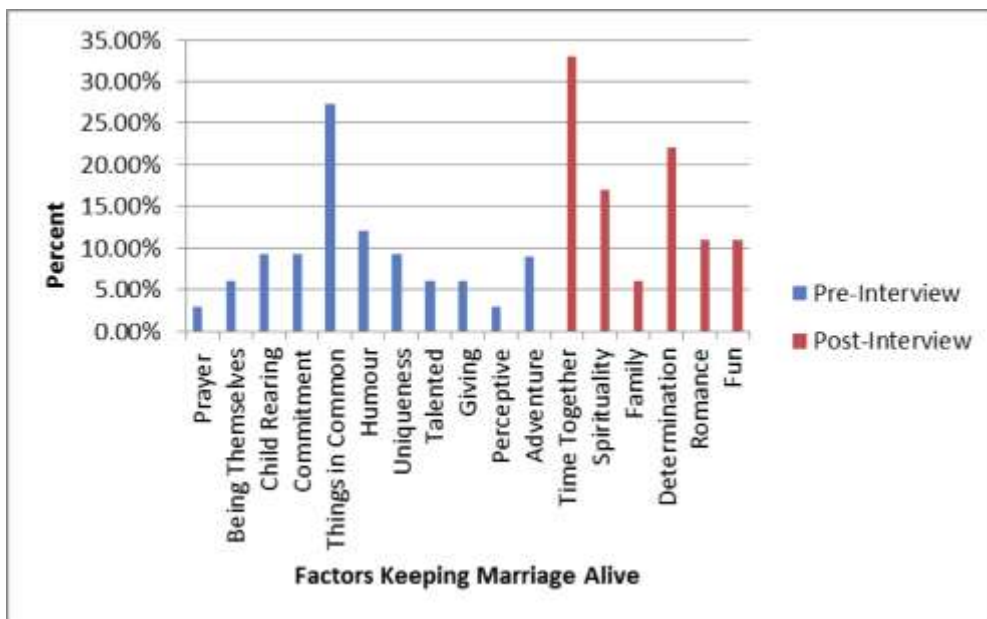
b) What keeps your marriage alive?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Prayer 3%, being themselves 6%, child-rearing 9%, commitment 9%, things in common 27.3%, humour 12.1%, uniqueness 9%, talented 6%, giving 6%, perceptive 3%, adventure 9%

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: none

New: Time together 33%, spirituality 17%, family 6%, determination 22%, romance 11%, fun 11%



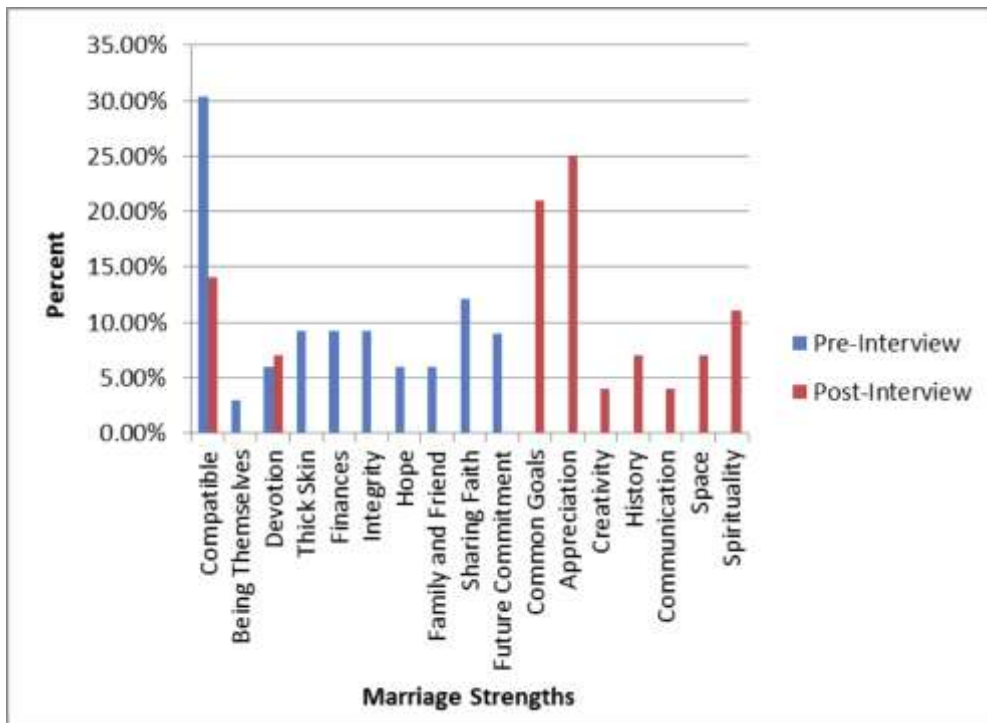
2) What would you see as your marriage's strengths?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Compatible 30.3%, being themselves 3%, devotion 6%, thick skin 9%, finances 9%, integrity 9%, hope 6%, family and friend 6%, sharing their faith 12.1%, future commitment 9%

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: Compatible 14%, Devotion 7%

New: Common Goals 21%, appreciation 25%, creativity 4%, history 7%, communication 4%, space 7%, spirituality 11%



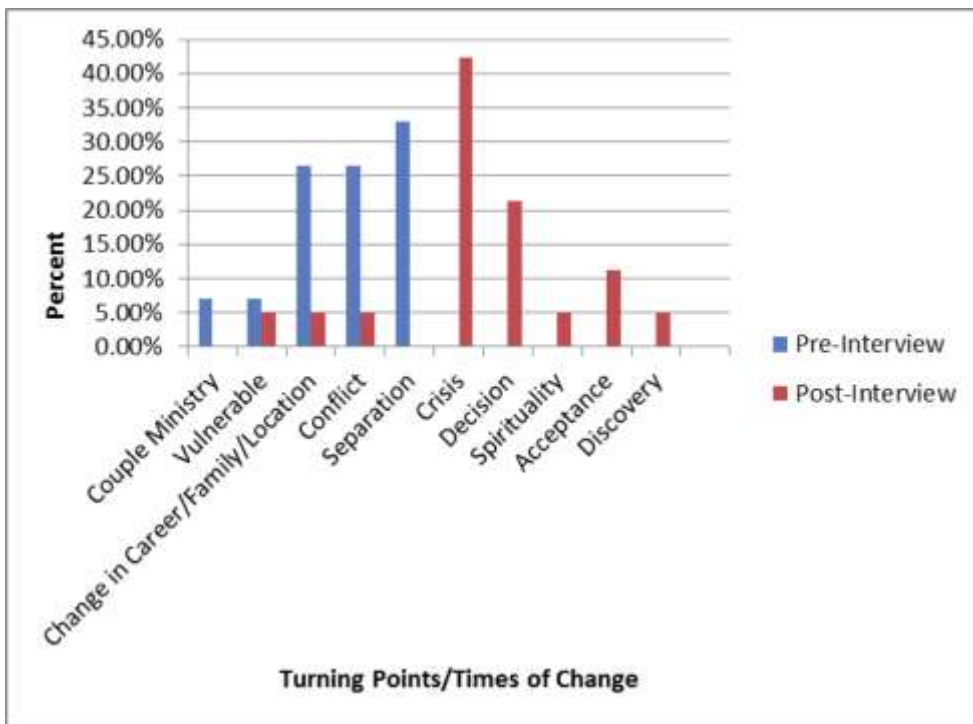
3) What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Couple ministry 7%, vulnerable 7%, change in career, family or location 27%, conflict 27%, separation 33%

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: Vulnerable 5%, change in Career, family or vocation 5%, conflict 5%

New: Crisis 42%, decision 21%, spirituality 5%, acceptance 11%, discovery 5%



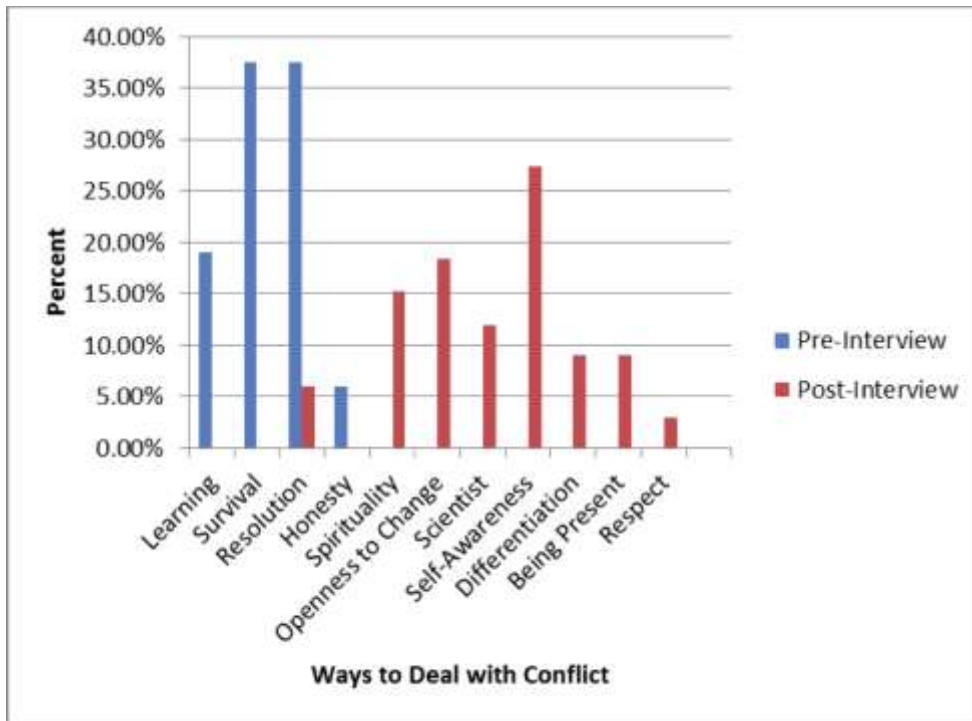
4) How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Learning 19%, survival 38%, resolution 38%, 6% honesty

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: Resolution 6%

New: Spirituality 15%, openness to change 18%, scientist 12%, self-awareness 27%, differentiation 9%, being present 9%, respect 3%



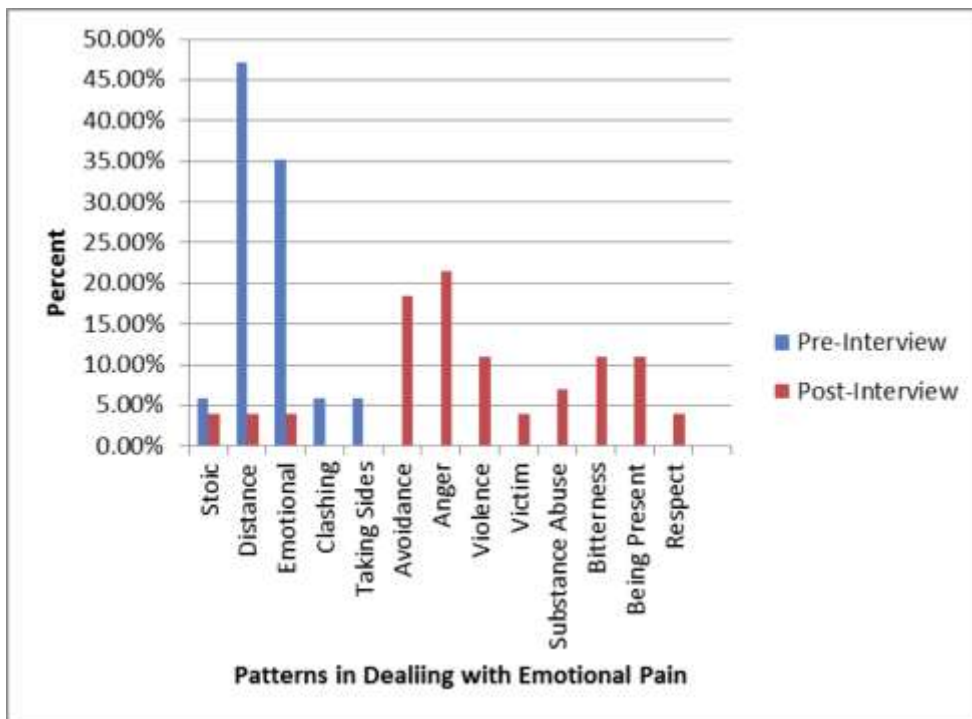
5a) What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Stoic 5.9%, distance 47%, emotional 35.2%, clashing 5.9%, taking sides 6%

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: Stoic 4%, distance 4%, emotional 4%

New: Avoidance 19%, anger 22%, violence 11%, victim 4%, substance abuse 7%, bitterness 11%, being present 11%, respect 4%



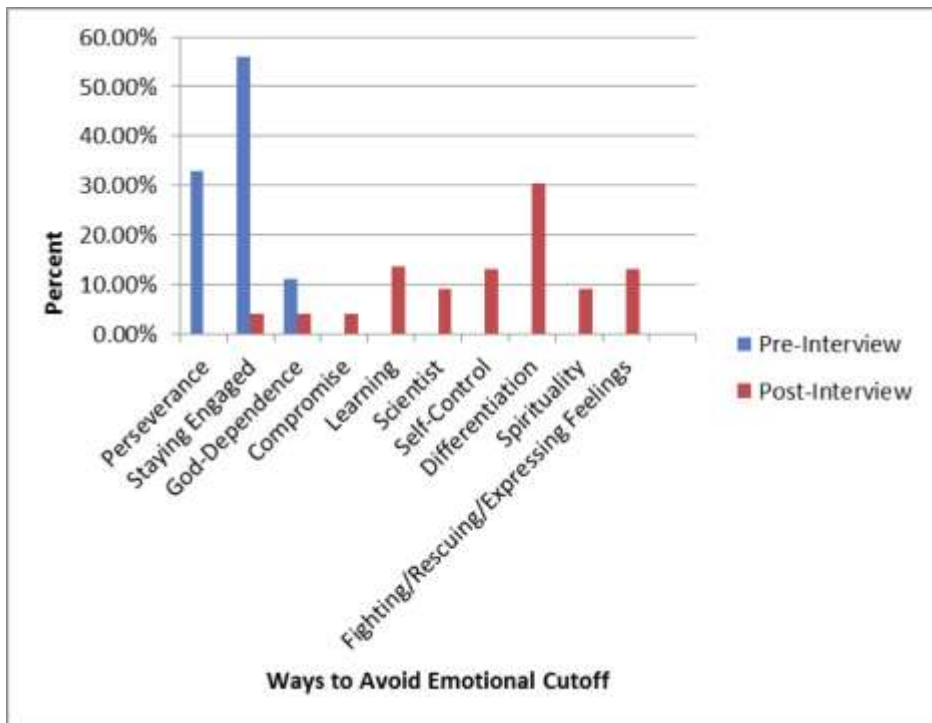
5b) How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Perseverance 33%, staying engaged 56%, God-dependence 11%

**Post-interview statistics**

Same: Staying Engaged 4%, God 4%

New: Compromise 4%, learning 13%, scientist 9%, self-control 13%, differentiation 30%, spirituality 9%, fighting / rescuing / expressing feelings 13%



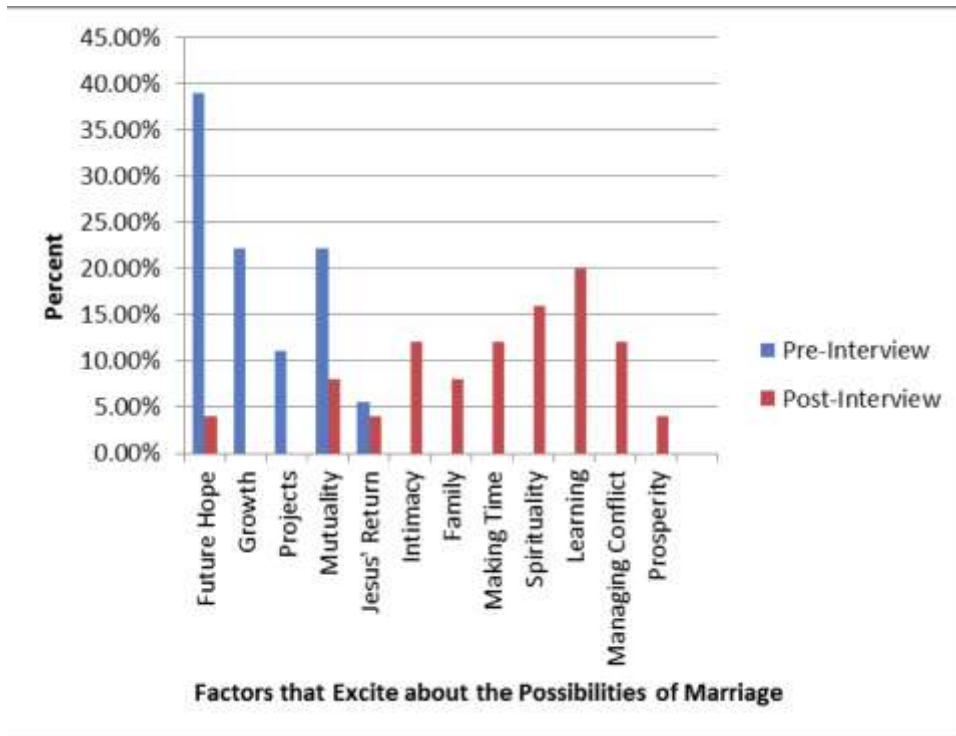
6) What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?

**Pre-interview statistics:** Future hope 38.9%, growth 22.2%, projects 11.1%, mutuality 22.2%, Jesus' return 5.6%

**Post-interview statistics:**

Same: Future Hope 4%, Mutuality 8%, Jesus' return 4%

New: Intimacy 12%, family 8%, making time 12%, spirituality 16%, learning 20%, managing conflict 12%, prosperity 4%



The Bowen concepts of emotional cutoff and distance were clearly identified in the interviews with the five couples. With Lloyd and Linda Lindsay, in their Strengthening Marriage Workshop pre-interview, Lloyd said that his family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was keeping their distance with some family members not knowing each other's private phone numbers. There was significant emotional cutoff with the mother and some of her adult children. Lloyd said that cutoff is a choice to ignore the other person, something that he tries not to do. In the pre-interview, Linda also said that her family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain was keeping their distance: "There have been years with sisters not speaking to sisters, mother not speaking to daughters, father not speaking to daughters." As mentioned earlier, the first and last names given to the five North Shore Couples were randomly chosen from North Shore Phone books.

The Bowen concept of emotional fusion was clearly identified in the interviews with the five couples. Rose Reid, a Strengthening Marriage Workshop participant, observed in her post-interview that her mom and dad were very emotional: "They would fuse up with each other and argue and fight. There wasn't ever anything that got dealt with. They would circle all the time."

The Bowen concept of balancing closeness and personal space was identified in the interviews with the five couples. John Jones in his Strengthening Marriage Workshop post-interview said that the closer he and Julie are to the middle, the less cutoff there is: "We tend to polarize but when one or both of us comes closer to the middle, then it tends to avoid those extremes." This principle of balancing closeness with personal space was the theme of the Session #4 of our Strengthening Marriage workshop. Several Workshop couples, in a marital exercise, acted out this closeness / personal space tension by choosing several different places to stand in the clubhouse while describing their marital interactions.



Many of the Workshop couples responded to the Bowen scientist concept. In Julie Jones' Strengthening Marriage Workshop post-interview, she said that they are starting to grow in the area of conflict; they are starting to think like a scientist, to look at it from an outside perspective, become detached and observe what is going on. When Burt Buchanan was asked in his post-interview how he best avoided cutting off in their marriage, he said: "That's when you have to be a scientist like we talked about in class." When Bev Buchanan was asked how the workshop strengthened her marriage, she said: "My biggest single takeaway would be to approach conflict like a scientist, just taking in the facts, not taking anything personally but just taking in the facts."<sup>144</sup> It was encouraging to see how many of the Marriage Workshop participants embraced this new way of seeing. Thinking like a scientist, which reduces observational blindness, holds great promise for bridging cutoff and strengthening marriage.

One contribution to the knowledge of ministry is an increasing understanding of the value of Family Systems Theory in strengthening marriages. Another contribution was the development of a MESI Interview Protocol that looks at strengthening marriages through the reduction of emotional cutoff. Doing the workshop made a measurable difference in the life of the participants, resulting in self-reported stronger marriages and reduced emotional cutoff. This learning has the potential to impact other married couples who desire stronger marriages through Strengthening Marriage workshops. The hope is that other clergy would find this material useful in their pastoral coaching of married couples in their congregations and community. All pastors are involved in marriages in their congregations. Learning about pastoral coaching will equip pastors to make a greater marital impact. Another contribution to ministry has been a deepened understanding of the theology of marriage as covenant,

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<sup>144</sup> Appendix ix: Analysis of the Interviews with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop Couples.

and the implications of covenantal differentiation for reducing marital cutoff. The convergent integration of bridging cutoff and covenant-restoration is new ground in the academic literature, and has great potential in strengthening marriages.

#### **4) STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE FROM A FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

Bowen theory is formally made up of eight interlocking macro-level concepts that deal with the marriages, families, individuals, and society. This wide-ranging blueprint for marital functioning is both very simple and very complex.<sup>145</sup> Gilbert stated that Bowen's eight concepts, in the logical progression that builds on the family as the emotional unit, are:

- 1) Nuclear Family Emotional System
- 2) Differentiation of Self
- 3) Triangles
- 4) Emotional Cutoff
- 5) Family Projection Process
- 6) Multigenerational Transmission Process

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<sup>145</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 3; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 13; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 62; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. xii, p. xv.

## 7) Sibling Position<sup>146</sup>

## 8) Societal Emotional Process

### 4ai) Nuclear Family Emotional System and Strengthening Marriages

The heart of Family Systems Theory is clear thinking, sometimes called “thinking systems” or “thinking in systems”. Bowen had the ability to “think in motion” reflecting a high level of self-differentiation and fluid morphogenesis.<sup>147</sup> Thinking systems is about seeing the family as an emotional unit. Marriages and families become emotional units by spending time with each other and thereby becoming important to each other. What is a relationship system? Bowen taught that any relationship with balancing forces and counter forces in constant operation is a system or a field.<sup>148</sup> Richardson described this balance as like a hanging mobile. The family of origin provides the interlocking family fields or ‘atmosphere’ to which a spouse is connected to, fused to or cut off from. The nuclear family emotional system is made up of the patterns of emotional functioning in a family in one generation.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p.304.

<sup>147</sup> *Marriage and Family Therapy: Psychoanalytic, Behavioral and Systems Theory Perspectives: Systems and Spirituality: Bowen Systems Theory, Faith and Theology* -The Papers and Proceedings of a Conference on Theology held at Washington Theological Union, July 1987, Edited by Joseph C. Carolin, Ph.D., ACSW, 1990, p. iii.

<sup>148</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 4; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 358; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Walter Smith Jr., “Emotional Cutoff and Family Stability,” p. 352; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership: Thinking Systems, Making a Difference* (Leading Systems Press, Virginia, 2006), p. 12, 26, p. 184; Gilbert, *Eight Concepts*, p. 26; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 51.

<sup>149</sup> Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 15, p. 19; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 78; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 53, p. 64; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation: an approach based on Bowen Theory*, p. 55.

Because the nuclear family emotional system is organic rather than mechanical, it embodies a dynamic tension and fluidity. In Session #2, the five couples were taught that increasing marital thinking strengthens one's ability to celebrate their uniqueness, thereby bridging emotional cutoff.

Bowen theory is a thinking therapist's therapy. Major effort was invested by Bowen over many decades into both clarifying theoretical assumptions and developing a coaching model consistent with these assumptions. He was convinced that such integrated clarity between theory and practice would provide a better structure for investigative research, and improve the predictability and outcome of the coaching. Theory was ultimately more important to Bowen than clinical therapy, because he was concerned that therapists would too easily adopt techniques without examining the underlying theoretical assumptions. Bowen often commented that there is nothing more practical than good theory. A systems thinker embraces marital complexity while simultaneously cutting to the core of the issue.<sup>150</sup> Family systems theory is about the big picture. Thinking in systems is a learned skill that does not come naturally for many people.<sup>151</sup> Many counseling methods lack the strong theoretical focus which is at the heart of family systems thinking.

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<sup>150</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 42; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 136; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Michael E. Kerr, Foreword, p. xvii; *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 31; Jenny Brown, "Is Bowen Theory still relevant in the Family Therapy Field?" *Journal of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Association of NSW Inc. (CAPA) Quarterly Issue 3* pp. 11-17, Sept 2008. <http://bit.ly/115dhrY> (accessed March 30th 2013).

<sup>151</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. ix; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 11, p.31; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 9; Susan Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 57.

Becvar stated that Bowen's model

is perhaps the only theory in the field. It gives us a method of organizing and categorizing events, helps us predict future events, explains past events, gives a sense of understanding about what causes events, and gives us the potential for control of events.<sup>152</sup>

There is a widespread misunderstanding that Family Systems Theory is a division of Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory. Bertalanffy's model is mechanistic and mathematical. Family Systems Theory, in contrast, is biological, with a focus on living emotional systems. Bowen said: "...I therefore chose to use concepts that would be consistent with biology and the natural sciences..." We did not devise human relationships anymore than the elephant or gibbon devised their family systems. Discovering such pre-existing living systems is like encountering a tribal system in the African jungle that no one imagined existed. It was there all along. We were just unaware of it. Biological thinking uncovers living patterns that reduce reactivity, encourage detriangling and bridge marital cutoff.<sup>153</sup>

Sometimes the intense chaos of marital relations leads people to believe that there are no patterns and no marital order to be found. Bowen was one researcher who was able to take this step back and to discover that there was indeed an order and predictability in what he called a seemingly impenetrable thicket. The Family Systems Theory emphasis in strengthening marriages is not on the content or subject matter as much as the process. Concentrating on the content of the discussion is a

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<sup>152</sup> Dorothy Stroh Becvar and Ralph J. Becvar, *Family Therapy: A Systemic Integration* (2nd Edition, St. Louis Family Institute, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1993, 1998), p. 147.

<sup>153</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 39; Jones quoting Bowen (1976:63); Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 39; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. ix, p. x, p. xi, p. 26; Bowen, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p.354; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Thinking*, p. 46.

sign that the therapist is emotionally entangled in a couple's problems. We need to pay attention to marital process and structure. Process refers to patterns of emotional reactivity and structure to the interlocking network of triangles.<sup>154</sup>

As a former Freudian psychoanalyst, Bowen birthed most of his Family Systems Theory concepts in the midst of his disappointment with the relative ineffectiveness of Freudian counseling. Out of crisis came unprecedented breakthrough. Bowen said:

Originally conceived as an emergency measure to control uncontrolled emotion, it opened up a new area of observations, techniques, and concepts.

What was at stake was "the exaggerated importance of being informed and the colossal failure of insight to bring change...."<sup>155</sup> Self-awareness and new information, while important, do not by themselves bring morphogenesis in married couples. Bowen was also concerned about the tendency of Freudianism to blame the parents. Family Systems Theory seeks to blame no one.<sup>156</sup>

When working on the symbiotic relationship between mother and schizophrenic person, Bowen found that it was no longer necessary or productive to speculate about the unconscious conflicts and

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<sup>154</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. xi, p. 14 ft. 9, pp.379-380; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 11, p. 180; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 136, p. 144; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational life*, Augsburg Fortress, 1996, p. 81; Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 12; Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: a Family Systems Approach* (The Alban Institute, Verndon, VA, 1996), p. 105.

<sup>155</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 38, p. 157; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. viii; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 25; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 377; Margaret Carlson, *Problem-Solving Family Therapy* (Faculty of Social Welfare, University of Calgary, Models of Family Practice, Chapter 7), Page 17.

<sup>156</sup> Murray Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice' (*Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol.7, No. 5, October, 1966), p. 346; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 19; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p.107; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 192.

motivations of the mother and patient. Bowen described this clinging symbiosis as a very sticky thing. He worked hard through being supportively neutral to not get stuck and incorporated in the symbiosis. Many of Bowen's psychotic patients developed symbiotic attachment to Bowen's staff. Staying out of symbiosis was a major emphasis in the development of Bowen Theory. Peleg and Arnon's research has confirmed the connection between schizophrenia and emotional cutoff.<sup>157</sup> Because of Bowen's symbiotic work, Family Systems Theory became stereotyped for a decade as merely a schizophrenic therapy.

Bowen decided:

I am not going to use (any) more 'ids, egos, superegos, repression, suppression,' all the stuff that goes with psychoanalysis because once you use it, you've got psychoanalytic theory. And right in front of our eyes is a new way of thinking. So I'll put the next years on trying – trying not to use old concepts.<sup>158</sup>

Rather than label people with symptomatic psychiatric diagnoses, Bowen discarded the language of pathology, choosing instead to use simple descriptive language. Abandoning diagnostic labeling allowed Bowen and his colleagues to systemically notice the previously unnoticeable. Bowen stated:

The use of a familiar term of diagnostic label, associated with the individual, was sufficient to cause an automatic revision from family unit to individual thinking.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 35, p. 44, p. 50; Ora Peleg & Tom Arnon, "Are Differentiation Levels Associated with Schizophrenia?", *Deviant Behavior* (2013) 34:4, p. 321.

<sup>158</sup> "A Science of Human Behaviour for the Future: Selected Segments by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics," G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 373; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 5; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 66.

<sup>159</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 67, p. 95, p. 157.

Family Systems Theory operates on a simple, obvious order of functional relational facts that all of us have always known, a distant drumbeat that all have always heard. It is possible to hear this simple drumbeat, this simple story without hearing it. What is important to hear and see, said Bowen, is not what is in people but what is in-between people. Bowen moved the attention from what was going on inside the heads of each family member to instead drawing on other scientific models and analogies with which to observe the relationship process itself. He concluded that many of Freud's followers were more disciples than scientists.<sup>160</sup> Psychiatry for Bowen was a pseudo-science in which theory and therapy were increasingly separated from each other.

The lack of training in theoretical assumptions left mental health practitioners oriented towards the therapeutic relationship but unable to reflectively question its theoretical basis. An action / reflection model was missing. Bowen said: "This is why my own theory is incomprehensible to those who cannot think through their early basic teaching and practice." Theoretical orientation and therapeutic zeal increases theoretical obliviousness. Bowen longed for a scientific basis for counseling theory.<sup>161</sup>

Bowen was one of those rare individuals with "a genuinely new idea." As many of Bowen's students were ex-Freudians, they "literally had to untrain themselves...from individual concepts in order to see the family emotional system." Bowen became to many an ex-Freudian heretic, leading Friedman

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<sup>160</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 340; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 59, p. 64; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 339; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. vii quoting Kerr.

<sup>161</sup> "Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics," G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 34; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 411; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 136; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 46, p. 50, p. 55, p. 58.



to comment that “Bowen theory is often so anathema to many therapists that it isn't even mentioned.”<sup>162</sup> In many circles, Bowen Theory is treated if it doesn't exist.

Friedman saw the wedding rite of passage as essential to understanding married couples. He believed that weddings are like icebergs in which only one eighth is visible. Weddings have a major impact on the family homeostasis, and release major generational transmission in terms of the emotional processes in one's families of origin. Merely living together, Friedman suggested, has less fusion impact on a couple, saying that “it is as if fusion does not develop as long as they still have the option to terminate the relationship.” The wedding releases major emotional fusion forces in which the couple can lose their own sense of self and merge into an undifferentiated ego mass. Paul Stevens said that living together is a stolen covenant because it lacks the three constituent parts of full covenant – “leaving” (public wedlock), “cleaving” (social unity and friendship) and “one flesh” (sexual consummation.)<sup>163</sup> Living together is often a commitment to the present but not to the unknown future. Marriage is strengthened when we ‘take the brakes off’, commit to the unknown future, and launch into the covenantal adventure of life. In Session #1, the five couples were taught that focusing on strengths helps one's marriage become more adventurous rather than regressively safe. One of the greatest dangers to healthy marriages is the loss of adventure and anticipation. While the covenant marriage movement has

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<sup>162</sup> <http://www.thebowencenter.org/pages/murraybowen.html> (Accessed Dec 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.); Kerr, *Handbook of Family Therapy*, p. 220.

<sup>163</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 179, p. 295; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 35; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 92; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 66.

been successful in reducing the divorce rate, it has not yet been successful in reversing the linear decline in marital satisfaction rates of both covenant and standard marriages.<sup>164</sup>

#### 4a) Anxiety and Strengthening Marriages

A key process to observe in strengthening marriage is anxiety. Anxiety is the crucial issue. Friedman said: "In one sense, this entire story is about the management of anxiety...this overlaps with management of oneself."<sup>165</sup> To miss anxiety is to miss the heart of family systems theory. There is a chronic anxiety in all of life that comes with the territory of living. How we observe and manage anxiety is key to strengthening marriages and reducing cutoff. Bowen observed that relationship patterns are more closely related to fluctuating anxiety than to emotional illness. The greater the level of anxiety, the more behaviour becomes automatic or instinctual. Anxious people are often painful to be around, sometimes leading to emotional cutoff.<sup>166</sup>

We need to get over our fear of anxiety. Jonathan Wilson said that when we fear anxiety, we betray the very truth of creation being redemptively brought into the new creation. As we become less anxious about being anxious, we become freer.<sup>167</sup> Many people who flee their settings (marriage, family,

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<sup>164</sup> Alfred DeMaris, Laura A. Sanchez, and Kristi Krivickas, "Developmental Patterns in Marital Satisfaction: Another Look at Covenant Marriage", (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, Volume 74, Issue 5, October 2012), p. 989.

<sup>165</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 63, p. 361.; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 299.; Jones, p. 41.

<sup>166</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 139.; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 66.; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 41, p. 67.; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 404, p. 438.; Gilbert, "The Ten Percent Solution," <http://www.hsystems.org/4.html> (accessed Oct 15<sup>th</sup> 2011); Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 105.; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 54.

<sup>167</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 133.; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 302.

or church) whenever they feel uncomfortable (i.e. anxious). As a result, they never grow in their self-differentiation. Bowen reminded us:

Anxiety does not harm people. It only makes them feel uncomfortable. It can cause you to shake, or lose sleep, or become confused, or develop physical symptoms, but it will not kill you and it will subside. People can even grow and become more mature by having to face and deal with anxiety situations.<sup>168</sup>

Chronic anxiety is sometimes called emotional pain. Of all the relationship patterns, people caught in conflict are most apt to seek help because of their awareness of pain. Growth comes from increasing the pain threshold, not reducing the pain.<sup>169</sup> That is why Friedman memorably commented: "I am on the side of pain." Pain and reactivity are closely linked. Emotionally-fused soothing does not help the married couple. Neither does dumping our anxious and angry feelings onto the other spouse.<sup>170</sup>

The most contagious of all emotions is anxiety, followed by depression. Anxiety rubs off on people, being transmitted and absorbed without thinking. A married couple doesn't have to choose someone else's anxiety, any more than one choose someone else' flu or cold. All that has to happen is for the other spouse or another person 'sneeze' anxiously on the partner, while their emotional immune system is low. It has been compared biologically to the response of an animal herd under threat, causing

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<sup>168</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 85.

<sup>169</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 45.; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 121, p. 242, p. 341.

<sup>170</sup> Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 137.; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 237.; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 116. ; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, P.47; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 150.

them to flock or herd together.<sup>171</sup> Anxiety can seriously reduce our ability to think. We may lack the clarity that we usually count on to make good marital decisions. It can also reduce the ability of married couples to see the big picture, the emotional system. Anxiety heightens our tendency to see one's parents as "emotionally endowed images" than as people in their own right. It dehumanizes the key people in our generational family. As anxiety increases, couples tend to focus on linear cause-and-effect blaming of each other. Bridging marital cutoff involves replacing simplistic linear thinking with process thinking.<sup>172</sup>

When the cerebral cortex is flooded with anxiety, this creates groupthink, an anxious fused imitation of actual thinking. Groupthink simulates thinking, using the appearance of reason to whitewash over anxiety. Appearances can be deceiving. Reasonable thinking is less common than many realize. Bowen observed that with groupthink, if one member had an itch, another member would scratch himself.<sup>173</sup> Anxiety also can shut down our marital curiosity and willingness to learn. The loss of curious learning increases emotional cutoff. In contrast, learning bridges marital cutoff and reduces anxiety. Marital learning takes courage to stay thoughtfully engaged rather than anxiously

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<sup>171</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 362; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 116, p. 125, p. 176; "Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self," by Michael E Kerr, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, p. 151; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 91; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 28, p. 36; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Illick et al, "Toward Understanding and Measuring Emotional Cutoff," p. 205; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 15, p. 112; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 263; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, Benswanger, "Strategies to Explore Cut-offs", p. 194.

<sup>173</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 21; JC Wynn, *The Family Therapist* (Fleming H Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1987), p. 150; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 31, p. 41; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 28; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 72.

disconnect.<sup>174</sup> With reduced anxiety, family members become more objective and calmer. It is not just the marriage that prays together, but also the marriage that plays together that stays together. When anxiety is less, many of our marital problems simply don't happen.<sup>175</sup> Less anxiety means less potential emotional cutoff in our marriages.

The more self-aware we are, the more observant we become regarding what escalates marital anxiety and when this anxiety increases. We need to be careful observers of the patterns of anxiety, looking for marital triggers, such as negative stimuli, mannerisms, gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. By addressing the triggers, there will be a significant reduction in anxious withdrawal and marital cutoff.<sup>176</sup> Marital anxiety comes in waves, sometimes feeling like a tsunami. Bowen Theory pays particular attention to the intensity and duration of anxiety. Our marriages have built-in mechanisms for reasonably adapting to acute anxiety. Chronic marital anxiety (rather than acute marital anxiety) is most significant in determining the self-differentiation in a marriage. Pastoral coaches can choose to become transformers who reduce the marital anxiety level rather than increase it.<sup>177</sup>

In our relationally-cutoff and fragmented society, we tend to see togetherness as the cure-all for most of our problems. Weddings and marital togetherness are not a quick-fix for our own personal

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<sup>174</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 92; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 130; Kerr and Bowen, p. 131; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 76.

<sup>175</sup> Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 68; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 118; Randy Roberts, "Two Distinct Approaches to Family Therapy: The Ideas of Murray Bowen and Jay Haley," *The Family*, Vol. 6 No. 2, p. 42; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 87.

<sup>176</sup> J.C. Wynn, *The Family Therapist* (Fleming H Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1987), p. 144; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 37, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", Meyer, p. 91; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 134, p. 135.

<sup>177</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 65; Friedman, 1999, p. 117; 'Toward the Differentiation of a Self in one's own Family', by Anonymous/Bowen, p. 152; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 267.

issues, giving us an automatic happily-ever-after card. Marriage in no way guarantees emotional maturity. It is a mark of maturity to know what pleases our spouse and to make the special effort to do what pleases him or her. Immaturity with high anxiety is a difficult combination for married couples.<sup>178</sup> Bowen said that it causes us to confuse ourselves with God as if we are omniscient and omnipotent regarding our spouse. Maturity is helping with a problem without becoming responsible for the problem.

Bowen taught about the two contrasting dichotomies of having both a mature and immature side. Our immature side is synonymous with infantile striving for dependent security. Our mature side, rather than our coach, is meant to be the responsible keeper of the immature. As pastoral coaches, we are to encourage married couples to speak maturely about their immaturity. Overinvolvement and reactive attachments come from our immaturity. Acknowledging our personal and marital immaturity is an important step in reducing marital cutoff.<sup>179</sup> Family Systems Theory teaches us that the wrong kind of togetherness is actually part of the problem, and leads to greater marital anxiety. Bowen named this the “togetherness force”. Togetherness and anxiety feed off of each other. Anxiety can cause both reactive togetherness and reactive apartness. Kerr and Bowen stated that

...the universal problem for all partnership, marital or otherwise, was not getting closer; it was preserving self in a close relationship, something that no one made of flesh and blood seems to

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<sup>178</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 5, p. 15; J.O. and J.K Balswick, *A Model of Marriage*, p. 44; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 113.

<sup>179</sup> “Various Theoretical Points People Miss: A Training Session by Murray Bowen at the Minnesota Institute of Family Dynamics,” G. Mary Bourne, Ed., *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 44; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, “Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy”, Meyer, p. 89; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 43, p. 44, p. 48, p. 49, p. 54.

do well. (I eventually came to define my marriage counseling as trying to help people separate so that they would not have to 'separate'.)<sup>180</sup>

The togetherness force urges us toward others, for attachment, for affiliation, and for approval. Both the pastoral coach and the married couple need to increase their detachment from any desire for approval. Our anxious fear of disapproval keeps us locked in marital fusion and cutoff. Anxious togetherness will bring more rigid boundaries and less morphogenetic flexibility in married couples.<sup>181</sup> The avoidance of anxiety explains why many married couples are connected by a 'rubber band' where they pull away during high anxiety, only to snap back into fused togetherness. Gossip and marital anxiety are very closely connected, feeding on each other. The higher the anxiety, the more that spouses may isolate from each other, which in turn lowers responsible communication and increases underground gossip. When feeling overwhelmed, a spouse may isolate not only from their partner, but even from oneself.<sup>182</sup> Kerr taught that when acute or chronic tension / anxiety builds in a marriage, people have four options in responding to it:

1) They can distance from each other; 2) they can get into conflict with each other; 3) one can compromise his / her own functioning to preserve relationship harmony; or 4) the couple can band together over a common concern, for example, a child. When any of these options is overused, it can lead to the category of problems that families commonly seek help for, namely, marital conflict, impaired functioning of a spouse, or problems with a child...

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<sup>180</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 126; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 43; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 535; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 7.

<sup>181</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 13; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis of Therapy", p. 73; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 74, p. 104.

<sup>182</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 19; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 291.; Peleg and Arnon, p. 325.

The more fusion in the married couple, the more anxiety; this makes these four dysfunctional mechanisms more normative.<sup>183</sup> One of the dangers of empathy, an important trait, is that it can easily slip into emotional fusion and collusion. We care so much either as the spouse or the pastoral coach that we lose the big picture. Calmness sets tone. Marital clarity is more important even than empathy, because it brings objectivity and reduces anxiety.<sup>184</sup> Anxiety can cause spouses to fixate on each other. One of the benefits of anxiety is that it can be motivational for having the couple go for coaching. One of the dangers of short-term reduction of anxiety is that many married couples lose their motivation to continue with coaching in order to bring lasting morphogenetic change.<sup>185</sup>

Anxiety can lead us to unfairly blame our spouse for problems in the marriage. Blame is rooted in shame and deficit-based judgments. Bowen advocated stepping back and getting beyond anger and blame. By thinking clearly in the midst of intense emotion, a spouse is able to modulate their marital anger and anxiety.<sup>186</sup> It is remarkable how easily the self-centered amygdala part of our brain justifies our angry blaming of our spouse. In Session #2, the five couples were taught that saying no to the blame-game strengthens marriages and reduces emotional cutoff.

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<sup>183</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 242; Gilbert <http://www.creatormagazine.com/dnn/CreatorLeadershipNetwork/InterviewswithLeaders/RobertaGilbert.aspx> ; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 22.

<sup>184</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 116; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 21; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p.144; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 69; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 155; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 23.

<sup>185</sup> Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol. 7, No. 5, October, 1966, p.370; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 7; Gilbert, <http://www.hsystems.org/4.html> "The Ten Percent Solution."

<sup>186</sup> Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 78; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 197; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 79; J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 50; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 146.



Communication is itself an emotional phenomenon, depending on three inter-relational variables: direction, distance and anxiety. Genograms are unusually helpful in tracking and objectifying those three variables. Anxiety is the static in any communication system and can distort or scramble any message. Without anxiety, marital distancers would lack the emotional speed and fortitude to outrun their pursuers. Sometimes marital distancing is a short sprint; other times it is a marital marathon. Pursuing one's spouse ensures that they will not be able to hear you. Bridging cutoff works best when your spouse moves towards you. Only if they move towards you can your message crack through the anxiety communication wall.<sup>187</sup> With anxious couples, Thomas Fogarty recommended that they try a relationship experiment:

Pursuers are encouraged to restrain their pursuit, stop making demands, and decrease pressure for emotional connection – and see what happens, in themselves, and in the relationship. ...Distancers are encouraged to move towards their partners and communicate personal thoughts and feelings – in other words, to find an alternative to either avoiding or capitulating to the other person's demands.<sup>188</sup>

#### 4b) Differentiation of Self and Strengthening Marriages

The first and most important concept in understanding and impacting marriage relationships is differentiation of self. Bowen called self-differentiation the principal subject and the cornerstone of Family Systems Theory. No other concept in Bowen Family Systems Theory is so often discussed and

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<sup>187</sup> Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 305; Papero, "Bowen Family Systems and Marriage," p. 17; Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, p. 69; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 305.

<sup>188</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, quoting Thomas Fogarty, p. 144, p. 151; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 53.

associated with Bowen's work.<sup>189</sup> The concept of self differentiation is "generally the most difficult one for people to grasp and apply." One of the challenges to this very important Bowenian concept is that it is so different, so unintelligible to many people. Their eyes often glaze over when we first use the term. Differentiation is not even found as a noun in some dictionaries. The closest term in the Concise Oxford Dictionary is the verb 'differentiate', which is helpfully defined as "constitute the difference between; develop into unlikeness, specialize, discriminate between (from the noun *difference* [Latin: *differential*]). The Merriam/Webster dictionary includes this helpful definition of differentiation: "the sum of the processes whereby apparently indifferent or unspecialized cells, tissues, and structures attain their adult form and function."<sup>190</sup> To become adult in marital form and function is to specialize, to become different and unique. The glory of one's spouse is that they are not us.

The other seven interlocking Bowen concepts articulate how couples express their level of differentiation during fluctuations of reactive anxiety. Marital differentiation is balancing being ourselves while being engaged with our spouse. Bowen saw differentiation as equivalent to identity and individuality.<sup>191</sup> At the heart of strengthening marriages and reducing cutoff is strengthening the sense of self and personal identity of each spouse. Many spouses have given little if any attention to

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<sup>189</sup> Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 25, p. 44; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 45; Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 44; Leroy T. Howe, "Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective" (*Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 5, 1998), p. 347; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 12, p. 18.

<sup>190</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/differentiation> (Accessed April 27th 2013)

<sup>191</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*: p. 126; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 65; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. xxi; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 135-136; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 109.

strengthening their personal identity. Our highest identity as believers is in Christ through the Spirit of adoption.<sup>192</sup>

Differentiation means to “distinguish between emotion and reason, between relationship orientation (less mature) and goal orientation (more mature)”. Bowen developed the concept of self-differentiation through observing how feelings and intellect were either fused or distinguished from each other. Differentiation is the opposite of emotional fusion. Lower-differentiated people, in spite of their strong relationship focus, tend to have more problematic relationships.<sup>193</sup> A person with a high IQ may have low self-differentiation if they are emotionally fused to their family of origin.<sup>194</sup> No one ever wants to differentiate. We may eventually do it because it’s less painful than the alternatives.<sup>195</sup>

Getting married can bring with it a major loss of self. In the closeness of an intense relationship, the emotional selves of each blend or fuse together into a common self, a ‘we-ness’.<sup>196</sup> The tendency in fused relationships is to work toward agreement, ‘we-ness’, togetherness. Such togetherness, ‘we-ness’ is uncomfortable with one’s spouse’s differences, seeking sameness as an anxiety reducer. This we-ness almost automatically leads to conflict. The paradox of differentiation is that it opens the space for true togetherness, how to get both closer and more distinct. Differentiation is the reverse process of

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<sup>192</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 20; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, “Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy”, p. 109; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. xiv, p. xvii, p. 64.

<sup>193</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 58; Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 57; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 59; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 73.

<sup>194</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 71 ft 9; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 20.

<sup>195</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 74.

<sup>196</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 93; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 156; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 120; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 51; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 494.

triangling. A differentiated marriage, said Bowen, is a functioning partnership. Each spouse can enjoy the full spectrum of emotional closeness without giving up self.<sup>197</sup> 'We-ness' is undifferentiation or fusion which will bring about three dysfunctions in couples: (1) marital conflict (2) symptoms in a spouse, including sickness or (3) dysfunction in a child. These three dysfunctions are primary 'reasons' for married couples seeking counseling.<sup>198</sup> Defining self is life-giving and foundational.<sup>199</sup> Differentiation of self is a lifelong process which involves knowing the boundaries of where your self begins and ends.<sup>200</sup>

Friedman said that "the problem is how to preserve self in close relationships. That's the critical issue." Differentiation allows couple closeness, allowing your relationship to shine like a diamond.<sup>201</sup> Self-defining reduces emotional reactivity, protecting married couples from the domino effect. To some married couples, self-defining may seem counterintuitive. Part of self-defining is taking the risk to self-disclose our self to our spouse.<sup>202</sup> Higher-differentiated spouses are less needy and therefore less threatened by variations in closeness and distance by their partner. Intimacy and love is not the higher-

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<sup>197</sup> Freeman, *Family Therapy with Couples*, p. 16, p. 50; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 34; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 74; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 22; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage*, p. 68; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 73.

<sup>198</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 504; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 181.

<sup>199</sup> Randy Roberts, Ph.D. "Two Distinct Approaches to Family Therapy: The Ideas of Murray Bowen and Jay Haley," *The Family*, Vol. 6 No. 2, p. 40; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 45; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 409; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 58; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 198.

<sup>200</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 51, p. 106, p. 108, p. 117, p. 119, p. 380.

<sup>201</sup> Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 33; Richardson, "Differentiation of Self as a Therapeutic Goal for the Systemic Pastoral Counselor," p. 36; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 102.

<sup>202</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 138; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 94; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 114; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 120-121.

differentiated couple's 'drug' without which they cannot function or exist. The marital journey of self-definition includes times of loneliness and pushback.<sup>203</sup>

Differentiation for married couples is about greater awareness of themselves within the context of their family emotional systems. Titelman noted that "Bowen theory postulates two main variables in human functioning: anxiety and differentiation." The greater the differentiation of self, the lower is the level of chronic anxiety. A self is more attractive than a no-self.<sup>204</sup> The most powerful therapeutic tool is the use of self. Focusing on self is the sadly rare but healthy alternative to blaming one's spouse.<sup>205</sup>

Changes in differentiation of just one spouse can alter the entire emotional system of the married couple. One spouse will make the first move as he / she begins to define, in a self-directed way, where one stands and how one will act on major marital issues.<sup>206</sup> If the differentiating spouse can maintain one's position without attacking or distancing, the family will settle down at a new higher level of differentiation.<sup>207</sup>

Reaching '70' in the self-differentiation scale is the new '100'. This is true as well for our marriages, as "in reality, no human marriage gets a rating of more than 70%." Perfectionism in seeking to

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<sup>203</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 74, p. 109; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 73; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 95.

<sup>204</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 87; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 20; Richardson, *Couple in Conflict*, p. 25; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 86.

<sup>205</sup> Margaret Carlson, *Problem-Solving Family Therapy*, (Faculty of Social Welfare, University of Calgary, Models of Family Practice, Chapter 7), p. 121; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 101.

<sup>206</sup> Roberts, *The Family*, p. 44; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 133.

<sup>207</sup> Roberts, *The Family*, p. 42; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p.86.

be self-differentiated is a sign of anxious fusion. Differentiation, said Bowen, eliminates the concept of being normal, because we are all on an emotional continuum. Some people are offended by Bowen's teaching that we are not qualitatively different than psychotic or schizophrenic people. The more people understand the concept of the scale of differentiation of self, the more they often seem to turn a corner in their marriages, continuing to do better and better as time goes by.<sup>208</sup>

When the pastoral coach self-differentiates with the married couple, there may be pushback, rejection, and even sabotage. As Friedman observed, no good deed goes unpunished. The pastoral coach will be criticized as cold, distant, rigid, and non-feeling when he / she either self-differentiates or detriangulates.<sup>209</sup> When a spouse self-differentiates, there will be pressure to cave in, and go back to the existing homeostasis. Lasting marital change will be fought against by irrational reactivity and polarization. For couples to break through, the pastoral coach has to express self-differentiated leadership that doesn't show failure of nerve when the couple expresses emotional reactivity and even sabotage. When couples resist or sabotage the pastoral coach, it may be tempting to quit, but that is usually when a breakthrough is near.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 30; Kerr and Bowen, p. 70 ft 8; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 69; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 66, p. 67; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 3.

<sup>209</sup> Bowen, "Family Systems Theory," first published in *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, edited by Philip J. Guerin, New York: Gardner Press, 1976, pp. 65-90; Bowen, "Family Systems Theory," first published in *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, edited by Philip J. Guerin, New York: Gardner Press, 1976, pp. 65-90; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 282; "Toward the Differentiation of a Self in one's own Family," by Anonymous/ Bowen, p. 140; Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, p. 2, p. 303; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 154.

<sup>210</sup> Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol. 7, No. 5, October, 1966, p. 371; Steinke, *A Door Set Open*, p. 49; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 38. Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 73; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 164.

Marital homeostasis greatly prefers sameness and security when compared with the risks of a new definition. Bowen noted that people treat families with great caution, lest the equilibrium be upset.<sup>211</sup> Careful listening is foundational for differentiation, with minimal verbal input to the married couple. The plan, said Gilbert, for differentiation “would be to mostly listen. When I did say anything, it would be with understanding, logic and patience.” Self-differentiation is already inside of the married couple. It is just covered over by other people’s baggage.<sup>212</sup>

The self-differentiation of the pastoral coach is foundational to helping a married couple. High level leaders see working on self in their family relationship systems, both in their original and in their nuclear families, as the most important work they do. The best way to help married couples is for the pastoral coach to keep working on him/ herself. There is a significant correlation between greater awareness of one’s own emotional system and a growing awareness of one’s spouse’s emotions. Self-differentiation requires great courage. Worry is an indication of undifferentiation. The pastoral coach seeks to be calm, cool, and collected. Family Systems Theory is not about ‘fixing’ a married couple. It is rather about non-reactive thoughtful connectedness.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 209; Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 263; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 437, p. 507.

<sup>212</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 119; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 153; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. xvii; Kerr, *Handbook of Family Therapy*, p. 215, p. 250; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 42.

<sup>213</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 152; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, p. 107; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 138; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 24, p. 99; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 80; JC Wynn, *The Family Therapist*, 1987, p. 143; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 294; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 109; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 152.

Self differentiation is based on well-thought-through guiding principles. Guiding principles are inherently calming for married couples. Marital principles and goals reduce reactivity; reactivity reduces principles.<sup>214</sup> Such principles are not rigidly held but are open to new data. Systemic marital openness is the opposite of systemic marital cutoff. Openness to one's parents is the foundation of marital openness.<sup>215</sup> Guiding principles help us discover and mature our basic self as opposed to our pseudo or functional self. These principles are not uncovered easily and quickly but rather through thinking, investigating, testing, and retesting. Pseudo-self is where most of us live most of the time. Without guiding principles, the married couple will default during anxiety to groupthink.<sup>216</sup> The pastoral coach can model for the married couple how guiding principles operate to direct one's basic self. Well-defined people show, above all else, two prominent characteristics: clear self-boundaries and a focused inner guidance thinking system.<sup>217</sup> The five couples were taught in Session #2 that daring to be different, taking principled stands with clear goals strengthens marriage.

There is a temptation to believe the myth that being loving and being kind by itself will cure all of our couple conflicts. Love is often a Canadian term for giving up self. If we do not speak up, we lose

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<sup>214</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 152, p. 364, p. 449; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 9; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 21; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 35, p. 36.

<sup>215</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 53; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 231.

<sup>216</sup> Becvar and Becvar, *Family Therapy*, p. 148; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 44, p. 94; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 68; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 39, p. 94; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 105.

<sup>217</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 164; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 117; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 79; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 127; Richardson, "Differentiation of Self as a Therapeutic Goal for the Systemic Pastoral Counselor," p. 41 quoting Bowen, p. 437.



identity, self, and self-awareness of our thinking and core convictions. Our 'I' statements as pastoral coaches enable 'I' statements from the couple being coached.<sup>218</sup> 'I' statements focus on core principles and thoughtful courses of actions. Learning to use 'I-statements' as a married couple takes time. Sadly it is often our families that resist such self-definition.<sup>219</sup> When a spouse in a marriage uses 'I' statements rather than just 'we' statements, it helps her/him take responsibility for her / his own growth and health. Through self-defining 'I' statements, a spouse avoids blaming or taking responsibility for the other spouse's emotions and actions. Bowen called such an 'I' position "doing what you say and saying what you do."<sup>220</sup>

When self-differentiation is low, more emotional energy is trapped in the marriage relationship. Such a spouse is a "complete emotional prisoner" of the relationship. When a spouse is trapped in their emotional world, they often impulsively make decisions based on what feels right at the moment. People with low differentiation often default to emotional distance and marital cutoff as their anxiety reducer. Bowen spoke about relational nomads in their lower differentiation going from marriage to marriage to short relationship. When differentiation is higher, more energy is available to use in one's effective marital functioning. One can be fully involved in the emotional sphere without fear of becoming too maritally fused. Most higher-differentiated people are affected by anxiety but recover quicker. The swiftness and quality of recovery from symptomatic anxiety and regressive emotional patterns are the

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<sup>218</sup> Freidman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 11; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 78; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 111; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 75.

<sup>219</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 132; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 35; James L Framo, "Family of origin as a therapeutic resource for adults and marital and family therapy: you can and should go home again," *Family Process*, 15:193-210, 1976, p. 340.

<sup>220</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 495; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 99; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 93.

clearest indications of self-differentiation. Higher differentiation in couples enables more flexible change and morphogenesis, in contrast to rigid homeostasis.<sup>221</sup>

Highly differentiated person, able to select emotional states, can actually greatly enjoy them. Differentiation for married couples is about becoming more fully human. Emotional and sexual boredom with married couples is often a sign of rigid, fused undifferentiation. Undifferentiated couples are often both addictively drawn to each other and simultaneously drawn to flee from each other.<sup>222</sup> The lower the differentiation, the more likely that one spouse will become more dominant, taking self and the other one more adaptive / compliant, losing self. The more adaptive / compliant we are, the less that we have the energy and creativity for lasting transformation. Couple relationships, which naturally deteriorate anyways, deteriorate more quickly and dramatically when self-differentiation is low.<sup>223</sup>

Humour, which sometimes included irony and a sense of the tragic / comic, is a key strategy in self-differentiation for married couples. When spouses don't know how to de-stress, it leaves them vulnerable to self-medication. Humour reduces fusion in marriages.<sup>224</sup> Marital collusion happens when couples are so fused that they treat others as the IP negative and project their intimacy anxiety onto them. Through self-effacing humour, the pastoral coach sets the tone, "keeping it loose". Often a casual

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<sup>221</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 534, p. 536; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 69, p. 75; Peleg and Arnon, p. 325; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 38; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Meyer, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", p. 90; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 66, p. 67.

<sup>222</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 24, p. 116; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 77; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 151, p. 258.

<sup>223</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 80, p. 85, p. 104; Bowen, "Family Systems Theory," *Family Therapy*, p. 295; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 111.

<sup>224</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 143; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *The Good Marriage*, p. 20, p. 28; John and Anne Coles, *Making More of Marriage*, p. 10.

comment with light humour can do wonders. Humour may easily be “one of the most helpful mechanisms for helping a family get some distance from its own misery.”<sup>225</sup>

At the heart of self-differentiation is a non-anxious presence. Some people call this ‘benevolent disinterest’. Staying out of the emotionality of transference is key to self-differentiation. In contrast to Freud’s transference goal of replacing the parent, Bowen sought to reconnect his client with their parents. Knowledge of the family emotional systems reduces emotionality. Some married couples slip back and forth from an anxious presence to an anxious non-presence. Through avoidance, substance abuse or workaholism, some spouses temporarily achieve a non-anxious absence. What is desired is presence, present to oneself, one’s marriage, one’s family, and others. Being present without being swallowed is the key. It is so easy to not ‘be there.’ Bowen became so emphatic about this insight that he became known as Dr. Presence.<sup>226</sup> As pastoral coaches, learning to practice a non-anxious presence is challenging but indispensable for strengthening marriages and reducing emotional cutoff.

#### 4c) Triangles and Strengthening Marriages

Once you look for triangles in marriages, you’ll find them everywhere. Triangles exist in all relationships. Triangles are the universal unit of analysis, the smallest stable emotional unit. They are the cement that integrates the other seven Bowen concepts into one unified theoretical basis. Triangles and interlocking triangles are the web through which emotional process is both transmitted

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<sup>225</sup>Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 299; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 74; David S Freeman, 'A Model for Teaching a Beginner's Course on Family Therapy', *Models of Family Practice* School of Social Work, UBC, Chapter 8; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 313; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 183; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 153.

<sup>226</sup> Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 56-57; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 43, p. 163; Richardson, *Family Ties that Bind*, p. 45; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 84.

and stabilized in the multigenerational emotional system.<sup>227</sup> Some of this triangular stability is illusory and temporary.

Marital coaching is always triangular in nature, if only because it involves the pastor or therapist, but more often because it includes the child, or in-laws. Bowen stated that most of his Family Systems learnings came from studying triangles. He did not personally like the term 'triangle', as it was mathematical rather than biological. But he stuck with it for lack of a better biological term. Structured marital patterns repeat and repeat in triangles. Emotional cutoff is a triangular, not a solitary activity. Ironically it takes two or more for cutoff to work.<sup>228</sup>

The two-person dyad of the married couple is inherently unstable, especially during times of anxiety. The dyads naturally draw in and triangulate to a third party. Many married couples find intimacy painful because of the fused loss of self, and avoid dyadic intimacy by quickly triangling with a third party.<sup>229</sup> I wonder if a couple's anxiously overfocusing on their marriage and treating it as an IP+ (Identified Person Positive) or IP negative may inadvertently turn their marriage itself into the third member of an unhealthy triangle. Titelman would call this a mental construct triangle, because it involves a non-living being as the third member of a triangle. Perhaps husbands and wives need to detriangulate from their overly serious, urgent and important marriages. Chronic stress can destabilize almost any but

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<sup>227</sup> Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 87; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p.147, p. 150; Papero, "Bowen Family Systems and Marriage," p. 16; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 379; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. xi, p. xiii.

<sup>228</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 50; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 138; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 52, p. 76; Bowen, *Family Systems Theory*, p. 40; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 11; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 23.

<sup>229</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 138, p. 146; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 28; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 50; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 499; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 381, p. 382.

the most differentiated dyads. Triangles stand in the way of the very resolution that they are attempting to bring about. Susan Jones observed that triangulation offers stabilization through diversion rather than through resolution of the issue. Such triangulation in a married couple creates an appearance of calmness because the anxiety is being transferred to the third party of the triangle. Through the transferring of dyadic anxiety, even 'low-level' adultery can temporarily bring 'calmness' to a married couple until the adultery becomes more intense. Triangling temporarily calms couples by letting off emotional steam; because this triangling brings frozen rigidity, the 'calmness' ultimately backfires.<sup>230</sup>

Emotional distance between married couples brings one spouse closer to the third party in the triangle. Freeman said that some people who do not wish to work on self or their own part in a relationship may choose triangulation as a convenient substitute. Married couples can triangulate in many ways, such as by gossiping with others about the relationship, or by discussing about politics, TV, etc, anything that avoids dealing with self, other and the relationship. Triangulation can be a way of hiding from marital intimacy.<sup>231</sup>

There is a close connection between triangles and self-differentiation. Bowen held that there was a solid theoretical basis for saying that differentiation of self takes place only in a triangle, and the most effective method was in the triangle consisting of the two closest family members (the two spouses) and the coach. The lower the differentiation of the married couple, the more active the

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<sup>230</sup> Becvar and Becvar, *Family Therapy: A Systemic Integration*, p. 149; Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 48; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 401; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 49; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 128.

<sup>231</sup> Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 48; David S. Freeman, *Family Therapy with Couples: the family-of-origin approach* (Jason Aronson Inc, New Jersey, 1992), p. 49; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 349; Freeman, *Family Therapy with Couples*, p. 49.

triangles will be in funneling dyadic anxiety. Anxiety moves around the triangles of the family.<sup>232</sup> The presence of the third party, such as a new baby, sometimes calms the marital dyad, but at other times anxiously destabilizes it because of the enormous energy investment needed. The removal of a third party, such as an adult child leaving home, can either increase or decrease the conflict or stability of the marital dyad. Despite the great challenges, the intense triangles of many married couples can be impacted by calm, principled pastoral coaches. To observe triangles, it is necessary to see past the symptoms to the underlying emotional process: the interplay of individuality and togetherness and the impact of anxiety on that interchange.<sup>233</sup>

Marital triangles reveal the absurdity of asking why in any causal sense. Triangles, a fact of nature, describe the what, how, when and where of marriage relationships, not the why. 'Why' questions are often expressions of our defensiveness which retriangulates us. With married couples, there are good triangles but most triangles are considered unhelpful, particularly because they include some and exclude others. Few, if any, like being the outsider or the IP negative target / scapegoat. Often husbands end up as this person, with the third person being the mother-in-law, the wife's female close friend, the pastor, the counselor, or the male adulterer.<sup>234</sup>

Anxiety is the major shaper of triangular activity. Triangles spread the anxiety more widely, therefore 'protecting' the marital dyad from emotionally overheating and burning out. Triangulating

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<sup>232</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 530; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 29; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 139; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 155; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 127.

<sup>233</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 138, p. 139, p. 151; Gilbert, *Eight Concepts*, p. 55.

<sup>234</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of family therapy*, p. 242; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 134, p. 136, p. 154; Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, p. 266.

spouses target less secure individuals in their projecting anxiety onto them. Our focus needs to be not only on the structural design of the system (the triangles and how they interlock), but on the actual movement of anxiety within that system of triangles. Watching for process is done by observing how emotions flow and change within and among the individuals and triangles of a relationship system. Triangles can be identified by whom the spouse goes to when they emotionally distance from their spouse. Triangles tend to be repetitive, reactive, predictable and automatic.<sup>235</sup>

Emotional triangles are more stable, flexible, and able to contain anxiety than the marital dyads. When triangles are overwhelmed by anxiety, they interlock with other triangles in order to share the anxious load. With two parents and two children, you already have four triangles. The addition of one more child brings you to ten triangles just in one nuclear family. The higher the anxiety of the married couple, the greater the number of interlocking triangles formed. Every corner or angle of the 'tri-angle' is a functioning position. Variables affecting our functioning position are gender, birth order, family patterns, and multigenerational nodal events.<sup>236</sup> Three of the functioning positions are the anxiety 'generator', the anxiety 'amplifier', and the anxiety 'dampener'. Each of these three positions is a way of avoiding responsibility for managing one's own anxiety. Expressing anger to a third party (i.e., gossip) about one's spouse functions to bring togetherness with the third party, while anxious expression of anger to one's spouse functions to create emotional distance. In marital conflict, the emotionally triggered person characteristically adds emotional fuel by defending or counterattacking. One cannot

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<sup>235</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 135; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 32; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 146.

<sup>236</sup> Kerr, "Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self," in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, p. 54; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 139, p. 149; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Family Systems Theory*, p. 10.

positively impact triangulation in married couples by trying to change other people in their triangle. Trying to change others in the triangle is likely to reinforce the very aspects you wish to change.<sup>237</sup>

The laws of the triangle are key indicators as to who will end up in an outsider, more cutoff position. Paying attention to the triangles found in genograms is vital in reducing marital conflict. The more organic nature of the genogram is expressed by “the inclusion of relationship conflicts, cutoffs, and triangles.”<sup>238</sup> In the *Strengthening Relationships* home group which emerged from the Strengthening Marriage Workshop, there has already been produced thirteen genograms since September 2012, with remarkable insight and self-reported life-transformation.

The solution to triangling is detriangling oneself. Staying out of triangles increases our ability to see the family emotional system. Observing triangles enables one to read how their amygdala is firing and where they are being emotionally reactive rather than thoughtfully responsive. Controlling such reactivity is at the heart of detriangling.<sup>239</sup> When a family appears to be stuck, the pastoral coach should focus primarily on changing one’s own input into the therapeutic triangle. The central triangle is the most important triangle where systemic change is most likely to occur. A pastoral

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<sup>237</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 142; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 439; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 150.

<sup>238</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Klever, “Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff,” p. 230; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Victoria Harrison, “Reproduction and Emotional Cutoff,” p. 248; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 138.

<sup>239</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 145; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 53, p. 74, p. 77.



coach brings detriangulation by being present but detached, expressing a non-anxious presence with the married couple.<sup>240</sup>

Titelman said that there are many forms that detriangling takes place: expressing neutrality-objectivity, humour, reversal, systems questioning, and avoiding fusion by putting the other together with the other or phantom other. Reversals are statements made by the pastoral coach that ironically convey the reverse meaning of the literal statement. Such reversal comments, when calmly neutral, can potentially reduce homeostatic rigidity and increase marital awareness. The calculated risk in such reversal detriangling is that one or both of the spouses may reactively cut off the pastoral coach. Mature coaching will sometimes use reversal detriangling as a last resort after every other responsible step has been taken.<sup>241</sup>

Ironically detriangulation is facilitated by the pastoral coach creating “a new triangle, a therapeutic one” with the couple. Detriangulation is not about manipulating and controlling the married couple but rather about setting healthy boundaries so that one is not manipulated and controlled by them in their emotional reactivity. Detriangling is closely linked to self-differentiating.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 153; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 137; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 148; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 479; Michael E. Kerr, ‘Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self’, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, p. 55.

<sup>241</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 57; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 39, p. 101, Meyer, “Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy”.

<sup>242</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 136; Kerr, “Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self,” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, p. 58; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 59; Daniel V. Papero, “Responsibility for Self,” *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 70.

Objectivity and neutrality are both key to detriangling from a married couple, and for a spouse detriangling from his / her spouse. Neutrality is key to reducing marital polarization. Bowen defined emotional neutrality as the ability to be in the presence of disharmony without taking sides. Staying neutral and refusing to take sides with either spouse is the “central, most challenging task” and first priority for the pastoral coach.<sup>243</sup> Marital coaching is particularly vulnerable to getting caught in triangles. Many clients want the pastoral coach to pedestalize them as the IP+ and/or the victim, in contrast to their IP- spouse. Marital morphogenesis requires neutrality which Bowen describes as priceless, as our greatest coaching asset. There is no formula for quick-fix neutrality. To be charmed or angered neutralizes our neutrality. Most therapists, said Bowen, were either oversympathetic or rejecting. When we have inherited the couple’s problems, neutrality is lost. Defining self is one way of detriangling through demonstrating neutrality with the couple in conflict.<sup>244</sup>

A key to objectivity with married couples is the phenomenological rather than interpretive stance of the pastoral coach. We need to resist and repent of the temptation to ‘read the minds’ of the married couple. Giving marital advice is one way of taking a side. In detriangling, actions speak louder than words. Jones taught that the essential stance for the pastoral coach is to be in contact with each spouse, but not caught in the triangle. A knowledge of triangles is one of the best ways to avoid falling into the

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<sup>243</sup> Michael E. Kerr, ‘Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1988, p. 57; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 30; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 349; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 73; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 62; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Therapy*, p. 41, p. 389, Ferrera, “Bridging Emotional Cutoff from a Former Spouse.”; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. 43.

<sup>244</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, “Marital Fusion and Differentiation”, p. 137; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 96, p. 99; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 74; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 63; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 39; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 40, p. 41.

emotionality of transference.<sup>245</sup> Detriangulating may look like the pastoral coach is doing nothing, all the while he / she is balancing on a shaky high-wire. In our activist, technique-oriented western society, 'doing nothing' and becoming small as a way of strengthening marriages doesn't look impressive. It may look very weak, yet marital detriangling is about becoming human and staying human.

Sometimes a spouse or pastoral coach may try to detriangulate prematurely before they have become objectively neutral themselves. Such attempts will usually go badly. It is better to just keep in touch (K.I.T.), and wait until the anxiety level has moderated before attempting detriangulation. Maintaining unfused non-anxious contact and connection is vital in bridging emotional cutoff. When it comes to detriangling, "a new way of thinking is learned slowly. For the most part, people teach themselves."<sup>246</sup> People caught in marital triangles often have significant reactive denial about their triangular involvement even when expressed rationally to them. No one is immune from being triangled and nobody is immune from triangling others.<sup>247</sup>

Triangulated marital conflict is closely connected with secrecy and gossip. Such triangular marital processes have their rules about 'keeping gossip secret'. Bowen stated that relationships can become distant and hostile when there are secrets. Marital secrets have dysfunctioning effects in the next

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<sup>245</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 151; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 63; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 65; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 155; Jones, *Family Therapy: A Comparison of Approaches*, p. 57; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 57.

<sup>246</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 154; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 151, p. 153 ft 10, p. 154.

<sup>247</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 161; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 349.

generation. Part of detriangling and growing up is letting go of secret gossip.<sup>248</sup> Reducing triangulated secrecy strengthens marriages and reduces emotional cutoff.

#### 4d) Family Projection Process and Strengthening Marriages

In the family projection process, married couples often relieve anxiety by projecting their anxiety onto each other or others, making them weaker through scapegoating. The family projection process is a special kind of emotional triangle.<sup>249</sup> By seeing others as the problem, one doesn't have to work on oneself. Such transfer of anxiety involves the projection of one's own feelings of helplessness, weakness and inadequacy. Without discriminating between feeling and reality, such feelings of helplessness define the person, and then become projected onto the other spouse or third party.<sup>250</sup> Bowen taught that the therapeutic emphasis is to be directed at this helplessness. Through helping the couple discover their strengths and their problem-solving abilities, they are able to move from being passive to becoming marital activists and change-agents. Bowen said that many, before coaching, had seen their marital problems as individual burdens to be endured rather than family problems to be solved: "...it is not traumatic action but passive lack of action that is incapacitation to patients."<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 12, p. 509; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 58; Evan Imber-Black, "Secrets and families and family therapy: an overview", *Secrets in families and family therapy* (New York, Norton, 1993), p. 6; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 520,

<sup>249</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 434, p. 443; Titelman, *Triangles*, p. 37.

<sup>250</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 127; Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 8.

<sup>251</sup> Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 39, p. 69, p. 100, p. 113, p. 118.

We can project onto the other spouse the identity of IP+ or IP- (Identified Person Positive or Negative). When we project onto our spouse IP+, we pedestalize them, exaggerating their messianic qualities, only to knock them off the pedestal and identify them as IP negative. The payoff in identifying the other spouse as IP negative is a temporary reduction of anxiety.<sup>252</sup> Before we cut off from our spouse or parents, we usually identify them as IP negative. In the worst case of cutoff, we deny their essential humanity and worth.

Through the family projection process, some spouses blame their spouse and some blame themselves. Most systems handle anxiety by displacing their fears onto someone else or something else.<sup>253</sup> Married couples may immaturely project their anxiety and undifferentiation on their children. The more fused we are to our children, the greater the temptation to put them on a pedestal or see them as the problem. The payoff is a temporary anxiety reduction in our marriages. Those children who show a lower level of differentiation were “more exposed to parental immaturity than their more fortunate siblings.” The child, in order to adapt to the anxious parents, lives out the position of functional helplessness. When the projection process is fixated on one of the three projection mechanisms, marital cutoff and stuckness are higher.<sup>254</sup>

Jim Van Yperen spoke about the temptation we face to “minimize (our) personal responsibility while seeking to blame or disparage others.” It is easy for pastoral coaches to slip into benevolent over-

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<sup>252</sup> Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” p. 49; Freeman, *Family Therapy with Couples*, p. 49.

<sup>253</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 130; Richardson, *The Healthier Pastor*, p. 19.

<sup>254</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 65; Becvar and Becvar, *Family Therapy: A Systemic Integration*, p. 149; Papero, “Bowen Family Systems Theory and Marriage,” p. 16; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 34; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 62.

helpfulness and projection which harms the couple while trying to help them.<sup>255</sup> To break the power of family projection, Bowen “usually avoid(ed) a relationship with the family member already designated ‘sick’ or ‘patient’ by the family process.” By working with the highest functioning, the most motivated, and the pursuers, Bowen turned the family projection process on its head, thereby bridging marital cutoff. Bowen said that in each family and marriage, there is an active person who gets things done.<sup>256</sup> By helping the married couple become more aware of the family projection process, the tendency to weaken, scapegoat, and cut each other off can be reduced.

#### 4e) Family of Origin and Strengthening Marriages

Family Systems Theory holds that greater awareness of our family of origin brings significant reduction of cutoff in our nuclear family system. Friedman vividly expressed in the metaphor of a collapsing telescope that generations are connected to each other in uncanny ways that we do not realize; each telescopic cylinder somehow formulates the next. Working on our family of origin is the ‘high road’ to working on strengthening marriages. Family of origin differentiation enables couples to become close without anxiously fusing. Family of origin work is about life context, in which our generational family is the most influential context for either morphogenesis or staying stuck.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: a guide to overcoming church conflict*, p. 36; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 435.

<sup>256</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 113; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 62; Bowen, *The Origins of Family Psychotherapy*, p. 70.

<sup>257</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 68; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 11; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 108; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 85 (quoting Walter Toman, *Family Constellation* book, 1962.)

The pastoral coach equips the married couple to bring their family system alive through careful, nonreactive observation. Generational transmission means that what matters is not the location or the issues but rather the systemic family forces involved. Married couples will benefit greatly through examining where they have both come from, and where they might be heading, integrating the past and the present / future. Some married couples are so narcissistically absorbed in the anxious present that they have no energy to give to their seemingly irrelevant family-of-origin past. Bowen theory addresses the multigenerational family themes, patterns, functioning positions, and symptom eruptions as rooted in the past and encountered in the present. In strengthening a marriage, one does not have to choose between past, present and future. Remarkably many married couples may make more progress through family of origin work than even through going for Family Systems therapy sessions.<sup>258</sup>

Richardson says that family-of-origin work is the best way (he) knows to bring together theory and practice in our own lives. By studying their family of origin emotional patterns and comparing them to their nuclear family emotional patterns, married couples can become less emotionally reactive and more thoughtfully responsive to each other. It is so easy for couples to get stuck in the 'blame game' regarding their family of origin. Family of origin work replaces the visual 'shoulds' with the visual indicatives. It looks at our families as they are, rather than how we want to see them. Nonreactively seeing both that which was and that which is calls forth the responsive marital future. Peleg's research

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<sup>258</sup> Randy Roberts, "Two Distinct Approaches to Family Therapy: The Ideas of Murray Bowen and Jay Haley," *The Family*, Vol. 6 No. 2 p. 37, p. 42; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 518, p. 546; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 165, quoting Murray Bowen, 1988; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 77.

has confirmed the family of origin hypothesis by showing a close correlation between the differentiation level of adult females in relating to their father and their husbands.<sup>259</sup>

Some married couples may be reluctant to reconnect with their family of origin, thinking that they will stir up trouble for themselves. It may feel like going into a war zone. Some, particularly those who have burnt their emotional bridges, wonder if they have any family of origin out there to reconnect with. Others are in contact with their family but at great emotional distance, returning home very infrequently for duty visits.<sup>260</sup> Generationally cutoff couples tend to invest more in work and social settings than in each other. Without coaching a married couple, going back to one's family of origin may backfire. Family of origin work helps repair the generational damage of emotional distance and cutoff. Working on our family of origin issues can release multi-generational breakthrough, particularly in the areas of forgiveness, healing, and clearer self-identity. Forgiveness opens the door to one's multigenerational future.<sup>261</sup>

If you can get a one-to-one relationship with each living person in your extended family, it will help you grow up more than anything you could ever do in life. In a one-to-one relationship, you and I talk with each other only about you or me or our relationship. Doing this is vital in bridging emotional cutoff

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<sup>259</sup> Peleg, "Differentiation of self and separation anxiety: Is there a similarity between spouses?", p. 27; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 10; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 78; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 263; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 32.

<sup>260</sup> Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 162; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 138, p. 139, p. 140, p. 186; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 543; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 57 quoting Murray Bowen, 1976.

<sup>261</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 178, p. 302; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 121; William Watson, "Soul and System: The Integrative Possibilities of Family Therapy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, University of Rochester Medical Center, 1997, Vol. 25, No. 1, 123-135, p. 128; Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, p. 88.



and thereby strengthening marriages.<sup>262</sup> Bowen encouraged us to do our family of origin work as a research project of life. This family of origin work by married couples must be done for the sake of self rather than for togetherness. One of the best places for couples to start is with the oldest members of their families.<sup>263</sup> Married couples were encouraged, when visiting their family members, to look for the generational facts, as facts tell a story about their family's differentiation and undifferentiation. Family of origin work for married couples is a fact-finding mission which helps each spouse become more of a self rather than a pseudo-self.<sup>264</sup> These factual stories are "angles of entry into the universal, if not cosmic, processes that have formed our being".

Bowen admitted, as happened with his own parents, that this family of origin work will not necessarily go smoothly. He had mistaken avoidance and distance from his family as emancipation, but he had unfinished emotional business with them. Bowen's breakthrough happened in 1966 on a home-visit when Bowen was able to relate to the family about emotional issues without becoming personally caught in the process. His family of origin's initial angry response was to write Bowen off as crazy, but they eventually came to refer to Bowen by the honorific title of the differentiating one.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p.119, quoting Murray Bowen, 1975; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 137; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 79; Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 52; p. 57; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, "Marital Functioning and Multigenerational Fusion and Cutoff," p. 239.

<sup>263</sup> Murray Bowen, 'The Use of Family Theory in Clinical Practice', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Vol. 7, No. 5, October, 1966, p. 372; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 202; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 502, p. 518; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 77.

<sup>264</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 77; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 120; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 287.

<sup>265</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 148; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 34, p. 125; Kerr, *Handbook of Family Therapy*, p. 232; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 516, p. 517.

Bowen's most important family of origin breakthrough was that he was able to detriangle from his parents. One's parents may triangulate behind 'we-ness', and remain hidden from the bid for re-connection. Couples are encouraged in doing family of origin research to look for nodal points when people have left or entered their family. All of us, including married couples, are more emotionally attached and fused to our family of origin than we realize.<sup>266</sup> It may be difficult for married couples to see their family of origin's triangles because they themselves are often colluded or reactive with their families. Activating one's family's triangles is key to bringing detriangulation. Even if one's direct ancestor is dead, the family triangles can still be activated through visiting one's cousins. The irony of family of origin work is that in connecting with one's past, a person is intentionally stimulating the very painful anxiety that produced the initial family cutoff. Moving into the past initially activates the anxiety that produced the cutoff. Making short visits helps reduce the reactivity so that married couples can be better observers.<sup>267</sup>

By facing family of origin issues like emotional distance from our parents, we can begin to see and work on emotional patterns like emotional distance. Distance and denial in married couples is generationally transmitted. Nichols encouraged connecting with the most emotionally distant member of the family, which is often one's father. Many have discovered that the intensity as emotional pursuer of one's spouse and children is due in part to unfinished family of origin business.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 34; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 494, p. 501; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 80; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 80.

<sup>267</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, p. 157; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Friesen, "Emotional Cutoff and the Brain," p. 105; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 146.

<sup>268</sup> Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, p. 22; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 144.

A key to breakthrough with one's family of origin is self-differentiation, both as the pastoral coach and as the spouse / adult child. As one comes to clarity about his or her own goals, this helps prevent us from becoming swallowed up in the swirling family emotional whirlpool. Family of origin differentiation has much to do with self regulation and with playfulness. By doing family of origin work in a self-differentiated, innovative way, whether as pastoral coach or as a spouse, one will be evoking reactivity from one's family of origin. If one does not become consumed by such family of origin reactivity, there can be reduction of cutoff and new insight for the married couple.<sup>269</sup>

Cutoff may increase during times of family deaths as a way of coping with new family triangles. Perhaps this is why Bowen encouraged us to visit our families of origin, to observe and potentially bridge cutoff during these critical life transitions of death, birth, weddings and holidays. Illnesses and holidays are also natural contexts that provide enough anxiety to ignite the family reactivity. One of the biggest mistakes is to use these sensitive times to emotionally confront and dump on one's family. The key with family of origin work is to observe others, but to work on self, not the other way around. Photographs, language or memory of history can be helpful in family of origin connecting. There are no quick fixes in family of origin work. We have to give up looking for marital panaceas, even Bowenian panaceas. Bowen talked about four years before generational transmission patterns will be modified.<sup>270</sup>

One of the most helpful ways for married couples to do family of origin work is to map out their family genogram. The main function of the genogram is to organize data during the evaluation phase and

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<sup>269</sup> Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, p. 12, p.18 ft 4; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 545.

<sup>270</sup> Richardson, *Family that Bind Ties*, p. 104; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 80; "Toward the Differentiation of a Self in one's own Family," by Anonymous/Bowen, p. 142; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 542; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, p. 163.

to track relationship processes and key triangles over the course of coaching. Genograms are vital in assessing and reducing emotional cutoff through better understanding family patterns.<sup>271</sup> It is helpful that dates of births, moves, deaths, and immigration all (be) recorded on the family diagram / genogram. Most Bowenian coaches use the family diagram as their way of systematically organizing family systems. Diagrams are most helpful when they are clear, specific and comprehensive. Friedman said that the emotional system includes all the data that can be recorded on a family's genogram. The genogram is uniquely devised to track generational transmission, thereby reducing emotional cutoff.<sup>272</sup>

#### 4f) Societal Emotional Process and Strengthening Marriages

Because anxious triangles interlock with other triangles outside the family, society's triangles can in turn impact the nuclear family during times of societal stress. When the society is more infectiously anxious, families become more anxious. We live in a society that is often very anxious, crisis-oriented, and emotionally regressive. While emotional cutoff is an age-old process, it has become more pronounced as a result of social anxiety. The more regressive our society is, the greater the marital cutoff. The greater the marital cutoff, the more regressive our society becomes.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> JC Wynn, *The Family Therapist*, p. 144; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 138, p. 150; Titelman, *Emotional Cutoff*, Alice Eichholz, "Managing Cutoff through Family Research," p. 175.

<sup>272</sup> Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*, p. 123; Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 150; Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, "Bowen Theory as a Basis for Therapy", Patricia Meyer, p. 71, p. 76; Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 144.

<sup>273</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 101, p. 109; Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, p. 304, p. 305; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 440; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 271; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 85.

Our individualistic, consumerist society is not generally supportive or aware of the principles that support strong marriages and families. Our anxiety-driven consumerism makes us less human and our marriages less satisfying. What would it take to turn from an economy of consumerism to an economy of communion and healthy relationships?<sup>274</sup> Many time-honoured principles of emotional mature living, says Gilbert, such as commitment, integrity, religious teaching and even the primacy of the family have been largely discarded. So many of us have been disillusioned by institutions, but lack anything solid with which to replace the corrupt institutions. Even marriage as an institution can become suspect to our jaded individualistic eyes. Some are trying to have a subjective independent relationship, free from the bonds of any institutional structure. What is missing in most marriages today, said Stevens, is what the Bible identifies as the heart of marriage: a covenant.<sup>275</sup> Marriage as covenant helps us recover our respect for the historic rootedness of marriage.

In times of social regression, there is much pressure on conflicted couples to find a privatized quick fix. Such quick fixes change nothing permanently and usually make their marriages worse. Social regression causes couples to do more of what they have always done, such as increasing their anxious togetherness and fusion. This creates a vicious cycle of more anxiety and more distance / cutoff. In times of social regression, togetherness is counter-intuitively often the problem, not the solution. Less togetherness brings greater marital intimacy and less anxious reactivity. Loneliness is often systemic anxiety, where we distance from marital closeness due to lack of a solid self.

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<sup>274</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 208, p. 209.

<sup>275</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 106, p. 107, p. 108; Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1968, p. 319; R. Paul Stevens, *Married for Good: the lost art of staying happily married* (Intervarsity Press, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, BC, 1986), p. 17.

We live in a regressive anxious society that emphasizes rights more than responsibilities, an out-of-balance emphasis that does not help married couples.<sup>276</sup> Merely focusing on an individual couple alone, without considering the regressive societal context, may be fitting into the old psychoanalytic solution. Is it possible that a rediscovery of marriage as covenant might reduce societal and marital regression and cutoff?

## **5) THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL INTEGRATION OF MARRIAGE STRENGTHENING**

### **WITH FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY**

Ever since becoming a Christian in 1972 and developing an unshakable hunger for bible reading, there has been a fascination with the theology of marriage. Reading Matthew 19: 6 (What God has joined together...), it was shocking to discover that God invented marriage.<sup>277</sup>

Systematic thinking about theology and faith integrates well with Bowenian systems thinking. Both systemic models are looking for meaningful patterns and metanarratives. Thoughtful theology is foundational to strengthening marriages. Many Christian approaches to family and marriage have either been uncritically rejecting or uncritically accepting psychological and sociological insights without doing serious theological and biblical reflection. Much of the emphasis in contemporary society on the conjugal or nuclear family, rather than extended kin, is a more recent reaction to the impact of a high-tech world

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<sup>276</sup> Kerr and Bowen, p. 132; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 110; Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, p. 63; Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, p. 117; Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 279.

<sup>277</sup> Peter and Judy Davids, "Healing the Bleeding Wound: Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Teaching, Pastoral Strategies, Healing Approaches" (PJD Ministries, Houston, Texas, 2009), <http://www.davidsnet.ws/biblical>, p. 2.

requiring mobility and leaving of extended kin to find employment. The 1950s stereotype of an insulated nuclear family was largely a North American phenomenon in which the educational and job demands cut people off from their traditional extended family and society support systems. The isolated nuclear family was never intended to bear alone all the weight of family responsibility. Bowen held that such family isolation is an anxiety-based compartmentalization.<sup>278</sup>

The extended family, church community and local neighbourhood are meant to be part of the fabric of relational support for our marriages and families. Hyper-individualism is the antithesis and the acid rain of covenant love. Instead of genuine individuation in which one self-differentiates, hyper-individualism is the emotionally-fused imitation. Covenantal solidarity is very difficult for our emotionally cutoff society to embrace.

As both a necessary social reality, as well as a theological truth, being connected means being human, and being human means being part of a family. Understood theologically, marriage stands as the concrete foundation of family rather than just a conceptual component. The quintessential order for the family is not rooted within the natural order nor in the freedom of the individual but in the creative Word of God and its purpose as expressed through the order of creation. The telos or ultimate goal of family and marriage is not found inherently in itself but rather incarnationally through the Word of God. Part of the reason that marriage often lacks identity and purpose is that our society's passion for unrestricted freedom makes it telos-allergic. Our aversion to telos is so entrenched, says Wilson, that it has brought about teleological amnesia.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 156; Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," p. 47.

<sup>279</sup> Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 17; Wilson, *God's Good World*, p. 33.

Marriage is never only about itself but rather is about a marital vocation, mission and calling to love the other, be it the wider family, the church family, the community, or the creation. From the initial Genesis creation account, we learn about our being made in God's likeness and image, both personal and communal in nature. To be made in God's image is to be an analogy of God, an ambassador of God with a clear commission to steward and renew God's creation. Creation itself, said Michael Horton, is an expression of God's covenant love. Wilson states that creation is from the beginning included in God's covenant.<sup>280</sup> Our marital vocation, being rooted in the *imago dei*, is inherently relational and covenantal.

#### 5a) Covenant-making God

Covenant is one of the most important themes in the whole of the Scriptures. The term 'covenant' is rarely used in contemporary English. To be as good as your word is covenantal language. Many systematic theologians went through a period of intentionally and unintentionally neglecting covenantal theology. In many top liberal and evangelical systematic theologians, one will find virtually no references to covenantal theology, even in their table of contents. It seems that covenantal language was seen as too dated or even too Jewish. Some even argued that the New Testament term 'diatheke' eliminated the need for covenant, replacing it instead with a last will and testament.

In the past fifteen years, there has been a renaissance of interest in covenant theology. It is once again being seen as foundational to biblical literature, even as an overarching theme and key to unlocking

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<sup>280</sup> Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 30; Michael S Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2008), p. 104; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 12, p. 220, p. 224, p. 259; Horton, *God of Promise*, P. 30; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 54 ft. 11.



the biblical metanarrative. Meredith Kline said that the discovery of the covenant connection with ancient Near Eastern treaties is more important than even the unearthing of the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>281</sup> The covenant of life includes both a commitment to life in the land, and to the wider arena of the entire creation. God's redemptive covenant of life means that life, not death, rules. Because creation's very telos is life, death is unmasked as an alien intruder. While the way of the world is that of death, the cross-shaped way of creation brings new creation life. We must continually ask ourselves whether we are serving death or life.<sup>282</sup>

When God's people have gone through challenging times, they often turn to a fresh understanding of God's covenant faithfulness. Deep disappointment has a way of driving us back to our covenantal roots. Perhaps this explains in part the fascination with the covenant of marriage in the midst of our Anglican denomination's ongoing theological / biblical / ethical / marital angst.

The concept of the eschatological new covenant became normative in early church literature. Even our Christian Scriptures came to be called Covenants or Testaments, old and new. We are sometimes so jaded to the practice of calling the Christian Scriptures 'The New Testament' that we often don't even hear the covenantal implications. From Matthew Chapter 1 to Revelation Chapter 22, we are describing God's new covenant. Leaders were defined by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 as ministers (*diakonous*) of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. Horton delightfully called the Third Person of the Trinity our covenant attorney, as 'another advocate' on our behalf. The new covenant was

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<sup>281</sup> Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion* (Brazos Press, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009), p. 117; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. viii, p. 235; Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975), p.25; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 28.

<sup>282</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 163, p. 169, p. 170, p. 172, p. 179, p. 203.

never meant to replace the old but rather to fulfill, perfect and transform the earlier Abrahamic covenant. Christ's new covenant, like many earlier biblical covenants, involved an oath, a sacrifice, and a meal. Hahn said that covenant is what God does because covenant is who God is.<sup>283</sup> Covenant is not just God's activity, but his core identity. Because covenant is being as well as doing, Isaiah 49:8 could say of the Servant Messiah: "I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people..." The covenant of redemption expressed the differentiated unity with the Triune community, convergently integrating being and doing, ontology and economy.

Charles Spurgeon said that the doctrine of the covenants is the key of theology. Covenant theology is a hermeneutical key to properly interpret the whole of Scripture: "recognizing the rich covenantal soil in which every biblical teaching takes root." J.I. Packer says that the gospel of God, the Word of God, and the reality of God are not properly understood until viewed within a covenantal framework. Covenant has been described as the often invisible architecture of the Bible, reminding me of the often invisible family systems described by Bowen. Creation, redemption, and new creation belong together in covenantal fulfillment of God's promises. New creation is the one end or covenantal telos of creation. Peter Golding said:

Biblical doctrine, first to last, has to do with expressing God's covenantal relationships between God and man (i.e., humanity); biblical ethics has to do with expressing God's covenant relationship to us...<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Horton, *People and Place*, p. 25; Hahn, *First Comes Love*, p. 59, p. 89, p. 94.

<sup>284</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Covenant of Grace* (Pilgrim Publications, UK), p. 45; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 23; J.I. Packer, Introduction to Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), p. 1-2, p. 28; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 51, p. 104; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), p. 186, p. 187, p. 194.

There are many varieties of covenants in the Bible including Noah's covenant, Abraham's covenant, Moses' covenant, David's covenant and Jeremiah's new covenant.<sup>285</sup> Wayne Grudem perhaps too clinically defines covenant as an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship.<sup>286</sup>

One often hears the evangelistic half-truth that the Christian faith is not a religion but a relationship. Even apart from James 1:29 affirming that there is both genuine and counterfeit religion, the expression 'relationship' is not without its ambiguities. Our modern term 'relationship' seeks to affirm the personal but often ends up with the merely individual and subjective. Just as pietism can collapse into private subjective benefits, so too male-female relations can end up in a bottomless well of subjectivity. Horton commented:

(With) rampant Western individualism, the emphasis on 'me and my personal relationship with God' has supplanted the biblical assumption of covenantal solidarity.<sup>287</sup>

When relationship is rooted in the covenantal metanarrative, then there can be substance and fidelity. Covenant is first and foremost a promise, a pledge, a vow. Again and again God covenantally declares: "I will be your God and you will be my people." (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:3, 11:4, 30:4; Ezekiel 36:28; Joel 2:27; Romans 9:26.) The Hebrew term for covenant *berith* is used 278 times in

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<sup>285</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 1; Petrus J. Grabe, *New Covenant, New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Current Understanding* (Paternoster Press, Bletchley, UK, 2006), p. xvii; Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson, *The God of Covenant: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives* (Apollos, IVP, Leicester, UK, 2005), p. 12; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, p. 117.

<sup>286</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994), p. 515.

<sup>287</sup> Horton, *God of Promises*, p. 15.

the Old Testament, and its Greek equivalent *diatheke* is found 33 times in the New Testament. The Greek Septuagint translates *berith* with *diatheke* approximately 267 times<sup>288</sup>.

Horton says that with the biblical drama, a broken covenant lies at the center of a crime scene. While the First Adam and Israel failed, the Second Adam repairs and fulfills the broken covenant, making all things new through his resurrection. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus offered an atoning sacrifice of obedience in place of Adam's and our covenantal disobedience. Hosea 6:7 teaches that the first Adam, like his heirs, was a covenant-breaker in what has been described variously by Reformed theologians as the Adamic covenant, the covenant of nature, or the covenant of works. Horton said:

Only in the fulfillment of the covenant of creation by the second Adam is the destiny of the image-bearer finally attained and dispensed through the covenant of grace.

Being made in God's covenantal image, we are all irreducible covenantal, whether we are presently denying or accepting, breaking or seeking to keep the covenant. Horton described this as the ineradicable covenant identity that belongs to us all. In the midst of the idolatry and immorality of Romans Chapter One, Paul identifies us in verse 31 as covenant-breakers (*asunthetous*).<sup>289</sup> Christ's covenant-keeping atones for our covenant-breaking.

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<sup>288</sup> Grabe, *New Covenant, New Community*, p. 12.

<sup>289</sup> Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: the Divine Drama* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2002), p. 93; *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Edited by Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006), (Chapter by Michael Horton), p. 59; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 119, p. 226.

## 5b) Covenant-keeping in the Midst of Covenant-breaking

We have broken or violated every covenant that God has created. Covenant-breaking is a breakdown of faith, hope and love, the three things that matter most. As the greatest is love, the greatest covenant wound is our failure to love God and neighbour. Only Jesus as the sinless Lamb of God has fully kept the covenant promises. Being fully human and fully divine, Jesus was uniquely able to keep both sides of the Divine / human covenant. Our Father is so amazingly generous to us that he fulfills all the covenantal requirements in his own son's obedience. Christ both says the divine yes to humanity as covenantal Lord and answers back humanity's yes as the incarnate servant.<sup>290</sup> Jeremiah's new messianic covenant is a renewal of the unconditional Abrahamic and David covenants rather than the broken conditional Mosaic covenant. Both the Davidic and New covenants are royal covenants shaped by the covenantal character of their servant King. God's Kingdom points clearly to God's new covenant. The Kingdom of God is not less than real, but a more than real redemption of God's creation.<sup>291</sup>

Most covenants involve sacrifice. To cut a covenant (*karat berit*) would involve walking between two severed halves of an animal, invoking a vow upon oneself and taking part in a meal. Genesis 15:17 comments: "When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces." Jesus' sacrificial life preceded his sacrificial death. The cross, as seen through the Passover meal, is a covenantal sacrifice: "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

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<sup>290</sup> Hahn, *First Comes Love*, p. 93; *The Mystery of Salvation, the Doctrine Report of the Church of England* (Church Publishing House, London, UK, 1996), p. 106; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 162, p. 219; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 184.

<sup>291</sup> Delbert Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1969), p. 112; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 53, p. 56, p. 59; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: an Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (The Paternoster Press, Exeter, UK, 1984) p. 206; Wilson, *God's Good World*, p. 51.

Therefore let us keep the feast. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)."<sup>292</sup> God acts sacrificially and covenantally within historical time and space. On Good Friday, Christ the forsaken one, in the words of Isaiah 53:8, was cut off (*gazar*) from the land to bridge our cutoff and sin. He took our marital and covenantal cutoff upon himself, trading places with us. Our covenant-breaking increases emotional cutoff while Christ's sacrificial covenant-making bridges cutoff. Horton says that it is Christ's covenantal intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25) that gives us the assurance that we will never be cut off from God.<sup>293</sup>

In the covenantal risen Christ, history and eschatology, past and future, arche and telos are convergently and catalytically integrated. The concept of covenant expresses the eschatological unity of creation, redemption, and new creation.<sup>294</sup> God's Alpha and Omega come together in covenant. Both covenant and eschatology are inextricably oriented towards fulfillment and promise. Creation is not the covenantal goal of human existence, but rather its teleological beginning. The telos of covenantal consummation in Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath is to bring the whole creation into God's Sabbath rest. Sabbath-keeping is rooted in the Kingdom dialectic of creation and redemption.<sup>295</sup> We can reject the false choice between history / covenant and future / eschatology coming from much of 20<sup>th</sup> Century theology. Without covenantal clarity, we may inadvertently collapse theology into the idolatry of

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<sup>292</sup> *The Mystery of Salvation: the Doctrine Report of the Church of England*, p. 116; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 223.

<sup>293</sup> Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 266; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 147.

<sup>294</sup> Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 97, p. 134, p. 259; *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Lints, Horton, & Talbot, Editors (Chapter by Horton), p. 46; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: God, The World and Redemption* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), p. 275.

<sup>295</sup> Horton, *People and Place*, p. 3; *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Lints, Horton, and Talbot, Editors, Horton, p. 59; *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Horton, p. 181 "Image and Office: Human Person and the Covenant."; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 220, p. 245; Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 106; Wilson, *God's Good World*, p. 29.

abstract neoplatonic deism or over-realized eschatology. Without covenantal eyes, creation becomes disrespected by humanity or symbiotically confused with its Creator.<sup>296</sup> The covenant concept helps us live in the dynamic tension yet / not yet of this present age and the age to come. We as God's covenant people are simultaneously living in the desert and are also breaking into The Promised Land. We live in the yet / not yet covenantal suffering of Good Friday and the glory of Easter.

John Calvin, writing on Psalm 25, said that we have no reason to be afraid that God will deceive us if we persevere in his covenant. He strongly contrasted the covenant of grace with the law. Vanden Bergh, author of *Calvijn over het Genaderverbond*, claims that no one before Calvin, except for Bullinger, treated the covenant as seriously as Calvin. He saw it as key to understanding salvation history. Many see Calvin's interest in Covenant Theology emerging from his debates with the early Anabaptists.<sup>297</sup> Covenant theology for Calvin was unilateral, unconditional, and fulfilled by God in Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Calvin mentioned the covenant concept at least 273 times in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The essence of Calvin's covenantal concept is the binding of God whereby God binds himself to his covenant community. The etymological root of the term 'connect', according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is from the Latin *nex*: to bind. Similarly the term 'religion' comes from the Latin *ligare*: to bind or connect. Counterfeit religion is fused bondage to rigid idolatrous homeostasis. The genuine religion referred to in James 1:29 involves covenantal, sacramental connecting to the incarnationally

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<sup>296</sup> Horton, *The God of Promise*, p. 15.

<sup>297</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979), 1:424; W. Vanden Bergh, *Calvijn over het Genaderverbond* (Aalten: De Graafschap, 1939), p. 10; Grabe, *New Covenant, New Community*, p. xxi, ft. 4; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology*, p. 24.

sacred. All such connecting and binding are a partial foretaste of the covenantal heavenly banquet. Sacraments for Calvin are seen as signs and seals of God's covenant promises rather than fully-realized ontological entities.<sup>298</sup>

Baptism was understood by Calvin as the New Testament covenantal version of the Old Testament sign of circumcision. Colossians 2:11-12 was seen as the key covenantal text for the baptism/circumcision relationship. Zwingli made a strong covenantal connection between circumcision and baptism, saying: "For as circumcision is a sign of the covenant, so too is baptism." Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer similarly held that "the same to them was circumcision that to us is baptism." Bromiley commented that circumcision and baptism were both covenant signs, the one pointing forward, the other backward, but both testifying to the one covenant of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>299</sup>

Calvin's theology of the covenant was extensive but incomplete, and later developed by his successors. Some people see covenant theology as the essence of Reformed theology.<sup>300</sup> Johannes Cocceius of Leyden (1603-69) is referred to as the father of Federal or Covenant Reformed Theology. The Westminster Confession is the first Reformed confession in which the concept of covenant permeates the entire document. S.A. Burrell makes a case that Scottish Presbyterian covenant theology was rooted in

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<sup>298</sup> Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Baker Academics, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001), p. 13, p. 15, p. 19, p. 24, p. 126, p. 137, p. 139; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 6.

<sup>299</sup> G.W. Bromiley, *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers* (Lutherworth Press, London, UK, 1953), p. 38; Bromiley, p. 38, p. 39; Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 165-166.

<sup>300</sup> Other Calvin-influenced covenant theologians include Herman Witsius, William Ames, Geerhardus Vos, and Herman Bavinck.; Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenantal Theology* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2006), p. 11.



the pre-existing Scottish practice of forming bands for protection.<sup>301</sup> While Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed theologians may be most visible in covenant theology, it is also an important theme in other movements such as the Anglican Church:

The history of Israel, and the Old Testament as it both records that history and interprets it as the story of the creator God with his covenant people, would be seen as the God-given narrative of how the creator set in motion his plan to deal with the plight of the world, and of humans.<sup>302</sup>

### 5c) Covenant Marriage, Covenant Community

Because the triune God is family, the church lives out the Trinitarian covenant community as family, and offers the gift of family to a lost and hurting world. The doctrine of the Trinity gives us fresh insight into our distinctness and interdependence in church, family, and marriage. Wilson holds that one sign, perhaps the sign, of the Trinitarian redemption of creation is the Church.<sup>303</sup> Through ascension and Pentecost, we the Church become a life-giving liturgy of covenantal action and response, emerging in the heart of the Father, unfolding in the life of the Son, and brought to fruition in the power of the Spirit. As we abide in the covenant agape / hesed of the Son and are pruned by our Father, we will not be cut off but rather bear marital fruit that will last.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: the Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Christian Focus Publications, Ross-shire, Scotland, 2004), p. 14-15; S.A. Burrell, "The Covenant Idea as a Revolutionary Symbol: Scotland, 1596-1637," *Church History* 29, 1958, p. 338-350.

<sup>302</sup> *The Mystery of Salvation: the Doctrine Report of the Church of England*, p. 75, p. 189.

<sup>303</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 140.

<sup>304</sup> Horner, *People and Place*, p. 30, p. 31; Horner, p. 37.; John 15:17.

At the heart of the biblical idea of marriage is the covenant. The strength of the covenant becomes the strength of the marriage. Marital covenant love is rooted in the Trinitarian love of the Father, Son and Spirit before the creation of the world. We love because the Triune God first loved us. Strengthening marriages, particularly through Family of origin work, involves the impartation of covenantal narratives and values.<sup>305</sup> At the heart of covenant love is right relationship.

Marriage as a differentiated unity is meant to reflect the loving differentiated unity between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Marital differentiation is rooted in developing and defining a secure self, validated in Christ. Being validated in Christ reduces an overfocus on the spousal validation. Differentiated in Christ is about being centered in Christ and his covenantal differentiation. The Trinitarian perichoresis is a dynamic dance of particularity and relatedness without absorption.<sup>306</sup>

Similarly the marriage covenant rooted in the imago dei is about unity without absorption. Covenant love not only accepts our unique marital and family differences but actually celebrates them as strengths. Our differences are meant to be signs of God's gracious presence and the beauty of holiness. The God-given beauty of our spouse disappears when we force them to become us. Many of our spouses are afraid to embrace their beauty because we have not honoured their diverse participation in the covenant blessing of God's redeemed creation.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Paddy Ducklow, Doctoral Thesis, *Coaching Church Leaders in Conflict: resolving strategies using family systems theory* (Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, December 2002), p. 13.

<sup>306</sup> J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 97; Horton, *People and Place*, p. 28; Horton, *The God of Promise*, p. 15.

<sup>307</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 41, p. 43, p. 106-107.

The central task of God's covenant family is to be a reconciled and reconciling community grounded in God's new creation. Through the outpouring of the Spirit of Adoption, we become brothers and sisters grafted into God's family and inserted into the covenantal history and eschatology of our glorified head, Jesus. Newness is at the heart of God's new family: new worth, new parity, and new belonging. The Church as God's new covenant family is called to share in the renewal and recreation of marriage and family. The many theological images of Church, including the Body of Christ, integrate well with the systemic, corporate nature of family systems theory. No one is meant to live in isolation. We all need the household of faith for the sanctification and strengthening of marriage, family, and singleness. As Horton comments, only by indwelling this covenant community faithfully can this unity of faith and praxis be formed.<sup>308</sup>

In honouring our family's histories without needing to change or manipulate them, we are honouring God.<sup>309</sup> Spiritual formation in marriage, family and church is about the competence to love. Through faith, prayer, and the Holy Spirit, Bowen theory equips us to grow in our marriages and relationships, thereby reducing emotional cutoff.

Family and marriage are both covenantal in nature, based on the covenant partnership that God has with Israel and Christ with the Church. The rabbis regarded the Jewish marriage service as reflecting the main features of God's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. God's covenants with Israel were often described as marriage covenants. Everything that God has done, is doing, and will do

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<sup>308</sup> Horton, *People and Place*, p. 21; Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 26, 86, 146; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 147; Horton, *Covenant and Community*, p. 260.

<sup>309</sup> Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 67.

through our biblical heritage comes out of his covenants. Our Judeo-Christian heritage and traditions are deeply covenantal.<sup>310</sup> This is why recovery of the biblical concept of marriage as covenant is so vital in reducing emotional cutoff and strengthening marriages.

#### 5d) Love and Commitment in Covenant Marriage

Jesus' relational understanding of the Shema integrated the love of God with the love of neighbour and self in a way that is foundational for all healthy families and marriages. Unselfish love is not an instinctive rejection of self but rather a thoughtful differentiated "being on the side of the other doing well." While marriage is more than love, it involves the mutual recognition, choice, and commitment of two people in covenant partnership. Commitment, says Stevens, is a big word today, but covenant is a bigger word.<sup>311</sup> A theology of marriage consists of the relating of marriage to God, or of God to marriage, as he himself instructs us through the biblical texts. Because God invented and ordained marriage, it is wisdom to study the bible, the covenant treaty, for God's understanding of the marriage covenant. There are great theological riches in the Book of Common Prayer marriage liturgy which speaks of the marriage covenant as "an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency". The Anglican Prayer Book also speaks about the performing and keeping of the vow and

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<sup>310</sup> Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p. 203; John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Intervarsity Press, Leicester, UK, 1979), p. 226; James J. Jr. Ponzetti and Barbara Horkoff Mutch, "Marriage as covenant: Tradition as a guide to marriage education in the pastoral context." (*Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 54(3), Jan, 2006), p. 224.

<sup>311</sup> Randall T. Frost, "Thinking Systems in Pastoral Training," *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 194; Stevens, *Married for Good*, p. 47.

covenant made by the couple.<sup>312</sup> One of the unintended consequences of the Protestant reformation can be a rationalistic deconstruction of the sacramental covenant of marriage. As an Anglican presbyter, there was pleasure with the late Stanley Grenz's case for a sacramental understanding of the covenantal ordinances as community acts.<sup>313</sup>

In the marriage covenant, the sexual unity of male and female is integrated into total humanity. Marvin Wilson, author of *Our Father Abraham*, says that the essence of marriage --the content, the bond, and the relationship which results -- is covenant. Covenantal boundaries bring greater sexual freedom, vulnerability, and security. Marriage for both Jews and Christians is rooted theologically in the covenantal cleaving and leaving of the first marriage in Genesis 2. By quoting Genesis 2: 24 in Matthew 19:5, Jesus reaffirms that marriage is intrinsically covenantal. Covenant is not embellishment, but essence. The purpose of the marriage covenant, says Stevens, is to belong, to bless and to be blessed.<sup>314</sup>

Christian spirituality is inherently covenantal, directional, and teleologically full of hope. Zechariah 9:11 eschatologically states that because of the blood of the covenant, we prisoners of hope are freed from the waterless pits. Marital despair can seem like a waterless pit. God's covenant faithfulness gives us unshakable hope in God's future. Bailey said that without the assurance of

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<sup>312</sup> Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 207, p. 209; *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Book Centre, Toronto, 1962), p. 564; *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 567.

<sup>313</sup> Stanley Grenz, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts," *Baptist Sacramentalism*, edited by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Paternoster Press, Carlisle, UK, 2003), p.76, p.91.

<sup>314</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989), p. 203; Peter and Judy Davids, "Healing the Bleeding Wound"; Stevens, *Married for Good*, p. 24.

covenant, there can be no hope at all.<sup>315</sup> As Proverbs 23:8 and 24:14 remind us, there is surely a future hope for us and our hope will not be cut off. The covenant is the fundamental order of God's relation to creation. Covenant is stronger than all the forces of emotional cutoff.

The marriage covenant, said Karl Barth, is "a parable and sign of the link which Yahweh has established between Himself and His people."<sup>316</sup> Barth's focus was on the covenant of grace as all-pervasive in the Bible. He rejected the Federal concept of the covenant of works as a legalistic corruption of Calvin's teaching. Barth taught that Jesus Christ alone is the content of the eternal will of God, the eternal covenant between God and humanity. For Barth, creation itself is the external basis of the covenant while covenant is the internal basis of creation.<sup>317</sup>

Covenant theology is about God's unilateral action in which God calls forth a response from people and nations. God's covenantal action on the cross was above all unilateral. Covenant is expressed by the 'and' in the phrases 'God *and* people', or 'man *and* woman'. Covenant contrasts with the concept of contract which is mutual, bilateral and no longer binding if broken. Historically three general types of marital contracts have existed over the centuries: the family contract, the religious contract and the companionate contract.<sup>318</sup> Marriage is both a social contract and a covenant

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<sup>315</sup> Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 116.; Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 39; Denis Baly, *God and History in the Old Testament* (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, NY, 1976), p. 187.

<sup>316</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, p. 315.

<sup>317</sup> James Cassidy, "Francis Turretin and Barthianism: The Covenant of Works in Historical Perspective", *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Vol. 5 (Confessional Presbyterian Press, Dallas, Texas, 1999), p. 204; Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 53–54; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3/1, p. 97; Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*, p. 115.

<sup>318</sup> Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 61.

partnership. To reduce one of the most fundamental building blocks of society to a mere contract is to decrease its covenantal implications. As Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby put it,

A law that changes marriage from being about covenant to being about contract is a weakening of the glue that holds society together.<sup>319</sup>

Carl Zimmerman said that for trustee families, marriage is a sacred covenant; for domestic societies, marriage is a contract; and for atomistic households, it is a convenient means of companionship. In the atomistic household, individual rights and pleasures trump family bonds. When the atomistic household becomes normative, marital and family responsibilities are seen as a burden and impediment. Zimmerman points out that only societies based on the trustee family have been able to rise to the level of civilizations.<sup>320</sup>

God as covenant maker remains faithful to his covenant even when we are not faithful. Marital cutoff is a breaking of covenant, breaking of faith.<sup>321</sup> Malachi vividly comments:

Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?...It is the Lord who is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her, even though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his...So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 41, p. 47, p. 90; The Christian Institute, UK, <http://bit.ly/YGdLQo>, accessed March 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

<sup>320</sup> Hahn, *First Comes Love*, p. 22-23.

<sup>321</sup> Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, p. 27.

<sup>322</sup> Malachi 2:10, 14-15, New International Version, Zondervan, 1985; Ed: sometimes cutoff is tragically necessary to protect a spouse from violence and abuse. This is reflected in Malachi 2:16 where God not only says that he hates divorce but also hates violence.

At the heart of the concept of covenant is unconditional commitment. James Olthuis taught that marriage is troth, as in 'I pledge you / give thee my troth'. The expression troth, as in betrothal, is an Old English term for truth, faithfulness, loyalty and honesty. Truth, said Horner, is a covenantal and therefore an ethical word. The Anglican Prayer Book uses troth to define the core of the marriage service, what we usually call the wedding vows. At the heart of marriage troth is our pledge 'to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part...' The Anglican Prayer Book richly says: "Then shall they give their troth to each other in the manner '...and thereto I give thee my troth.'" Many contemporary marriage liturgies now use the phrase "vow" as an equivalent of troth. Both terms are acceptable covenantal concepts. Our commitment to covenant faithfulness is a commitment to troth. Stevens redefined marital satisfaction as covenant satisfaction rooted which comes from the fruits of covenant making: increased faithfulness, character development, troth, comfort in the relationship and love. Stevens delightfully defines the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 as covenant fruit.<sup>323</sup> Bearing such fruit is the work of the redemption of creation for the new creation telos. Peleg's research shows the marital satisfaction increases over time with husbands, yet decreases over time with wives. One hopes that consistent covenantal fruit by husbands might bring a satisfaction shift for wives.<sup>324</sup>

The Hebrew word "hesed" and the Greek term "agape" are about covenant faithfulness. Hesed, the superglue of the marital covenant, means that loyalty is true love and vice versa. In Ethan's

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<sup>323</sup> James H Olthuis, *I Pledge You My Troth*, (Harper & Row Publishers Inc, San Francisco, CA, 1975), p. 21; Olthuis, p. 22; "The Marriage Vows Section," *Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Book Centre, Toronto, Ontario, 1962), p. 566; Stevens, *Married for Good*, p. 19.

<sup>324</sup> Peleg, "The relation between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction", p. 388; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 249.



covenantal Psalm 89, God says that he will maintain his love / hesed to David and his lineage forever, and God's covenant / berit with David will never fail. Hesed and berit are woven together through Hebrew poetic parallelism into one core concept of God's unending covenant solidarity. As Horton put it, hesed belongs to the covenant.<sup>325</sup> In the foundational 'new covenant' chapter, Jeremiah 31:3 reminds us that our covenant-making God loves his covenant-breaking children with an everlasting hesed / agape. Even with God's unconditional covenant love, he desires that there would eventually be reciprocity and mutuality. Any attempts to minimize our fallenness and self-centeredness, even as God's new creation, distorts the gracious gift of covenant.

Covenant partnership, as an expression of structural commitment, is strong and persevering when facing setbacks, selfishness, and disappointments. Stevens calls the marriage covenant a net between two trapeze artists. A marital eschatology of hope gives couples the Spirit-filled strength to finish well as they covenantally commit not only to the present moment but more importantly to the unknown future, for better for worse. To disregard the structure of covenant is to lose the significance of commitment and fidelity, the surrender of one's own will to the cause of the other.<sup>326</sup> Covenant love is a key protection against marital despair and abandonment. Safety, grounded in covenant love, facilitates marital intimacy. At the heart of the covenant promise is the intention to commit to the health of the marriage till death do us part. A marital promise-land is rooted in covenant promise. Adultery and dishonesty are shattering to covenant trust, a trust grounded in the forsaking of all others. Marital infidelity is a form of covenantal cutoff that may reflect transgenerational patterns.

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<sup>325</sup> Stevens, *Married for Good*, p. 72; Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 259.; Horner, *Lord and Servant*, p. 124.

<sup>326</sup> Stevens, *Married for Good*, p. 20; Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 50, p. 89.

Horton says that desertion happens in the heart as an ethical / covenantal form of presence and absence. Covenantal absence and conflict avoidance brings estrangement. Marital cutoff is a state of covenant-breaking estrangement. Through the redemption of the shalom of creation in Jesus Christ, we face our marital conflicts and bridge cutoff:

In telling (the story of God in Christ), we may bear witness...to the redemption of the peace of creation in Jesus Christ and offer an account of the longings of those who are now working for 'restorative justice', 'conflict resolution', and peace.<sup>327</sup>

Covenant renewal is where eschatological strangers meet, whether Christ as stranger or our spouse as stranger.<sup>328</sup> I find it fascinating that at the etymological heart of the marital terms estranged and estrangement is the term 'strange', derived from the Latin term 'extraneous' or outsider. May Christ the covenantal stranger, the outsider, break into the strangeness of our marital alienations, bridging emotional cutoff.

Marital covenant commitment is more than just institutional or merely personal. Covenant love sacrificially embraces the institutional, personal and relational aspects of marital commitment without collapsing into institutional legalism and personal hedonism. Fidelity to a covenant partnership brings co-existence in which the "particularity of the other becomes an irrevocable source of one's own destiny."<sup>329</sup> Through balancing marital particularity and relationality, unselfishness replaces selfishness and lack of self. Covenant love asks what are in the best interests of one's spouse, relationship, and community.

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<sup>327</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 28.

<sup>328</sup> Kerr, *Handbook of Family Therapy*, p. 250; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 12; Titelman, *The Therapist's Own Family*, Benswanger, "Strategies to Explore Cut-offs", p. 191.

<sup>329</sup> J.O. and J.K Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 42; Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 89, p. 91.

Covenant renewal is at the heart of marriage renewal. Because covenant is the basis of family, order precedes and overcomes disorder.

Covenant love is not that which condemns us to our past, but rather moves us towards our teleological future. As Horton shows us, there is no contradiction between covenant theology and eschatological theology, as God's future breaks into our salvation history. Marriage is both covenant pilgrimage and eschatological adventure, moving hand in hand with our sometimes strange spouse towards our often strange Kingdom future.<sup>330</sup> The genuinely other can be genuinely strange. Covenant love is about being chosen in our uniqueness rather than out of any sense of equalized sameness. Most of us are far more homeostatically attracted to sameness than we would readily admit. Celebrating strangeness and covenantal otherness is key to differentiated marital intimacy and reduced cutoff.

Marriage is a covenant of grace, rooted in the conviction that God's grace is enough in our weaknesses. Covenant is grace by its very nature. John Calvin taught extensively on the covenant of grace, teaching that as faith precedes repentance in the *ordo salutis*, Grace precedes Law in the history of redemption. He held that the Old Testament is based on grace, and that the Law was given subsequently for the fostering of obedience. Seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Williams Ames saw the unconditional covenant of grace as perhaps the single most important biblical teaching.<sup>331</sup>

Grace and covenantal love are inseparable. The greater the self-awareness, the greater will be the appreciation and need for God's redeeming and forgiving grace in our marriages. We grow most

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<sup>330</sup> Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 4, p. 21.

<sup>331</sup> R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism To 1649* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1979), p. 27; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (The Labryinth Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1629, 1968), p. 54.

when we realize that we will never outgrow our marital need for God's grace. Covenantal renewal in marriage is not about anxiously trying harder and striving in the flesh / old nature but rather faithfully receiving the gift of grace. The covenant of grace is meant to move us from unforgiving self-centeredness to forgiveness-rooted other-centeredness. Gracious forgiveness is at the core of covenant marriage renewal.

#### 5e) The Covenantal Marriage in Ephesians 5

Both Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 express the Apostle Paul's profound covenantal theology of marriage. The biblical concepts of headship and submission can only be understood in light of the mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21. Thomas Neufeld and Frank Thielman observed that *huppotassomenoi* is simply the last in a chain of participles that elaborate what it means to be *plerousthe en pneumatic* (filled with the Spirit). Mutual submission is nothing less than charismatic, Spirit-filled activity.<sup>332</sup> Paul is showing men a Spirit-filled way to be Christ-like to their wife in a way that is not intended to be harsh or enslaving.<sup>333</sup> How often have we quenched, resisted, grieved, vexed and even lied to the Holy Spirit as we refuse to practice mutual marital surrender? Letting go and letting God is meant for the maritally challenged as well as the chemically challenged.

Mutual submission cannot be done in the flesh, in our own human effort like a foolish Galatian. It needs to be done charismatically and covenantally in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both Ephesians

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<sup>332</sup> Neufeld, *Ephesians: Believers Bible*, p. 243, p. 255; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010), p. 365.

<sup>333</sup> Peter Williamson, *Ephesians* (Baker Academics, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009), p. 174.

5:19-20 and Colossians 3:16 root marriage in Spirit-filled song. Every marriage needs a heart song, a radical unshakable dream. Marital emotional cutoff is often connected to broken dreams and visions. When our spouse cannot trust a word that we say, emotional cutoff is just around the corner. Marital covenant-keeping requires that our yes be a yes. Hence the emphasis in Ephesians 4:22-25 and Colossians 3 vs. 9 is on rejecting lying through our covenantally putting off the old self and putting on the new self, and being renewed in the imago dei. As Wilson put it,

the character of the old self, captive to the lies of the world, must be shed, and we must put on a new self formed by the telos of the Kingdom.<sup>334</sup>

In our society, the terms ‘headship’ and ‘submission’ are often instantly misunderstood and dismissed. Stott said that “almost nothing is calculated to arouse more angry protests than talk of ‘subjection.’”<sup>335</sup> Williamson admitted that “these verses are the hardest to understand in the Letter to the Ephesians and cause many people to cringe.” A homeostatic and reactive defensiveness around these two concepts does not help bring marital transformation. To flippantly dismiss these concepts is to unintentionally weaken our commitment to the final authority of Holy Scripture. We cannot just wish that the Bible had omitted these embarrassing terms. Rather we must live in the dynamic tension and awkwardness of these important and often confusing insights. While the Bible is always reliably true, the challenge is to hermeneutically understand its contextual meaning. Avoiding conflict by emotionally cutting off from this challenging passage only makes matters worse. Nothing, said Neufeld, is to be

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<sup>334</sup> Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 220; Wilson, *God’s Good Creation*, p. 206.

<sup>335</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 215; Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 158.

gained by obscuring the evident difficulties of the text.<sup>336</sup> In the Strengthening Marriage Workshop, it was commented:

Have you ever seen other couples do that where they allow themselves to be a doormat to their spouse? In a lot of societies, that is fairly normal; it is all that they know. In patriarchal societies, the woman is often the doormat and in matriarchal societies, sometimes the man is the doormat. Sometimes it flips back and forth in a marriage where we are either the dominant person or give up self.

Most people nowadays would agree conceptually to the concept of mutual submission. It seems so kind and even Canadian. F.F. Bruce insightfully said that it is easier to pay lip-service to the duty of mutual submission than to practice it:

When Peter enjoins this same attitude (of mutual submission), he does so in words which recall Christ's own example in girding Himself with a towel to perform a lowly service for His disciples: 'Yea, all of you gird / clothe yourselves with humility, to serve one another'. (1 Peter 5:5)<sup>337</sup>

Through mutual submission, the dividing wall of gender hostility becomes torn down. In a world enslaved by selfishly taking and keeping, marital discipleship is about mutually submitting through radically giving and receiving. Wilson noted that it is hard to live a faithful life of Christian discipleship – giving and receiving – in a world enslaved by taking and keeping. Marital discipleship, as the way of the cross, is the redemptive way of creation calling forth new creation.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians: Believers Bible Commentary* (Herald Press, Scottsdale PA, 2002), p. 257.

<sup>337</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Pickering & Inglis Ltd, London, UK, 1961), p. 113.

<sup>338</sup> Ponzetti and Mutch, "Marriage as covenant: Tradition as a guide to marriage education in the pastoral context.", p. 220; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 110, p. 172.

Mutual submission is a way of putting on Christ and living out our baptismal covenant in which there is differentiated unity, neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:22-29). Mutual submission bridges emotional cutoff as it affirms that in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). We rejoice as Spirit-filled marital partners in the new covenant mutuality that as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.

Ephesians 5:21 is the lynchpin for understanding how we live out covenantal relationships. As Balswick said, the call for specific subordination of one group to another is indissolubly tied to the mutual order proclaimed in 5:21. It is providential that vs. 22 lacks a verb, because otherwise I could imagine someone arguing that the verb for submission in vs. 22 has a totally different meaning in the Greek than the verb for submission in vs. 21. Stott said:

...there is no verb at all in verse 22, because the call for submission is intended to be carried over into it. So verse 21 is in fact a transition verse, forming a bridge between two sections...<sup>339</sup>

Many scholars have observed that both the Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 passages are making use of the Haustafel/household genre. What many people miss is that while Paul employed this genre, he redefined it. The Ephesians 5:21 call to mutual submission gives context and new identity to the ancient household code genre that Paul is using. As Barth put it,

The unique message of Ephesians is silenced when the dominant position of vs. 21 over the Haustafel (table of household duties) and the peculiarly startling content of this verse is neglected.

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<sup>339</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 215.

David Garland observed that in contrast to the commands to children and slaves, Paul does not tell wives to obey their husbands. It is notable, said Stott, that the word *exousia* (authority) was not used once in the passage. The word *hupotassomenoi* is in the middle voice and can imply a voluntary submission:

It makes the wife's submission her willing choice, not some universal law that ordains masculine dominance.<sup>340</sup>

It is interesting how we are often instinctively drawn in the Ephesians 5 passage towards how we should be treated better by our spouse. Yet the energy of the passage is in the opposite direction. It is about going the second mile for one's spouse. Covenant and sacrifice go together, particularly in marriage. The wider passage of Ephesians 5:21-32 is about sacrificing oneself through the power of the Holy Spirit for one's wife:

These verses are not to be understood in a hierarchical sense in which the husband lords it over his wife, but rather in sacrificing oneself for his wife.

New covenant people, as new creations in Christ, are in the process of being liberated from the gender-based distorted relations in Genesis 3. As John Stott put it, the new creation in Christ frees us from the distortions of relations between the sexes caused by the fall.<sup>341</sup> The new creation brings renewed covenantal possibilities and new options for bridging generational cutoff.

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<sup>340</sup> Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: Anchor Bible* (DoubleDay & Company Inc, Garden City, New York, 1974), p. 606, p. 607; David E. Garland, *Colossians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998), p. 244; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 219.

<sup>341</sup> J.O. and J.K. Balswick, *A Model for Marriage*, p. 67; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 221.



Marital headship is spoken about in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11, but not in Colossians 3. Rather than make a case for kephale as meaning 'the source of a river', headship is best understood in light of the incarnational Christ in Philippians Chapter 2:1-11.<sup>342</sup> Marital headship is about making oneself nothing and taking the very nature of a servant even to the foot of the cross, what Family Systems Theory calls 'making yourself small'. The covenantal indicative of the cross leads to the covenantal imperative of Christlikeness, imitating his obedient life and death.<sup>343</sup> The more self-differentiated we are, the more we are willing to make ourselves small in our marriages. Authentic marital repentance requires that we make ourselves small, admitting that we were wrong and practicing marital restitution. Could marital headship in part be about reducing our marital over-functioning which causes our wives to underfunction and emotionally cutoff? Could marital headship be about choosing to be the self-differentiated catalyst that chooses to remain non-anxiously present to our wife even in times of potential marital sabotage?

Because the bible, while paradoxical, does not ultimately contradict itself, marital headship categorically cannot be about lording one's authority [*katexousiazousin*] over another; Rather marital headship must be about our willingness to become the *doulos* servant / slave of all. Jesus taught in Mark 10:45 that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Marital headship is a call to Christlike covenant servanthood, to differentiating enough to wash one another's feet like Christ did in John 13. Imagine what the full extent of Jesus' love (John 13:1) might do to strengthen our marriages and bridge cutoff. Marital headship can only be understood as Christlikeness, as imitating Christ, as agape sacrificial love for one's wife, by giving up oneself for her as

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<sup>342</sup> Neufeld, *Ephesians*, p. 267; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 216; Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 376.

<sup>343</sup> Friedman, *Bowen Theory and Therapy*, 1991, Chapter 5, p. 154 quoting Bowen; Horton, *Lord and Servant*, p. 253.

Christ did for his bride. The covenantal image of the bridegroom and bride in Ephesians 5 is meant to be a profound expression of liberating love, not coercive domination:

What stands out in Paul's development of the theme is the steadfastness of the heavenly Bridegroom's covenant love for his bride.<sup>344</sup>

Without clear content and application, love becomes a meaningless word, used to manipulate one's partner. So often in marriage, we talk a good talk, but live our lives as marital hypocrites. The term *agape* used in Ephesians 5 is a strong clear word for love. As Stott said, the Stoics also taught their husbands to love, but only with a *phileo* brotherly love. Agape marital love is rooted first and foremost in the cross of Christ. Marriage, said Martin Lloyd Jones, is more about the doctrine of the atonement than about ethics. Barth taught that by benefiting and drawing from the fact, mode, intention and achievement of Christ's love, a husband shall learn what is the essence of love.

Harold Hoehner, author of the *Ephesians Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, noted:

...this exhortation to husbands to love their wives is unique. It is not found in the Old Testament, rabbinic literature, or in the household codes of the Greco-Roman era.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 227; Stott, p. 226.

<sup>345</sup> Stott, *The Meaning of Ephesians*, p. 226; Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 623; Martin Lloyd Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 148; Harold W Hoehner, Tyndale, Carol Stream, Ill, 2008, p. 115.

It is hard for us to comprehend how counter-cultural Paul's message would have been to Greco-Roman husbands who were used to looking to mistresses and concubines for their erotic desires:

...the typical Hellenistic view is represented by Pseudo-Demosthenes (fourth century BC): 'We have wives to bear us children, concubines for the daily care of our persons, mistresses we keep for the sake of our pleasure.'<sup>346</sup>

Paul challenged husbands four times in Ephesians 5 to love their wives. In contrast, Paul never asked the wives to love their husbands, perhaps because that is generally already their strong suit. The wife's love for her husband often seems to be the last thing that dies in a marriage. Instead he encouraged the wives in vs. 33 to respect their husbands, one of the more challenging and vital callings for wives in their marriage covenant. Respecting one's husband's core self, rather than the pseudo-self of the dating scene, is at the heart of lasting intimacy. The same Greek term employed for respect in the mutual submission verse in Ephesians 5:21 is again used in wrapping up this section:

It is true that 'respects' translates *phobetai*, meaning literally 'fears', but this verb 'may express the emotion of fear in all its modifications and all its degrees from simple respect through reverence up to adoration, according to its object.'<sup>347</sup>

Thielman noted how the rhetorical force and number of words encouraging husbands to love their wives outweighs the delicately phrased and brief admonition to the wife: "Paul places the burden of

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<sup>346</sup> Peter Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 162, quoting A. Murray, transl., *Private Orations III*, Loeb Classical Library (Boston: Harvard, 1939), p. 445-46, (Against Neaera 122.)

<sup>347</sup> Stott, *The Meaning of Ephesians*, p. 231 (Hodge, p. 353.)

this section on the husband.”<sup>348</sup> It is misleading and reactive to casually dismiss Ephesians 5 as a misogynist diatribe.

Neufeld, Moule, and Bruce saw baptismal covenantal allusions in the Ephesians 5:26-27 section of ‘cleansing her by the water of the word’. Moule called this “assuredly referred to”, while Bruce said that it “can scarcely be anything other than baptism.” Hoehner and others disagreed, suggesting instead that this is referring to a prenuptial bridal bath preparing for her husband. I wonder if one has to choose between these two options, given that Christian baptism is often seen as rooted in the Jewish mikvah cleansing baths, related to Temple ceremonies and Gentiles being admitted into Judaism. Stott said:

Perhaps there is a deliberate allusion to the bridal bath...The ‘washing of water’ is an unambiguous reference to baptism (cf. Acts 22:16) while the additional reference to ‘the word’ indicates that baptism is no magical or mechanical ceremony...<sup>349</sup>

Perhaps our baptismal covenant can be analogized to a prenuptial teleological bath preparing for the coming marriage supper of the Bridegroom:

Let us be rejoice and be glad, and give him glory! for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear ...prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband...Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 21:9)

If so, husbands are living out the implications of their baptismal covenant as they daily wash their wife with the water of God’s Word, making her radiant, without stain, wrinkle or any other

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<sup>348</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 371, p. 392.

<sup>349</sup> Neufeld, *Ephesians*, p. 262; Handley Moule, *Ephesians Studies* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, UK, 1902), p. 292; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 116; Harold W Hoehner, *Ephesians: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Tyndale, Carol Stream, Ill, 2008), p. 116; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 227.

blemish. The mutuality of both our baptismal and marriage covenants calls husbands to share in making our wives holy and blameless, whole and self-differentiated. All of one's wife's wrinkles are a husband's personal ministry to remove, just as with Christ removing his Bride's many wrinkles. Bruce insightfully commented:

The Church as it is seen in our actual experience at the present time falls far short of this ideal; spots and wrinkles are abundantly in evidence.<sup>350</sup>

Does verse 29 involve an allusion to how Christ feeds and cares for his bride through the Eucharistic covenant, the Paschal Lord's supper in which Jesus said: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.'? As an Anglican presbyter, I value how Christ weekly cherishes and feeds married, divorced, widowed, separated, and single people through Word and sacrament. The Church of England "Mystery of Salvation" Doctrine report said:

At the last supper, Jesus makes clear that the death, which he is about to die, initiates a new covenant between God and his people.

We as his bride are signed and sealed by grace through faith in the baptismal covenant and renewed by the Spirit in the Eucharistic covenant. Grudem commented:

In the new covenant, the sign of beginning a new covenant relationship is baptism, while the sign of continuing in that relationship is participation in the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>350</sup> *New International Version* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984); Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 117.

In the Eucharist, we receive the life and gift of Christ's redeemed creation. The Holy Spirit makes visible the conjunction of Christology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology in the Eucharistic banquet. The Church, says Horner, is what it eats. The Lord's Supper, the liturgy of the new covenant, is sacramental food for a hungry bride. Might a well-fed bride, lovingly washed by her bridegroom, be less likely to cut off from her marriage? Hahn poignantly said:

This covenant is made in Christ's death and resurrection and by his command is to be remembered and renewed in the sacramental-liturgical action of the Eucharist.<sup>351</sup>

Horner covenantally described the Lord's Supper, in light of 1 Corinthians 11:26 'until he comes', as a eucharistic tension mediated by the Spirit between this present age and the eschatological age to come. The Greek word *thalpei* translated here as 'care' or 'cherish' is only used elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 to describe a mother gently nursing her children. Williamson says that *thalpei* means to warm. Husbands need to grow as gentle-men in the gentleness of Jesus, warmly cherishing and nourishing their wives. This gentleness and meekness, says Wilson, is the disposition to restrain one's power so that it aligns with the redemption of creation for the new creation.<sup>352</sup> Falling far short of covenantal dreams for their marriage, husbands are too often left with sad regrets, broken dreams, and marital cutoff.

The marital theology of Ephesians 5, unlike Colossians 3, is explicitly rooted in the covenant marital theology of Genesis Chapter 2. Both Jesus (in Mark 10:7) and Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 in which

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<sup>351</sup> *The Mystery of Salvation, the Doctrine Report of the Church of England*, p. 106; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994), p. 520; Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 212; Horner, *People and Place*, p. 123; Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, p. 55.

<sup>352</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 229.

male / female monogamy is affirmed as God's created order and intention for marriage. Polygamy represents lower differentiation, higher amygdala-dominated fusion, and many more reactive triangles. While polygamy was common in the Old Testament, it was consistently linked with marital difficulty. Never in the New Testament was a husband called to lay his life down for his harem. The bride in Ephesians 5 is distinctly singular, as is Jesus' singular bride, the Church. Without Jesus and Paul's reaffirming the monogamous trajectory of Genesis 2:24, it is quite possible that as with Islam and early Mormonism, polygamy might have been widespread and even normative in Christianity. Wherever Christianity makes a significant cultural impact around the world, monogamy seems to become the cultural default. Even in the legal changes to Canadian marriages laws, the monogamy 'bias', whether heterosexual or homosexual, still seems to be holding for now.<sup>353</sup>

We on the North Shore of Vancouver and in North America have largely lost a sense of the covenantal mystery of what it means both to be married and to be Christ's bridal church. After speaking in vs. 31 about Genesis 2:24, Paul calls this 'a great or profound mystery'. The Vulgate translated the Greek term 'mysterion' as 'sacramentum' or sacrament. The Eastern Church still calls the sacraments 'mysteries'. John Chrysostom called marriage a mystical icon of the church, indeed as the church in miniature.<sup>354</sup> Many protestant commentators have rejected the concept of marriage as a sacrament, preferring to call it an 'ordinance'. The term ordinance seems somewhat sterile; the terms covenant, sacrament or even mystery seem preferable. Because the Anglican Church is both protestant and

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<sup>353</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 120.

<sup>354</sup> Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 173, ft. 29; Fr. John Chryssavgis, *Love, Marriage and Sexuality: Orthodox Theological Perspectives for a New Millennium* <http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/orthodoxy/society/love.htm>

catholic, its approach to this issue is complicated. In the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion #XXV, baptism and the Supper of the Lord (Eucharist) are described as the “two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel (Sacraments of the Gospel).” Both Gospel Sacraments are covenantal and relate to the new covenant in Jesus’ blood through his dying and rising (Luke 22:20). Article XXV describes marriage as one of “these five commonly called Sacraments...not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel...partly are stated of life allowed in the Scriptures....” In agreement with Article XXV, I see the covenant of marriage as a sacrament or sacramental, but not as a Gospel Sacrament. Either way it is, as Paul said, a great mystery.

Christ’s covenantal relation to his bride the Church is mysteriously paralleled to the husband’s covenantal relation to his bride. The ‘one flesh’ covenant relationship of husband and wife, for Paul, foreshadows and demonstrates the covenant relationship between Christ and the Church. Stott said:

When applied to Christ and his church, the ‘one flesh’ is identical with the ‘one new man’ of Ephesians 2:15.

Paul goes back and forth almost seamlessly in Ephesians 5 discussing both parallel covenants.<sup>355</sup> Jesus was clear in Mark 12:25 that our male / female marriage covenant is temporary for this life only, but the marriage covenant between Christ and his people is eternal. The first covenant is penultimate; the second ultimate. I see this as all the more reason to not take our marital disagreements too seriously and to value our earthly marriage in the short time that we have together as husband and wife.

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<sup>355</sup> Stott, *The Meaning of Ephesians*, p. 231; Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 389.



## 5f) The Covenant Marriage of Colossians 3

The wider Colossians context of the paraenetic marriage teaching is about living out one's baptismal covenant, both in terms of our dying and rising with Christ(2:11-15, 3:1-4), and putting off and on of 'baptismal' clothes (3:5-15). George Canon said that the Colossians 3 marriage teaching is part of a baptismal instruction for those being initiated:

The phrases 'put to death' (3:5), 'put off' (3:9), and 'put on' (3:10, 12) in a periscope clearly associated with baptism (2:12-3:4) points to the existence of a baptismal catechism.<sup>356</sup>

Luther said that we are to regard our baptism as our daily garment, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new. In our marriages, we are to convergently integrate our being and doing in our baptismal identity, becoming more fully who we are already in Christ. We need to incarnationally live into our baptismal and eucharistic identity in Christ. As Thomas Trevethan, author of *Our Joyful Confidence*, put it,

The basic motif of Paul's ethical teaching can be summed up in the phrase, 'Be what you are!' His transition from the indicative (You have died with Christ) to the imperative (Put to death therefore...) arises from the circumstances of believers.

The context of Paul's marital teaching in Colossians 3 is vs. 15's emphasis on the peace or shalom of Christ ruling in us since as members of one body we were called to peace. Horton holds that shalom,

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<sup>356</sup> David M. Hay, *Colossians* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 2000), p. 115; George E Canon, *The Use of Traditional Material in Colossians* (Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1983), p. 123; Martin Luther, *Lutheran Confession IV 83-84*.

including the presence of trust and communion, is the covenant goal. Such shalom is cross-shaped:

...Paul subverts what the empire calls peace by appealing to a piece achieved through a victim of the empire: allow that all-pervasive, cross-shaped peace to rule your life as a communal body.<sup>357</sup>

Marital peace is not about placating or pretending. In Colossians 3: 7, we are told: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of its Creator.” As Bowen said, we are to give up pretending. Marital shalom is not a dishonest avoidance of conflict but rather the covenantal living out of our telos / destiny through putting on the new self renewed in the image of its Creator. Our marital shalom is the telos of redeemed creation. Wilson said that shalom is more than just privatized peace of mind; it is the very shape of the life of creation. Despite appearances to the contrary, shalom is powerful, not weak, “a power...that rules in men, ...as a kingdom, in which the believer is protected.”<sup>358</sup>

A healthy covenantal anthropology is rooted in an eschatological understanding of our all being made in the image of God, of our all being precious in his sight, even our sometimes painful spouse:

Covenant and eschatology do not exhaust the meaning of the human (the imago dei) but significantly contextualize and orient it.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Thomas L. Trevethan, *Our Joyful Confidence: The Lordship of Jesus in Colossians* (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1981), p. 81; Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed* (IVP, Downers Press, Illinois, 2004), p. 176.

<sup>358</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good Creation: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013), p. 27, p. 121.

<sup>359</sup> Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, p. 133; Horner, *Lord and Servant*, p. 92; New International Version, (Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI), 1985.

The all-too common trauma of marital violence is acting contrary to the telos of a created identity and to our new creation identity in Christ. Violence has no permanent residence in creation.<sup>360</sup> Covenantal peace is about staying maritally present and engaged when our amygdala is telling us to fight, flight or freeze. This covenantal shalom, being rooted in Jesus' death and resurrection, is the theological centre of marriage. Hebrews 13:20 tells us that the God of peace through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus. Paul intentionally prefaces his marital Colossians teaching with a strong emphasis in vs. 15-17 on peace and thanksgiving, two qualities often absent from marital conflict and resulting cutoff. This eucharistic shalom is rooted in our covenantal dying and rising with Christ. Harrison noted that paralleling the peace of Christ is the word of Christ listed in Colossians 3:16.<sup>361</sup> This emphasis on God's Word expresses another strengthening feature of a Christ-like marriage.

In a very counter-cultural way, Paul says yes to marital self-giving love and no to male harshness in verse 19. Agape love is about footwashing rather than demanding one's rights. Much of the Greco-Roman world saw wives primarily as breeders rather than intimate companions. As the first / second century Greek physician Soranus put it, women are married for the sake of bearing children and heirs, and not for pleasure and enjoyment.<sup>362</sup>

The 'bitterness' verb *pikranesthai* occurs in a relational context only here in the New Testament, though it is common in Greek literature since Plato. James Dunn, author of *Epistles to Colossians and Philemon*, stated that to be *pikros* is a characteristic regularly attributed to a tyrannical overlordship.

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<sup>360</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Creation*, p. 27 ft 27.

<sup>361</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Colossians: Christ All-Sufficient* (Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1971), p. 91.

<sup>362</sup> Soranus, *Gynecology 1:34:1* (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1956.)

Harshness and bitterness are antithetical to covenantal love. Garland observes that sulking, fuming, grumbling or worse, lashing out in verbal violence is strictly forbidden. To say no to bitterness is to say yes to marital love. As NT Wright said, the husband must scrupulously avoid the temptation to resent his wife for being the person she is rather than the projection of his hopes or fantasies. Eduard Lohse said:

the admonition 'do not be embittered' is an exemplification of the commandment of love which determines Christian conduct.<sup>363</sup>

The 'in the Lord' phrase of Colossians 3 vs. 18, and alluded to in vs. 13, vs. 20, vs. 22-24, defines covenantal relationships christocentrically. Our covenantal reason for being and doing is Christ. Harris said:

...in all four cases where the motivation is explicitly stated, it is Christological, for the Lord (Kurios) is invariably the point of reference.

Our marital mutuality is rooted in Christ who is both the Lord of the covenant and its servant.

Lordship brings covenant mutuality. Trevethan commented:

Because all roles are played out under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to please him, mutuality is established in all relationships."

Our equal personhood and dignity in marriage is found in our Christ-centered identity as adopted children made in God's image. Every marital life choice becomes measured by the incarnational Christ.

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<sup>363</sup> James G Dunn, *Epistles to Colossians and Philemon* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), p. 249; Garland, *Colossians*, p. 245; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 158; NT Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Intervarsity Press, Leicester, UK, 1986), p.138.

As Lohse put it,

The phrase 'in the Lord' however...is not a mere formal element whose only function is to Christianize the traditional [Haustafel / Household Duties] material. Rather the entire life, thought and conduct of believers is subordinated to the lordship of the Kyrios. At the same time the words 'in the Lord' set forth a critical principle which makes possible to determine which ethical admonitions were considered binding for the community.<sup>364</sup>

#### 5g) Covenantal Differentiation in Marriage

The more differentiated a spouse is, the healthier and holier will be the covenantal marriage. Covenantal differentiation strengthens marriages and bridges cutoff. Richardson suggests that becoming a more differentiated self might be included in our concept of sanctification. In self-differentiation, we echo Martin Luther's morphogenic statement 'Here I stand'.<sup>365</sup> Prior to his death in 1990, Bowen was working on his ninth concept he called 'spirituality'.<sup>366</sup> He called it 'The Supernatural.' He did not continue his work, he said, because of the intense emotional reactivity of the profession to it. Gilbert wonders if he left that developmental work for others of this and future generations.<sup>367</sup>

Covenantal differentiation helps us discover the divine image in others. Nichols comments that throughout the twentieth century, psychotherapists tried to keep religion out of the counseling session.

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<sup>364</sup> Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 156.

<sup>365</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthy Church*, p.182; Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 67; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 13; Howe, "Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective," p. 355; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts*, p. 40.

<sup>366</sup> Ducklow, *Doctoral Thesis*, p. 232.

<sup>367</sup> Gilbert, *Eight Concepts*, p. 118.

As a result, they never asked people about meaning and spirituality.<sup>368</sup> Some of a family's most powerful organizing beliefs have to do with how they find meaning in their lives and their ideas about a higher power. The clearer our life principles, the more we can live out our Christian faith in a differentiated way. The responsible self is the faithful self, full of faith and alignment with one's core values.<sup>369</sup> By patterning our lives after Jesus as Bowen recommended for Christians, we are modeling our lives on that of a very highly self-differentiated individual. To call Jesus highly self-differentiated expresses the fullness of his humanity, but does not sum up the fullness of his Christology, including his Lordship and full divinity. Christ-centeredness and Christ-likeness is at the heart of the Christian covenant of marriage. Jesus Christ the covenant-making Lord is the exemplar of wisdom. Bowen himself said that Christians should pattern their lives after that of Jesus.<sup>370</sup> The way of marital wisdom involves the ability to think for oneself, rather than anxiously collapse into reactive groupthink. Covenantal differentiation is expressed when we choose to be in or for the world, but not of the world. Christ-centered differentiation involves fearless rejection of idolatry, especially relational idolatry.<sup>371</sup>

Marriages become strengthened and emotional cutoff is reduced in the midst of covenantal differentiation. Differentiated people become incarnationally integrated, bringing together theological,

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<sup>368</sup> Nichols, *Family Therapy Concepts and Methods*, p. 316; Howe, "Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective," p. 349.

<sup>369</sup> Frost, "Thinking Systems in Pastoral Training," *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, Bregman and White, p. 192-93.

<sup>370</sup> Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church*, p. 8; Richardson, *Couples in Conflict*, p. 235; Gilbert, *The Cornerstone Concept*, p. 51, p. 103, ft 10 quoting his daughter Joanne Bowen."

<sup>371</sup> Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, p. 16, p. 67 "Paul spoke about being in the world but not of it. This could be a way of speaking about differentiation in the emotional system of our family."

biblical and family systems wisdom. Creation and redemption come together in Jesus' incarnation:

The incarnation conceals the work of God in the visibility and embodiment of a human; it also reveals the work of God in creation and redemption.<sup>372</sup>

Christ's incarnation is the supreme covenantal act of God's grace to humanity, the basis of forgiveness and love. Spiritual formation in marriage is not meant to be imposed externally but rather embodied or incarnated contextually in our cultural setting. We are called as pastoral coaches to be covenantal bridges who are ready in the spirit of 1 Peter 3:15 to give an answer when people ask, doing it with gentleness and respect. Family Systems theory epitomizes the gentleness and respect that may lead to people choosing to ask us about the hope within.

A strong motivator for doing the Doctorate Thesis Project on Strengthening Marriages was a time of renewal on the North Shore of Vancouver in 1996 where we met six nights a week for three months. During that time, I saw the restoration of many marriages that were over. Through a powerful encounter with the incarnational Christ, many people self-differentiated from their emotional fusion to their spouses, and worked instead on their own personal issues. Again and again I saw marital cutoff bridged in apparently hopeless situations. One former North Shore couple, both of whom are lawyers, sends me a basket of fruit every Christmas as a way of their expressing gratitude for the marriage strengthening they received during that season of renewal. The restoration of North Shore marriages and bridging cutoff has become a strong calling for our St. Simon's congregation.

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<sup>372</sup> Wilson, *God's Good World*, p. 51, p. 181.

## 5h) Covenant-breaking, Marital Cutoff, and Remarriage

While we have broken or violated every covenant that God has fashioned, Christ's covenant-keeping in his sacrificial life and death atones for our covenant-breaking. Marital cutoff is a condition of covenant-breaking estrangement, a breaking of faith. Jesus as the second Adam, being completely human and completely divine, was completely able to fulfill both sides of the Divine / human covenant. Our covenant-breaking brings emotional cutoff while Christ's sacrificial covenant-making bridges cutoff.

Marital cutoff and divorce are rooted in multigenerational covenant-breaking. Divorce is one of the indications of transmissible multigenerational marital anxiety.<sup>373</sup> It seems to me that divorce is either covenant-breaking or a way of acknowledging that covenant-breaking and marital cutoff has occurred. The "cut off" concept is used 123 times in the Bible. People were cut off in the Old Covenant for eating blood, making unauthorized perfume, eating yeast during Passover, breaking the Sabbath, sacrificing their children to Moloch, and consulting mediums.<sup>374</sup> Paul cared so deeply for his own covenant people that he wished in Romans 9:3 that he himself might be cut off, if it would bring their covenantal restoration.

Cutoff is a convergent, integrative concept used in both the Bible and in Family Systems Theory. In the Strengthening Marriage Workshop, all five remarried couples had experienced the pain of cutoff. Every marital genogram produced in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop (and since) has shown that marital cutoff may look like an isolated act but is in fact an expression of generational transmission.

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<sup>373</sup> Titelman, *Clinical Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, Phil Klever, "Marital Fusion and Differentiation", p. 121.

<sup>374</sup> Exodus 12:15; Exodus 30:33; Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 7:27; Leviticus 20:6; Leviticus 20:13.



Everything is interconnected. No one is an island. This is why in divorce and remarriage, people may be set up for further emotional cutoff resulting in marital instability. In a Strengthening Marriage Workshop post-interview, John Jones said: “The only times I can ever remember my mother’s emotional pain was when her dad died and when my parents got divorced.”<sup>375</sup> A deeper understanding and practical application of Bowen Theory and of Covenantal Theology is key to bridging marital cutoff and strengthening the marital covenant. Bowen Theory and Covenantal Theology are both powerful on their own, but when they are combined, there is additional synergy for strengthening marriages. Bowen’s concept of Emotional cutoff is deeply rooted in the Bible in prototype form. Benswanger, a Bowen Therapist, notes:

The prototypes of all cut-offs are portrayed in the Old Testament. The murder of Abel by his brother, Cain, Abraham’s banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, and the estrangement between Jacob and Esau exemplify the most fundamental human responses to perceived wrong-doing, stolen legacy, or conflict of values.<sup>376</sup>

Benswanger holds that every marital cutoff is a reaction to the conviction by one spouse that someone “killed their god”, be it defined as material possessions, level of care-giving, or respect for a key person, value or belief. In that sense, marital cutoff is an expression of idolatry and the destruction of one’s golden calf. Marital cutoff polarizes right and wrong, good and evil, black and white, pressuring family and friends to reactively triangle, choose sides, blame, and treat the other spouse as an IP-<sup>377</sup> The other spouse often becomes identified as the covenant-breaker and the killer of their god. When

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<sup>375</sup> Appendix ix: Analysis of the Interviews with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop Couples.

<sup>376</sup> Titelman, *The Therapist’s Own Family*, Benswanger, “Strategies to Explore Cut-offs”, p. 192.

<sup>377</sup> Titelman, *The Therapist’s Own Family*, Benswanger, “Strategies to Explore Cut-offs”, p. 193.

we can stop blaming our spouse for killing our gods and our dreams, then we are in the best position to renew the marital covenant.

Perhaps the best thing that could happen to our marriage is to have our false gods killed off. Marital disillusionment cuts off our pseudo-self illusions so that God's Kingdom future might be seen. In both a Bowenian and biblical sense, we so often have eyes but do not see, and ears but do not hear. Marriage strengthening is about seeing, for the first time, the previously invisible marriage covenant, the previously invisible family emotional system. The biblical marriage covenant itself is a family emotional system and a marital triangle that includes God himself. This is why at a wedding, one never just marries dyadically. Marriage is with the whole emotional family and with the Lord Jesus Christ our bridegroom. Even in a civil wedding, God is still present, because it is God who joins people together in marriage. To welcome Jesus into one's marriage is to acknowledge the third member of the marriage who was there all along. We were never meant to be just two people in a solitary marriage. Isolated, dyadic marriage is unhealthy and unbiblical, leading to much covenant breaking and marital cutoff.

Jesus' major teaching about marriage is ironically and fittingly in the setting of a discussion about divorce. Apart from turning up at the Cana wedding, Jesus' primary marital teaching is that he is the bridegroom, and that marriage will be abolished in the age to come (Luke 5:35, 20:35). For some spouses, they are very sad to hear about the abolition of marriage. Others are relieved. It does mean that no one in the future age will be divorced. Even divorce is temporary and will not hang over people's heads for eternity. Sometimes as Christians, we have pedestalized marriage into an idol that shuts the single and divorced out of God's Kingdom.

The two major rabbinic schools, those of Hillel and Shammai, attempted to triangle Jesus into their conflict about the permissible grounds of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The more conservative

House of Shammai held that a man may only divorce his wife for a serious transgression, but the more liberal House of Hillel permitted divorce for even small transgressions, such as the wife burning the dinner. Rabbi Akiba even said that a man may divorce his wife if he finds another woman more beautiful than her.<sup>378</sup> Rather than argue about Deuteronomy 24, Jesus compassionately liberated women from hard-hearted, easy divorce by turning to the original marriage covenant rooted in Genesis 1:27 (male and female) and 2:24 (one flesh). In Matthew 19:8, Jesus said “But it was not this way from the beginning”, thereby indicating that divorce was not God’s original creation intent for marriage. God’s intent, as included in our covenantal wedding vows, is till death do us part. Moses only permitted this breaking of the marriage covenant because of our hardness of heart.

Jesus’ comment about our hardness of heart reminds me of Stephen the first martyr’s similar comment. Stephen dared to self-differentiate and confront his accusers in Acts 7:51 about their uncircumcised hearts and ears, and their stiff necks. Who wants to be told that we always resist the Holy Spirit just like our fathers did multigenerationally? The Bible teaches in Genesis 17:14 that without the cutting of circumcision either physically as in the Old Covenant or spiritually as in the New Covenant, we are cut off. Without spiritually circumcised hearts, our covenantal marriages will be cut off. Too often we stonewall our spouse because our covenant-breaking has given us hearts of stone. How deeply we need Jesus’ new covenant-making for our marriages, so that his covenant faithfulness will be written on hearts of flesh. How much we need an undivided heart and a new spirit for our marriages and lives as promised in Ezekiel 11:19. How greatly we need Jesus to be the covenant Lord of our marriage and for us

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<sup>378</sup> *Babylonian Talmud* (Talmud Bavli), tractate Gittin, 90a. [http://www.come-and-hear.com/gittin/gittin\\_90.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/gittin/gittin_90.html)

to be his covenant people, washed in his covenant blood, fed at his covenant table, and sharing in his covenant promises.

In Matthew 19:6 (and Matthew 5:32), Jesus said that if anyone divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, he commits adultery. The parallel passages in Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 do not include the Matthean unfaithfulness exception. Because the term used for marital unfaithfulness is *porneia* rather than the more usual term *moicheia*, there has been an extensive scholarly debate about its actual meaning. Some have suggested that the term only refers to pre-marital infidelity as Mary was accused of during her pregnancy. Others suggest that the term refers to incest.

Charles H. Talbert, author of the Matthew Baker Academic commentary, commented:

The word translated "unfaithfulness" (*porneia*) cannot be incest (as Witherington, 2006, 362, claims) because in that case there would be no need for a divorce certificate. The marriage would have been considered invalid from the start (Lev. 18:18).<sup>379</sup>

The incest or pre-marital infidelity arguments are lacking. Within the framework of marriage, *porneia* has normally meant adultery, meaning sexual activity outside of marriage by a married person. The Greek Septuagint uses the term *porneia* in a very general way referring to a wide range of sexual misconduct. In the book of Hosea, the Septuagint uses the term *porneia* seven times to describe Gomer's adultery (1:2; 2:6; 4:11, 12; 5:4; 6:10.)<sup>380</sup> Spurgeon holds that the word is synonymous with "infidelity to the marriage vow," mainly adultery. He comments that one "who commits adultery does by that act and deed in

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<sup>379</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew Commentary* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2010), p. 233

<sup>380</sup> Joseph Jensen, "Does *porneia* mean fornication: a critique of Bruce Malina," *Novum testamentum* 20, no. 3 (July 1978): 172; Craig L. Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: an Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," *Trinity Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 176.

effect sunder the marriage bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the state as being sundered."<sup>381</sup> In 1 Cor. 10:8, Paul speaks about 24,000 slain for involvement in *porneia*. Given norms of Jewish culture, it is likely that most of the 24,000 slain would have been married, giving a clear indication that *porneia* includes adultery. In Acts 15: 20, 15:29 and 21:25, the forbidding of sexual immorality (*porneias*) for Gentile believers is another example of the term being used in its more generic wider sense. Paul in 1 Cor. 6:13 and 6:18 is clearly using the term *porneia* to include marital adultery, rather than only premarital sex. I have never heard anyone argue that only premarital sex is forbidden for Gentile believers but adultery is kosher.<sup>382</sup>

Some, including the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, have claimed that while divorce is permissible, remarriage is forbidden:

If any one shall say that the Church errors when she has taught, and now teaches, that according to the doctrine of the Gospels and of the Apostles the bond of Matrimony cannot be dissolved owing to the adultery of one of the partners, and that neither party, not even the innocent party who has not by committing adultery given any ground (for separation), is free to contract another marriage during the lifetime of the other partner, and that he who after putting away his adulterous wife marries another, commits adultery, or the wife who after putting away an adulterous husband marries another, let him be anathema.<sup>383</sup>

David Turner holds that freedom to remarry is the essence of divorce. Otherwise it is meaningless. This would agree with the actual Jewish divorce bill which contained the clause "You are

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<sup>381</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The King Has Come* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987), p. 59.

<sup>382</sup> D.A. Carson: "Porneia covers the entire range of such sins [sexual immorality]... and should not be restricted unless the context requires it." The Louw-Nida lexicon defines *porneia* as "to engage in sexual immorality of any kind."

<sup>383</sup> *Trent, Sess. xxiv, De Sacramento Matrimonii*, Can. vii.

free to marry again."<sup>384</sup> To permit divorce while forbidding remarriage is to tie a heavy yoke upon another that we ourselves are usually unwilling to carry. We Christians have crushed many weaker brothers and sisters with our harsh, legalistic interpretations of the bible, particularly in the area of marriage and divorce.

John Howard Yoder and Peter Davids claim that divorce is a legal myth, and that a marriage can never be ended. Second marriages therefore are polygamous. While they are right that "the two will never be as they were before marriage", I disagree that divorce and emotional cutoff are an impossibility.<sup>385</sup> Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." not "Therefore what God has joined together, it is impossible to separate (i.e. divorce)." Divorce is a tragic reality, similar to a death that does not leave people the same as they were before marriage. Widows and widowers remarrying are not being polygamous; neither are second marriages after divorce. As David Atkinson said:

If marriage is understood in covenant terms, the dissolution of a marriage (though always outside God's will for marriage, and therefore sinful) is not thereby impossible. Covenants, although intended and entered into as committed and permanent undertakings, can be broken.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> David L. Turner, *Cornerstone Commentary: Matthew*, (Tyndale Publishing, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2005), p. 249; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (T&T Clark International, New York, N.Y., 2004), p. 315.

<sup>385</sup> Peter and Judy Davids, "Healing the Bleeding Wound", p. 4.

<sup>386</sup> David Atkinson, *To Have and to Hold: The Marriage Covenant and the Discipline of Divorce* (HarperCollins Publishers, London, U.K., 1979), p. 135.

David's makes a good case that divorce and remarriage are clearly permissible when the believing spouse is deserted by the unbelieving spouse:

When Paul says in 1 Cor. 7:15 that the believing spouse is "not bound" in such a circumstance, we take it to mean that the believer is not bound to the marriage vow. Otherwise Paul would not have talked of being bound and he would not have used the terms for divorce in this passage (since divorce means freedom from the marriage vow and thus the ability to remarry)... Thus both his change of language and his use of the "not bound" terminology lead us to believe that he is allowing divorce in its full meaning (i.e. including remarriage) in this situation.

While God hates divorce, he does not hate divorced people. God does hate violence, particularly in marriage (Malachi 2:36). It is hateful to force women to stay in a violent and abusive marriage. On the North Shore, Christian women have been criticized for fleeing to a women's safe house when their life was in danger. Divorce, while tragic and not God's creation intention, is not the unforgivable sin. Many divorced people have been treated in some churches as the IP- covenant breakers, cut off from remarriage, from serving in leadership, and from even receiving communion.

In our desire to prevent divorce, we in the Church have often idolatrously over-focused on marriage. It seems not a coincidence that the largest North American alternative religion, Mormonism, offers eternal marriage ceremonies. This perfectly fits our North American pedestalizing of marriage. Marriage is meant to be a penultimate, not the ultimate. While marriage is an analogy to Christ's relationship to the Church, we are to seek first God's Kingdom, not seek first marriage. Projecting our unresolved attachment anxiety onto the covenant of marriage helps no one. Anxiously over-focusing on either marriage, family or children produces lower functioning, lower differentiation, more cutoff, and more divorce. Overfunctioning and rescuing others is a generational curse, not a covenantal blessing. We are to strengthen and not to take self from others. What if we chose to take marriage off the Church pedestal and refocused on washing one another's feet? What if we chose to practice a

calm non-anxious presence with married people, single, separated and divorced people, thereby being a catalyst for healthy lasting relational morphogenesis? What if we stopped blaming and started embracing without fusing? De-pedestalizing marriage is one of the best ways to strengthen marriages and bridge emotional cutoff.

## **6) CONCLUSION**

Something real happened with these five couples that participated in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop. The research question was “In what ways might a four-session Strengthening Marriage workshop strengthen participants' marriages?”

Something happened in their commitment to each other, in their commitment to the future of their marriage, and in their new tools to help them navigate future marital issues. Through the pre-interviews and post-interviews, the couples’ responses changed after taking the Strengthening Marriage workshop. The research results have given a substantial foundation that other people can build on in strengthening marriages.

A limitation of the research was in the size of the sample. Only five couples participated, given the focused criteria that they needed to be currently married while previously divorced, separated or widowed. This criteria was decided thoughtfully, in conjunction with the doctoral advisor, in light of the high value of research with remarried couples who had experience marital cutoff.

One can envision a longer-term study of a larger number of divorced and remarried couples, some of whom were randomly trained in Family Systems Theory and some who were not. Over a five-



year basis, a researcher could track these couples, analyzing marital strength and functioning. As a blind, the researcher would not be informed as to which couples had the Family Systems Theory training.

The data obtained from the post-interviews with the five couples show a number of ways that the marriages were strengthened by participating in the Marriage workshop. The largest number of participants (43%) indicated that the workshop strengthened their marriage through ‘fresh thoughts’.<sup>387</sup> This ties in well with the Family Systems Theory emphasis on activating clear original thinking as a way of strengthening marriages. One participant commented about the workshop: “It felt really good, extremely good, that they were going to something that was bringing fresh-air vents into their lives.”

The second largest number of participants indicated that the workshop strengthened their marriage through conflict management.<sup>388</sup> This connects with the Family Systems Theory teaching that marriages are strengthened as we thoughtfully embrace our conflicts rather than avoid them. In the post-interview, John Jones said the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was when one or both stepped outside the pattern the times of their normal response, causing them to differentiate from their common patterns: “That kind of breaks that cycle.” Bev Buchanan spoke in her post-interview about

self-awareness which will help with our life of conflict, and being there in the moment of what is occurring for you. (I also learned about) the differentiation between the phases of upset and being more aware of those. That was new. Another thing that I learned was about doing our own introspective work.

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<sup>387</sup> Question 7b Post-interview (44%) “How has the workshop strengthened your marriage?”

<sup>388</sup> Question 7b Post-interview (19%).

Other research data indicated the benefits of learning about key Family Systems Theory concepts such as Family of Origin and differentiation. John Jones in his post-interview valued and named self-evaluation and differentiation as key learnings.

In contrast with the pre-interview focus on compatibility<sup>389</sup>, the post-interview couples identified by common goals<sup>390</sup> and appreciation<sup>391</sup> as key marital strengths. These tie in with the Family Systems Theory emphasis taught in the workshop on strengthening marriages through vision, values and common goals, as well as by honouring strengths and differences. Julie Jones in her post-interview said that she and her husband John have a similar outlook on life, they are both heading in the same direction, they mostly parent the same way, and they have the same kind of goals. By contrast, compatibility by itself may reflect rigid marital homeostasis.

In contrast with the pre-interview emphasis on separation<sup>392</sup>, conflict<sup>393</sup> and change in career / family / location<sup>394</sup>, the couples in the post-interviews named times of crisis<sup>395</sup> and decision<sup>396</sup> as their most important turning points / times of changes. This corresponds with the Family Systems Theory

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<sup>389</sup> Question 2 Pre-interview (30.3%) “What would you see as your marriage’s strengths?”

<sup>390</sup> Question 2 Post-interview (27%) “What would you see as your marriage’s strengths?”

<sup>391</sup> Question 2 Post-interview (32%).

<sup>392</sup> Question 3 Pre-interview (33%) “What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?”

<sup>393</sup> Question 3 Pre-interview (27%).

<sup>394</sup> Question 3 Pre-interview (27%).

<sup>395</sup> Question 3 Post-interview (50%) “What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?”

<sup>396</sup> Question 3 Post-interview (25%).

emphasis taught in the workshop on strengthening marriages through facing conflictual crises and by making self-differentiated action-based choices. Sean Sutherland identified turning points as related to death of family members. Other turning points involved adapting to crisis situations by turning it on its ear and basically saying “Ah, that’s okay.” Sean and Susan Sutherland’s decision to get married was a very important turning point: “one of the biggest things that I have ever done in my life, and everything has kind of followed from there.”

While the pre-interviews emphasized survival<sup>397</sup> and resolution<sup>398</sup>, the post-interviews highlighted self-awareness<sup>399</sup>, scientist<sup>400</sup>, and differentiation<sup>401</sup> as ways to grow with marital conflict and change. Cumulatively these three categories represent 52% of the respondents. In the post-interview, Julie Jones spoke of dealing with conflict by “thinking like a scientist, becoming detached, realizing their own reactions.” Openness to change was also seen as significant.<sup>402</sup> This corresponds with the Family Systems Theory emphasis taught in the workshop on strengthening marriages through increasing objective differentiated awareness and through openness to change rather than survival-focused homeostasis. In the post-interview, Lloyd Lindsay said that the most important turning points / times of

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<sup>397</sup> Question 4 Pre-interview (38%) “How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years? What are ways to grow in that area?”

<sup>398</sup> Question 4 Pre-interview (38%).

<sup>399</sup> Question 4 Post-interview (29%) “How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years? What are ways to grow in that area?”

<sup>400</sup> Question 4 Post-interview (13%).

<sup>401</sup> Question 4 Post-interview (10%).

<sup>402</sup> Question 4 Post-interview (19%).

change were getting married again to each other after being divorced: “that was a real big shift. I think that was the biggest one of all. And from there, it was a lot different. That was a big change.”

In contrast to the pre-interview emphasis on distance<sup>403</sup> and being emotional<sup>404</sup>, the post-interviews identified anger<sup>405</sup> and avoidance<sup>406</sup> as their family’s pattern of dealing with emotional pain. Cumulatively anger and avoidance represent a dominant 57.8% response. In the post-interview, Richard Reid said that his family’s pattern of dealing with emotional pain was outward stability in a long-term marriage, but inwardly much anger from the father and desperation from the mother. The third strongest response was violence.<sup>407</sup> Living in a hard-driving, workaholic / alcoholic family, “I (Richard) used to get whipped to blackout, to blackout by my father with a belt buckle, the whole bit. He would come home and I used to hide under my bed. I was about eight to ten years old. He would grab me from under the bed and drag me out to the woodshed. He’d whip me, whip me, whip me, sometimes to blackout.” From a Family Systems Theory perspective, the post-interview responses about their family of origin’s pattern indicated significant intergenerational levels of emotional fusion, unresolved emotional attachment, and undifferentiation. A weakness in Question 5a was that it was not clear to all whether I was referring to their nuclear family or their family of origin. This was verbally clarified during the interviews that the question was primarily referring to their family of origin. In using this questionnaire in the future, I would recommend that this question be sharpened to clarify the family of origin issue.

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<sup>403</sup> Question 5a Pre-interview (47%) “What is your family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain?”

<sup>404</sup> Question 5a Pre-interview (35.2%).

<sup>405</sup> Question 5a Post-interview (31.4%) “What is your family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain?”

<sup>406</sup> Question 5a Post-interview (26.4%).

<sup>407</sup> Question 5a Post-interview (16.2%).

While the pre-interviews emphasized best avoiding maritally cutting off emotionally through staying engaged<sup>408</sup> and perseverance<sup>409</sup>, the post-interviews focused on the concepts of differentiation<sup>410</sup> and scientist<sup>411</sup>, bringing a cumulative 43% response. This connects with the Family Systems Theory emphasis taught in the workshop on reducing marital emotional cutoff through increasing scientifically objective differentiation. As to how Burt Buchanan best avoided cutting off in their marriage, he said: “That’s when you have to be a scientist like we talked about in class.”

In contrast to the pre-interview emphasis on future hope<sup>412</sup>, the post-interviews named learning<sup>413</sup> and spirituality<sup>414</sup> as what excited them most about their marital future. In the post-interview, Julie said that what excites her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that

the more they are getting to know each other, the more they are growing and the more they are doing self-work, the better they are learning, the better they are meshing together and the better it is with their family.

Intimacy, making time, and managing conflict were all tied at 14%. Some Family Systems Theory leaders suggest that greater spirituality comes through making time to learn about ourselves and through learning to increase intimacy by healthy conflict. Some of the pre-interview ‘future hope’ emphasis

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<sup>408</sup> Question 5b Pre-interview (56%) “How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?”

<sup>409</sup> Question 5b Pre-interview (33%).

<sup>410</sup> Question 5b Post-interview (33%) “How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?”

<sup>411</sup> Question 5b Post-interview (10%).

<sup>412</sup> Question 6 Pre-interview (38.9%) “What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?”

<sup>413</sup> Question 6 Post-interview (24%) “What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?”

<sup>414</sup> Question 6 Post-interview (19%).

seemed to be connected into seeing the Strengthening Marriage workshop as an Identified Person+ or even a quick fix.

The couples in the Marriage Workshop clearly indicated in their post-interviews that their marriages were strengthened by their workshop learnings. There was stated workshop growth in the area of self-differentiation, marital learning, and facing conflict. This indicates that such Strengthening Marriage Workshops have significant potential to reduce emotional cutoff, strengthening not only first marriages but also second marriages. Strengthening Marriage Workshops can help stabilize marriages, increase marital satisfaction and aid in thoughtful marital decision-making.

Marriage ministry is inherent to the life of the Church through marriage preparation, conducting weddings, and strengthening existing marriages. Clergy and churches have pioneered in the area of pre-marriage preparation. We as God's Church have a rich heritage of marital ministry that we can learn more about and more deeply integrate into our way of being. All clergy serving in congregations have opportunity to provide pastoral care for people going through marital challenges. Family Systems Theory gives pastors the tools to not make things worse, but rather to aid the couple in their building a renewed marriage. Strengthening marriages is not just the responsibility of ordained clergy. To view the church systemically is to realize that the entire church family can play a part in strengthening marriages and bridging cutoff. Strengthening marriages is key to living out our call to be a Church where the cutoff are restored and the wounded are healed.

The hope is to use the Strengthening Marriage manual and transcripts in strengthening marriages on the North Shore and beyond in training other people to use these materials. While the North Shore is the unique context in which the research was conducted, the findings are applicable to other settings in Canada, North America and around the world. Both church-attenders and non-attenders found this

material applicable and helpful in their marriages. Those who would benefit from using the Strengthening Marriage manual and workshop would include those preparing for a first-time marriage, those who have been previously divorced, separated or widowed, and those who wish to strengthen their existing marriage.

If these marital tools and concepts were made accessible to more marriages, the same things that happened to these five couples could be replicated in the lives of thousands of marriages. If we keep doing maritally what we have always been doing through our family of origin patterns, we will not see the needed breakthroughs in marital stability and satisfaction. Holding to our old homeostatic marital paradigms will merely continue the emotional cutoff and pain. Different marital results require different marital ideas and strategies for the twenty-first century. Through the strengthening of marriages, a new generation will receive hope that faith and God's covenant community make a genuine difference in their relationships.

In this age of accelerated marital cutoff, family and biblical wisdom are more needed than ever. Marriages, as expressions of God's covenant love, are indeed worth fighting for. In response to God's covenant faithfulness, we covenantally say "Here I am. Send me." We the Church are called as covenant servants of our Lord Jesus Christ to invest in strengthening the covenant of marriage on the North Shore and beyond.

Ephesians 5 shows us that strengthening marriages casts light on the relationship between Christ and his covenant community. In Christ-like mutual submission, we are called to covenantally love and respect each other. Colossians 3 teaches us the importance of not embittering our wives. God the covenant maker calls us in our marriages to covenant-keeping. Covenantal differentiation reduces cutoff

and strengthens marriages. God's yes in the covenantal sacrament of marriage is Yes and Amen, a clear divine Yes in a cutoff world.



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## APPENDICES

- i) Letter of informed consent
- ii) Newspaper advertisement for the workshop
- iii) Poster for the workshop
- iv) North Shore Outlook article on the workshop
- v) Emotional Cutoff Interview questions
- vi) Strengthening Marriage Manual
- vii) Interview with Randy Frost about Murray Bowen
- viii) Analysis of the Interviews with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop Couples
- ix) New Features in the Post-interview research data
- x) Glossary of Terms used in Family Systems Theory
- xi) Marital Statistics for the North Shore and for BC

### i) "INFORMED CONSENT"

#### "Strengthening Marriages: bridging emotional cutoff"

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your participation in the before-and-after interviews and the related 4-session "Strengthening Marriages: bridging emotional cutoff" workshop. This process is part of my Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project at Carey Theological College. The workshop will be held on Wednesday evenings 7pm to 9:30pm (May 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, May 30<sup>th</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup>). The location of the workshop is Cedarbook Village Clubhouse (555 West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, North Vancouver, just north off the #1 Westview exit)

Thank you.

Ed Hird [ed\\_hird@telus.net](mailto:ed_hird@telus.net)

604-929-5350

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to preserve your confidentiality. Participants involved in the interviews and workshop will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

Costs to Subject, and Compensation:

There are no costs to you or monetary compensation for your participation in the interviews and workshop.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in the interviews and workshop.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ii) **Newspaper Advertisement**

“North Shore couples who have been separated, divorced or widowed are invited to attend a complimentary 4-session “Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff” workshop on Wednesday Evenings May 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and June 6<sup>th</sup> from 7pm to 9:30pm at Cedarbrook Village Clubhouse (555 West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, North Vancouver, just north off the #1 Westview exit)\* To register, please phone 604-929-5350 or [ed\\_hird@telus.net](mailto:ed_hird@telus.net) \*map: <http://bit.ly/GDwGoR>

### iii) Strengthening Marriage Poster

<http://edhird.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/strengthening-marriage-workshop/>

Strengthening Marriage workshop: Bridging Emotional Cutoff



Strengthening Marriage:

- a complimentary workshop spread over four sessions with married couples who have been separated, divorced or widowed, and either live or have lived on the North Shore.

-This Strengthening Marriage Workshop is part of a Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project, supervised by Paddy Ducklow of Carey Theological College. The workshop will be held on Wednesday evenings 7pm to 9:30pm (May 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and June 6<sup>th</sup> ). The location of the workshop is Cedarbrook Village Clubhouse (555 West 28th Street, North Vancouver, just north off the #1 Westview exit). To register, contact Ed and Janice Hird at 604-929-5350 or [ed\\_hird@telus.net](mailto:ed_hird@telus.net) (NO CHARGE)



#### Course Overview for the four sessions

Session 1: Strengthening Your Marriage through rediscovering your mutual strengths

Session 2: Strengthening Your Marriage through Celebrating Your Differences

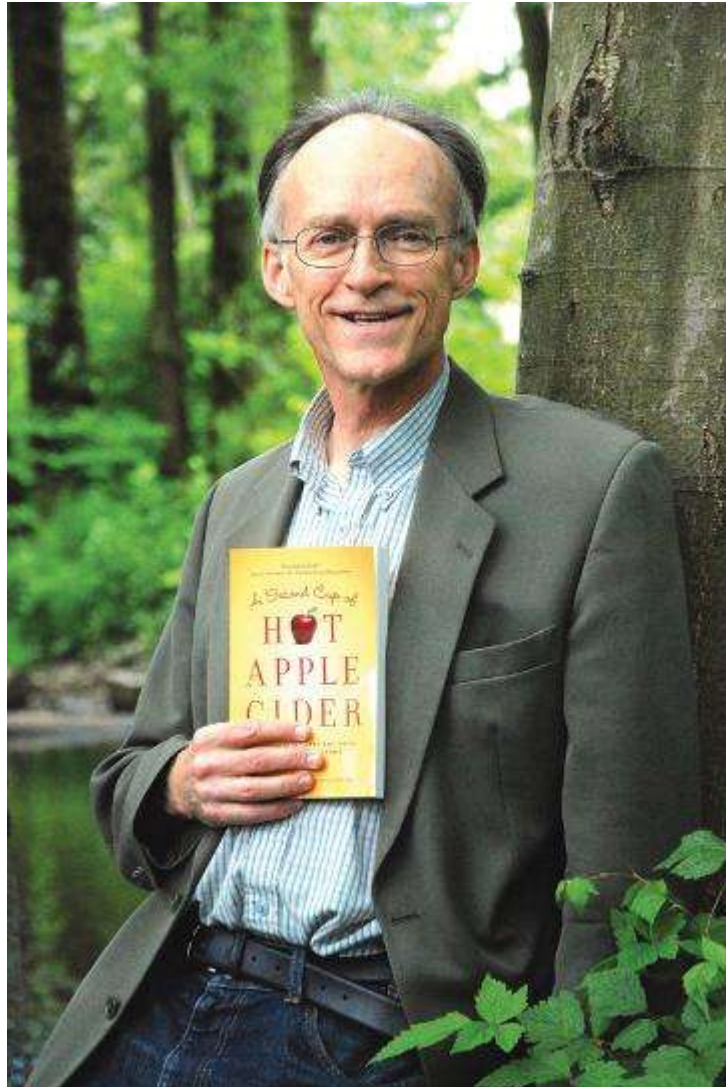
Session 3: Strengthening Your Marriage through working on your conflicts

Session 4: Strengthening Your Marriage through balancing closeness and personal space

iv) **North Shore Outlook Newspaper article on the Strengthening Marriage Workshop**

<http://www.northshoreoutlook.com/community/149841625.html>

**The North Shore's Relationship Reverend**



Rev. Ed Hird contributed an essay on relationships in the recent anthology, *A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider*.

By **Justin Beddall - North Shore Outlook**

Published: **May 02, 2012 9:00 AM**

Updated: **May 03, 2012 2:33 PM**

Rev. Ed Hird has stood at the altar to wed more than a hundred love-struck couples over the past three decades. For the bride and groom, it's a blissful, photo-album moment in time.

Statistically speaking, however, Rev. Hird knows many of the couples will end up losing that loving feeling: 37 per cent of B.C. marriages end in divorce, according to Statistics Canada's 2008 numbers.

And that's a trend the energetic, sneaker-wearing reverend hopes to reverse.

Later this month Rev. Hird and his wife Janice will be leading a four-session marriage workshop in North Vancouver.

"We're hoping it will be helpful to strengthen marriages," says Hird, who is doing the workshop as part of his doctor of ministry thesis project on marriage.

Marriages, he says take work. Lots of it.

"A lot of people put a lot more effort into their golf swing than their marriage. People have the myth that marriage is easy. Why should it be easier than any of the other important things we do?"

And while some naive newlyweds, especially grooms, think that once they've made it to the altar they're done, Rev. Hird cautions that that's actually just the beginning. He should know, he's been married for 35 years. "The marriage relationship is challenging but worth it. I would say to [newlyweds] don't believe the Hollywood myth that it's natural, it will just happen. There's a lot more to healthy relationships than good intentions."

And like golf or skiing — two of the reverend's favourite sports — marriage takes practice, patience and dedication. Especially if you end up in a bunker.

Even healthy marriages will have struggles, he says, which is why couples need to have the willingness to work on it.

Rev. Hird's marriage is no different. Fortunately he married "an amazing loving wife," who put up with certain personality traits — self-centered, insensitive, he admits — early on in their marriage, before he had a chance for some self improvement. "It's all about the relationship," he says.

His wife Janice says the marriage is "very good because he's willing to listen and change if he has to."

Just like Red Green, jokes Hird, referring to the Canadian comedy sitcom.

Through the years, the Hirds have learned to decode each other's love language. For instance, for Hird's wife, the language of love involves "acts of service" — something as seemingly unromantic as taking the time to make her a healthy lunch. "That makes her feel loved."

But Rev. Hird, on the other hand, prefers affirmations from his significant other — like, say, if she comments on the latest story he's written. "I'm a *words of affirmation* person."

Of course, in today's 24 / 7 wired world, it's harder than ever for couples to share quality time, even when on vacation. Hird says this is particularly true on the North Shore, which has a high concentration of successful professionals who don't have a lot of energy left for their marriages by the time they get home from work.

"How do you make time for each other?" says Rev. Hird. "[There's] tremendous pressure on couples these days."

But that doesn't mean your marriage needs to be a negative statistic.

"It can work with basically the willingness to actually work on the relationship."

The Hirds' free workshops are open to any couples who live or have lived on the North Shore and who have been divorced, separated or widowed. "Unless you get help, the divorce rate increases (in your second marriage)," explains Hird. "If you don't learn from your experience, you repeat it."

But his sessions aren't meant just for those who are encountering a thorny patch in their marriage.

"[The workshops can] make good marriages better. You don't have to be having challenges to find this helpful," says Rev. Hird, who is also a prolific author and blogger.

Rev. Hird says the sessions work to help couples rediscover mutual strengths, celebrate their differences, resolve conflict and find a balance between closeness and personal space.

“[We help the couples] rediscover their story. Every marriage has a story,” he says.

Rev. Hird is energized by “passion for helping marriages,” which he’s done a lot of at his church for the past 25 years. In one case, he remarried a couple who had been divorced for six years.

And while Rev. Hird enjoys performing marriage ceremonies, strengthening marriages seems to bring him just as much joy. “It’s worth it.”

To register for the [free marriage workshops](#) (May 16, 23, 30 and June 6, from 7-9:30 p.m.) contact the Hirds at 604-929-5350 or [ed\\_hird@telus.net](mailto:ed_hird@telus.net).

v) **Interview questions**

MESI (Marriage Emotional System Interview Protocol)

Pastor Ed Hird, St. Simon's North Vancouver

-the MESI Interview Protocol views marriages as emotional systems, as seen through the lense of Family Systems Theory. Designed as a strength-based exploration of marriages, the MESI Interview Protocol helps couples to better understand and to bridge emotional cutoff. Through focusing on attraction, turning points, handling conflict, emotional cutoff, family patterns, and possibilities for the future, a greater objectivity is enhanced regarding the identity and direction of the marriage emotional system.

Two goals: strengthening marriages; reducing emotional cutoff

Demographics

- Name:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Number of Years married:
- Number of times married:
- Number of people in your family:
- Church attender or non-church attender:
- How long do you anticipate living in this community (i.e. your area or surrounding areas)?
- Postal Code:



1. What attracted you to your spouse and what keeps your marriage alive?
2. What would you see as your marriage's strengths?
3. What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?
4. How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over the years? What are ways to grow in that area?
5. What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain? How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?
6. What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage's future?
7. (Only in the post-interview) How was the workshop for you? How has the workshop strengthened your marriage? How could the workshop be strengthened?

vi) **Manual for the Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff Workshop Contents**

**1. The Parameters of the Course**

- a) The focus of the course
- b) Those whom the course is for
- c) The organization of the evening sessions

**2. Preparing for the Course**

- a) Potential leadership
- b) Developing a workshop team
- c) Needed resources
- d) Spreading the word
- e) Course registration

**3. Course Overview for the four sessions**

Session 1: Strengthening Your Marriage through rediscovering your mutual strengths

Session 2: Strengthening Your Marriage through honouring differences

Session 3: Strengthening Your Marriage through appreciating conflict

Session 4: Strengthening Your Marriage through balancing closeness and personal space

**Appendices:**

-Letter of informed consent

-advertisement for the workshop

-Interview questions

## 1. The Parameters of the Course

### a) The focus of the course

The focus of the Strengthening Marriage workshop is to bring stronger marriages through rediscovering their strengths and helping couples to bridge emotional cutoff. Over four evening sessions, couples learn how to bring greater balance in their need for intimacy and personal space. They learn to celebrate differences as a way of growing closer together. Engaging marital conflict will become seen as an avenue to personal and marital growth.

The privacy of the couple will be protected. This is not a group encounter session where people will be expected to share private feelings to a group. The focus of the sharing will be between the couple themselves.

The Strengthening Marriage Workshop can be used in a larger group or in a home setting with a few other couples. It can also be done in four sessions spread over a weekend marriage retreat.

### b) Those whom the course is for

The Strengthening Marriage Workshop is suitable for any couple who want to strengthen their relationship. Couples involved will have different lengths of married life from newlyweds to long-term marriages. The primary intent is to help make good marriages stronger. The workshop is beneficial for couples who are facing challenges, as well those couples who have experienced separation, divorce or being widowed.

Couples considering marriage who are not yet married will find this workshop helpful in clarifying what kind of relationship they are looking for. The Strengthening Marriage Workshop is suitable for those either with or without a Christian or church background.

c) The organization of the evening sessions

The workshop takes place over four evenings, preferably on consecutive weeks. Couples are encouraged to reflect on what they have learned during the week, particularly with the given exercise.

Care needs to be taken to make the setting of the workshop safe and inviting. The warm welcoming of the couples by the leaders sets the tone for the evening. Some couples may be ambivalent about being there on the first evening. It would be helpful to have a registration table near the entrance with a list of the couples and name tags.

Refreshments, including coffee, tea, fruit and baked goods, are part of the welcoming atmosphere for the couples.

The setting may be in a wider circle of chairs or with people sitting around tables. It is helpful to have quiet music playing during the exercises done by the couples, so that the couples can hear each other, but not be easily heard by other couples.

The talk will be from 30 to 60 minutes, interspersed with opportunities for the husband and wife to talk with each other, sometimes using an exercise. These exercises will last between three to ten minutes.

It would be helpful to have a book table on Family Systems Theory material on relationships and marriage, such as those by Peter Steinke, Ron Richardson, and Roberta Gilbert.

## **2. Preparing for the Course**

### **a) Potential leadership**

The Strengthening Marriage Workshop is best led by a married couple who see the value on investing in strengthening marriages. It would be helpful for the couple to have previously taken this workshop or something similar dealing with marriage and family systems theory. It would also be useful for the lead couple to familiarize themselves with basic family systems theory represented by popular authors like Ron Richardson, Peter Steinke and Roberta Gilbert.

It is important that the lead couple demonstrate an ongoing commitment to growing in their own marriage and that there are not any current major unresolved issues between the couple that might affect the workshop. Rather than operating in isolation, it is vital that the lead couple be accountable to another mature couple. When done through a local church, it is important that there is support from the pastor and elders for this venture.

As this workshop is not a therapy session, the lead couple needs to know where to refer couples for professional counseling if issues arise beyond the scope of the workshop.

### **b) Developing a workshop team**

Depending on the size of the workshop, it can be valuable to recruit helpers who can assist with various aspects of the workshop. On subsequent workshops, previous guests may be invited to assist in one or more of the sessions. This allows couples who have had a positive

experience to give back to others in their marital journey, as well as being able to hear a previous talk for a second time.

Possible tasks may include:

- setting up the room
- welcoming guests as they arrive
- preparing and serving the coffee, tea and refreshments
- looking after the music
- sharing their story of growth with the workshop couples

It is advisable to meet with the workshop team in advance in order to discuss the four sessions and any potential concerns, to decide who will be speaking or sharing in the various sessions, and to ensure that the workshop team members are comfortable with the material and exercises. Couples could role-play what they might share in the sessions. Questions might include: 1) What strengths did you bring into the previous workshop? 2) How did those strengths become more important in your marriage? 3) In what ways are you better able to celebrate your differences as a married couple? 4) How has your need for intimacy and space become more balanced as a result to taking part in the workshop?

c) Needed resources

- The Strengthening Marriage Workshop Manual for the leaders
- Handout material for the couples

- Audiovisual materials such as *The War of the Roses* DVD (1989) in which a divorcing couple emotionally cut off while both staying in the house or *The Field* DVD (1990) in which the wife stopped talking to her husband after the death of the eldest son. These DVDs could be used to show a five-minute illustration of emotional cutoff.
- Sample books by Ron Richardson, Peter Steinke and Roberta Gilbert
- Music
- Overhead projector, if needed
- A stand for the speaker's notes

d) Spreading the word

It is important to emphasize the strength-based nature of the Strengthening Marriage workshop. Attending this workshop is because couples want to continue to grow, rather than because of their marriage being in crisis. This workshop offers an opportunity for married couples to go from good to great in their relating with each other. Through learning these key marriage principles, couples will find benefits in every area of their life, including their childrearing, community and business interactions. The message in promotion needs to be that the Strengthening Marriage workshop is for anyone who wants to build on the existing strengths in their marriage. There is a pervasive myth in our society that marriages should be inherently easy and never need work; therefore it is shameful to attend a marriage workshop. Married couples from all backgrounds, including those of different faith and non-faith, will find this workshop most practical.

It needs to be emphasized that couples will not be put on the spot and expected to share private information with other couples. Rather the emphasis is on one-to-one interaction with the married couple themselves. This will not be an encounter group or therapy session.

After the first workshop is concluded, future workshops could be promoted by brief sharing by a couple either in the church or community setting. Questions might include: 1) What motivated you to take the Strengthening Marriage workshop? 2) What lasting impact did the workshop have on your marriage?

It is helpful to develop a clear plan for recruiting others to the next Strengthening Marriage Workshop. Give yourselves up to two months to get the word out. A sample invitation can be given to friends. Information about an upcoming workshop can be spread through local churches, community groups, Recreation centres, schools, and local media.



Session #1

**Strengthening Your Marriage through rediscovering your mutual strengths**

- focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses empowers marital growth.
- focusing on strengths enhances our marital immune system and reduces our emotional reactivity.
- we have the power to build each other up rather than tear each other down.
- knowing our mutual strengths reduces the anxiety level of our marriage.
- clarity about our marital strengths brings greater clarity about our marital identity.
- focusing on strengths helps our marriages become more adventurous rather than regressively safe.
- couples can move into their preferred marital future by building on what already is working.
- do the following verbal exercise as a couple: a) I feel loved and appreciated when you.... b) I feel joyful when you...

## Session #2

### **Strengthening Your Marriage through Celebrating Your Differences**

- working on one's own self is the key to raising the level of differentiation in the marriage.
- objectivity about one's self and marriage increases marital satisfaction.
- Overcoming a loss of self brings energy and joy to one's marriage.
- increasing marital thinking strengthens our ability to celebrate our uniqueness.
- daring to be different, taking principled stands with clear goals strengthens marriage.
- the restoration of marital curiosity and imagination brings greater intimacy.
- clearer expectations come through re-engaging our family of origin.
- the high road to marital growth is through a deeper understanding of the family we were raised in.
- Saying no to the blame-game strengthens marriages.
- The use of genograms can help identify triangles that inhibit marital growth.
- a clarifying exercise: write down and then share with your spouse a) why you came to this workshop  
b) how you would dream of your marriage being in three years.
- exercise: draw an initial genogram of your mutual families of origin.

### Session #3

#### **Strengthening Your Marriage through working on your conflicts**

- Marital conflict is an opportunity for breakthrough into deeper intimacy and lasting change.
- Conflict avoidance leads to emotional cutoff.
- Facing our marital conflicts helps us become more mature and builds character.
- Learning to say no and to set healthy boundaries strengthens marital intimacy.
- Marital conflict is best resolved when we say no to quick fixes and take the long-term perspective.
- Conflict embracing in marriage happens most effectively when we give up blaming.

Exercise for the couple: What are some of the best ways to grow in handling conflict?

Note: This session would be an appropriate week to show a five-minute clip from *The War of the Roses* DVD to illustrate conflict and emotional cutoff in marriage.

## Session #4

### **Strengthening Your Marriage through balancing closeness and personal space**

- our need for closeness competes with our need for personal space.
- our varying desires for closeness and / or personal space usually reflect our family background.
- marital closeness is a choice rather than a pressurized obligation.
- By reducing our emotional fusion, we find greater gender equality with our spouse.
- the avoider can always outrun the pursuer in marriage.
- emotional cutoff only temporarily reduces and then actually increases marital anxiety.
- the overfunctioner can strengthen their marriage by reducing anxious striving, by turning down the emotional thermostat.
- a non-anxious presence is key to strengthening our marriage.
- playfulness helps us balance closeness and personal space in our marriage.
- Exercise for the couple: How does playfulness help you balance closeness and personal space in your marriage?

**Strengthening Marriage Workshop Appendices:**

- Letter of informed consent
- advertisement for the workshop
- Interview questions

“INFORMED CONSENT”

“Strengthening Marriages: bridging emotional cutoff”

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your participation in the before-and-after interviews and the related 4-session “Strengthening Marriages: bridging emotional cutoff” workshop. [This process is part of a Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project at Carey Theological College.] The workshop will be held on ( ) evenings ( ) to ( ): ( ). The location of the workshop is ( )

Thank you.

(Name)

(Phone)

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to preserve your confidentiality. Participants involved in the interviews and workshop will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

Costs to Subject, and Compensation:

There are no costs to you or monetary compensation for your participation in the interviews and workshop.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in the interviews and workshop.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Advertisement**

“( ) couples [who have been separated, divorced or widowed] are invited to attending a complimentary 4-session “Strengthening Marriage: Bridging Emotional Cutoff” workshop on ( ) Evenings ( ) from ( ) to ( ) at ( )\* To register, please phone ( ) or e-mail ( ).

\*map:

**Interview questions**

-the MESI Interview Protocol views marriages as emotional systems, as seen through the lense of Family Systems Theory. Designed as a strength-based exploration of marriages, the MESI Interview Protocol helps couples to better understand and to bridge emotional cutoff. Through focusing on attraction,

turning points, handling conflict, emotional cutoff, family patterns, and possibilities for the future, a greater objectivity is enhanced regarding the identity and direction of the marriage emotional system.

Two goals: strengthening marriages; reducing emotional cutoff

#### Demographics

- Name:
  - Age:
  - Gender:
  - Number of Years married:
  - Number of times married:
  - Number of people in your family:
  - Church attender or non-church attender:
  - How long do you anticipate living in this community (i.e. your area or surrounding areas)?
  - Postal Code:
1. What attracted you to your spouse and what keeps your marriage alive?
  2. What would you see as your marriage's strengths?
  3. What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?
  4. How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over the years? What are ways to grow in that area?
  5. What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain? How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?
  6. What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage's future?
  7. (Only in the post-interview) How was the workshop for you? How has the workshop strengthened your marriage? How could the workshop be strengthened?

vii) **May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012 Interview with Randy Frost, Executive Director of Living Systems Counseling, about his connection with Murray Bowen**

Randy: I had finished the second year at the training program in 1981. I was going to be on a sabbatical from St. Meinrad for six months. I wanted to do a week a month at the Bowen Center over six months, and I wanted Bowen to be my supervisor. With some encouragement from my supervisor in the second year of the program, I wrote him a letter and told him of my plan to come to the Bowen Center and asked if he would he supervise my work. I told him that I was particularly interested in the integration of pastoral care and counseling with his theory. He wrote back that he didn't have the foggiest if there was any overlap between his theory and pastoral care and counseling, but to come ahead. So I did and met with him each month for those six months. At that point, it was a time of real turmoil in my family of origin. So it was really valuable to have him as a resource. Then I continued to see him, often by telephone consultation right up until four days before he died. That was our last consultation just before he went to the Marriage and Family National Meeting of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy. After that, he was so exhausted that he just took to bed. Two days after that meeting, he died. But it was a real privilege to have him as my supervisor. There is no question about it.

Ed: What was it like to know Murray Bowen as a person? What was your experience of him?

Randy: I wouldn't say that we had a personal friendship, because I was a trainee and someone that was consulting him. But in addition to my personal interaction with him, I saw him at meetings, symposiums, other meetings that were held. He, I would say, had a unique ability to be himself, regardless of the situation. So he would say what he thought. That certainly stood out. Some might see him as a bit of a character. But he was always thinking theory and trying to present theory. Whether it was sitting with a person in supervision or on a panel with a major scientist like E.O. Wilson from Harvard, he would say



what he thought. If he thought at one point that the faculty were allowing the world to influence them and as a result were watering down or eroding theory, he would say it publicly. He always thought of the Bowen Center as the Citadel where people could go to recover their bearings. “But now the Citadel has lost its way.” (laughter) The faculty are sitting there listening to all of this. That would be an example of him being very direct and out front in what he is thinking. He had great ways of detriangling when people tried to pull him in somehow. There are lots of Bowen stories out there that people who knew him still tell. These stories are a way of having a window on how Bowen applied the theory in his own life. He was one of a kind in many ways.

Randy: I think that one of the misunderstandings of Bowen Theory is that it has nothing to do with feelings or that you eliminate feelings or something. At one clinical conference, Bowen declared: “Feelings are the heartland of therapy.” So if you read carefully what he has to say about differentiation, he talks about the integration of the differentiation between the thinking and feeling and emotional systems. The idea is that you can’t really integrate something unless there is a degree of separation, so that you know the difference between when you are operating out of your feeling system and when you are operating out of your cognitive thinking system. Once you are able to tell the difference, then you can integrate them and have access to both. You are aware of your feelings and at times you might want to go with your feelings. But you also have the counterbalance of the more objective thinking process that you can call on when it is important.

Randy: In therapy, we talk about being in good emotional contact with the family where the family is able to talk about what they are thinking, what they are feeling, what is happening without concern about the impact on the therapist. So it is an open kind of thing. When a therapist has that kind of relationship with a family, we say that the therapist is in good emotional contact with the family. The family can talk

about feelings. But the therapist is also working to maintain emotional separation from the family so that the therapist is not reacting emotionally to what he or she is hearing, but thinking about it and thinking with the family about the emotional process. So again you are trying to integrate the thinking / feeling process. But your questions and your focus with the family is directed at the more thoughtful side of the family, which can include trying to be more thoughtful about some of the intense feelings that they are struggling with. So that is one of the biggest misconceptions that Bowen Theory is anti-feeling, or anti-togetherness. "Bowen Theory is anti-togetherness" would be another misconception. If people have a robust sense of self, the togetherness goes a lot better. If you are trying to focus on the togetherness and push for more and more of it, the effort messes togetherness up.

Ed: How would you contrast Family Systems Theory with Attachment Theory, its similarities and differences?

Randy: Good question. Often it gets confused. Bowen talks about unresolved emotional attachment. Attachment Theory of course talks about differences in the kinds of attachments that people have. But if you look at Bowlby and Ainsworth and some of the others that have come along since, basically the critique is that there isn't enough attachment of a certain kind, whereas in Bowen Theory the focus is on too much attachment, the failure to gradually resolve the emotional attachment established at birth when it is entirely appropriate and needed. But then as the child grows and can do more and more for self, the parents relinquish some of that responsibility for the child and turn it over to the child. The child gradually assumes more and more responsibility for self until the time they are ready to leave home and make their way in the world. By then, they are ideally well-functioning adults who can maintain an open relationship with their parents with lots of good emotional contact, but not that emotional dependence that is more appropriate at a younger age. Clinically symptoms or vulnerability to symptoms has to do

with the degree of unresolved emotional attachment people have with their parents which can be over-positive or over-negative, either of which could be an indicator of a lack of resolution of some of that emotional attachment. Of course in very intense situations, with problems such as schizophrenia or autism, children are almost welded emotionally to the parents. In less severe problems, the attachment is less intense, but still an important factor. So that would be a major difference. Bowen Theory calls attention to the overinvolvement, overdoing of attachment whereas people in Attachment Theory worry about the lack of attachment, or the lack of the right kind of attachment.

Ed: Sue Johnson of Emotionally Focused Therapy, that would be a subcategory of Attachment Theory, and she also draws on John Gottman's research.

Randy: She does. We had Gottman here at a Living Systems conference with Mike Kerr and a number of researchers working on Bowen Theory and doing research with it. It was quite an exciting conference because Gottman's opening salvo was "Bowen Theory is wrong and here are the reasons." So it was quite a lively meeting. But the point that I made in my presentation at that meeting was that Gottman has this terrific research. What initially caught my attention with the research was hooking up couples to biofeedback equipment. For the ones who had a high level of marital dissatisfaction, when they discussed a sensitive issue, their indicators of tension like skin temperature, sweat rate, heart rate, heart beat intervals, all of that, went up in tandem. When couples who reported a high level of satisfaction participated in the same experiment, one person's level of tension could go up and the other's didn't change much. So one could stay calm even when their spouse was upset. The experiment captures the degree of differentiation in a marital relationship at a physiological level so that one person's upset didn't automatically involve the other getting upset. When one is upset, the other can keep talking and stay in contact without getting upset themselves. The tension then goes up for one spouse and then comes

back down. With the couples reporting a high level of dissatisfaction, they are feeding the tension back and forth, and each is further inciting arousal in the other.

Randy: To the degree that people can stay in charge of their own emotional response to spouse or children or parents when it is important to do so, it is one indicator of level of differentiation. You have to remember that Bowen worked for years with his family of origin before he considered his effort a solid breakthrough. One of the things that came out of that was seeing the family as a conglomerate rather than individual triangles. He tried to keep the family in a 'bag' with himself on the outside of it. So his effort to avoid allies and to stay on the outside in the family meeting was one of the features that helped him stay out of the emotional intensity the whole time. There is so much to learn in that. People sometimes get focused on the colourful ways and the funny ways that Bowen conveyed his detachment, his emotional neutrality. But there is a blueprint behind all of that which is very important.

Randy: John Gottman has a problem with differentiation. The paper that I presented talked about Gottman's wonderful research, picking up on the physiology of emotional fusion. Gottman's research is at odds with his therapy, because he is focusing on the togetherness aspects in the therapy and on feelings and emotions and what-not. He is not really following his research which indicated that what is more important than empathy and togetherness is emotional separation. So I concluded my paper by saying that I hoped that Gottman kept going with that wonderful research of his, because before he was done, he was going to prove Bowen Theory!

Randy: Take criticism as one of Gottman's four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It fits for the other Horsemen as well. It is kind of an automatic, reactive, nagging, what's wrong with the other person. This can just be seen as indicators of fusion where there is an effort to correct the other as if the other should be an extension of who you are. It gets thought of more in terms of the individual that the

individual needs to cool the criticism for things to go better. Fair enough. But it misses the relational piece, the struggle with fusion or a more intense attachment. That is what I would see the Four Horsemen as indicating or reflecting is this underlying emotional fusion. Gottman doesn't have a real theory to account for his research. He has this house with different planks which are very closely tied to specific items of research. I think that Gottman's research fits very nicely into Bowen Theory.

Randy: With Gottman's Four Horsemen concept of Stonewalling, I would see it as a reflection of an intense fusion where one person is impinging on another. The other's way of trying to get a little separation is to go silent. Both the one pursuing and the one clamming up are part of a relationship process. Again this is reflective of an underlying emotional fusion, not separation, not differentiation. What you have, as your course indicates, is that at better levels of differentiation, people can accept differences as well as respect them. There is not an expectation that the other will be an extension of you, think the same way you do, and feel the same way you do.

#### viii) **Analysis of the Interviews with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop Couples**

The first of the six questions that I asked the five couples was "What attracted you to your spouse and what keeps your marriage alive?"

With John and Julie Jones, in their pre-interview John said that he was attracted to Julie's passion for and desire to serve God, her making the Lord integral in her life, and her similar sense of humour. In the post-interview, John similarly emphasized being attracted to Julie's love for the Lord, putting God first in her life, and her godliness. While godliness was not a term used in the pre-interview, it was implied by the phraseology.

As to what keeps their marriage alive, John in the pre-interview mentioned praying together, laughing together, and the freedom to be themselves without pretending. In the post-interview, John four times mentioned spending time together doing things, something that had not been mentioned by John in the pre-interview. It appears that the emphasis on spending time together doing things may be a result of the marriage workshop. Another new statement was that Julie was definitely his best friend. Prayer and laughter were not mentioned in the post-interview though godliness was mentioned in the parallel section of what attracted him to Julie.

In the pre-interview, Julie said that she was attracted to John's character, his personality, the way that he endured suffering with integrity, how rooted in Christ he was, and how he made her laugh. In the post-interview, Julie similarly said that she was attracted to John's godly character, the way that he was able to gently point people towards a deeper, intimate relationship with Jesus, and his sense of humour. There did not seem to be any change here in the pre and post interview. As to what kept their marriage alive, Julie said in the pre-interview that they both trust each other a lot, so they find freedom in being able to be entirely ourselves. In the post interview, Julie mentioned having quality time together, going out and doing stuff together, laughing, and getting times (breaks) from the kids every week. These new comments were similar to what John was saying in his post-interview suggesting that these may be learnings from the workshop.

With Burt and Bev Buchanan, Burt did not say what attracted him to Bev in the pre-interview. In the post-interview, Burt said that it was the relativity of what they were experiencing in life at that time: the disappointment of losing a marriage, having the children, expecting more from your marriage, expecting more of himself, and being able to keep their family together. He went on to say that what attracted him to Bev was the chemistry which goes back to their backgrounds, having gone through the

same thing at the same time, being able to express themselves with each other, to open right up with each other, and see what each of them had to offer, and what they were lacking too. It looks as if the workshop assisted Burt in growing in self and systemic family awareness, key concepts in family systems theory.

As to what keeps their marriage alive, Burt in the pre-interview said that they both want better for the entire family, he just enjoys her, they have the same sense of humour, and they have the same sort of way of raising our kids. In the post-interview, Burt said that what keeps their marriage alive is determination, in particular his wife's determination for success in all aspects of life and whatever is needed to make that happen. Burt commented that where they are, they are in the same place, having the same challenges before they met, and now having the same challenges together, turning those challenges into possibilities. A common theme in both the pre and post interview is the term 'same': same sense of humour, same way of raising children, same place, same challenges. The new expression was determination, something implicit in the pre-interview.

In the pre-interview, Bev said that she was attracted that Burt was every bit as social and open as she was, that he was a very bright spark in a dull crowd, there was instant chemistry, it was love at first sight for her and they were friends for the first year. In the post-interview, Bev said again that what attracted her to Burt was instant chemistry, love at first sight, and that amazing bright spark over there that she couldn't see anything but him. Bev's attractional answer was virtually identical in both the pre and post interview.

As to what keeps their marriage alive, Bev in the pre-interview said that it was dedication and commitment, having a lot in common, being very hard-working and devoted to provide for their children, being a good fit, with their passionate, fiery natures keeping them connected. In the post-interview, Bev

said that Burt is her best friend in life; they both share is our passion for family. Coming from a large family, she needed a family, and Burt gave her his family. She remembers him saying: “You can cook like crazy and you love family. You’ve got me on both points.” The post-interview moved from passionate natures to passion for family and friendship.

With Sean and Susan Sutherland, in their pre-interview Sean said that he was attracted to her ethnicity, her being gorgeous, and her being female. This mysterious attraction was like a sense of smell. In the post-interview, Sean said that he was attracted to her strength, her being a match for him, her being able to stand up to him, and her independence. Sean knew that Susan needed to have a certain strength to be able to be married to him. In this post-interview question, Sean no longer mentioned her ethnicity, her being gorgeous. Instead he emphasized her strength which enabled her to stand up to his strength in a marriage. This insight suggests learning in the workshop around self-differentiation and reducing emotional fusion.

As to what keeps their marriage alive, Sean in the pre-interview said that it was the determination to keep the marriage going somehow in any way possible. In the post-interview, Sean said that he hadn’t lost the faith that getting married was a right decision. One of Sean’s insights through the workshop seemed to be the importance of faith in their marriage and future together.

In the pre-interview, Susan said that what attracted her to Sean was that he was handsome, smart, bright, interesting; he liked to lead in dancing and liked to leave room for her style of dancing too. In the post-interview, Susan said that what attracted her to Sean was that he was very handsome, very intelligent, different, Canadian and very fresh. The theme of Sean’s being handsome and intelligence came up in both interviews. Dancing was not mentioning in the post-interview. The new emphasis was on his being different, Canadian and very fresh, perhaps an unpacking of the early phrase ‘interesting’.



As to what keeps their marriage alive, Susan said in the pre-interview that Sean is witty, often funny, often has a unique point of view, doesn't follow the crowd in their thinking, perceptive of others, but not judgmental, has a good laugh, is talented at singing and acting, theatre things, and likes art which is what I do. He likes food and ethnic foods a lot with lots of flavour. We find interesting films and movie stuff. He is good with kids and older people which is important to me. He helps our older friends stay in their homes by fixing things; He introduced me to camping, and likes nature and the outdoors; He is generous with money and a hard worker; He is very good at what he does and has always has been at whatever he has done. Susan likes that he is from a different background, as she likes differences. In the post-interview, Susan said that she didn't know, maybe it was stubbornness, and that they have a history together. Susan's post-interview response to this question was much briefer.

With Richard and Rose Reid, in their pre-interview Richard said that he was attracted to their singing and dancing, her being very caring, and being a great cook. In the post-interview Richard said that he was attracted to Rose's faith. He could see and sense her faith. He was attracted that Rose is a classic woman in a lot of ways. He loved her sense of humour and her ability to cook. (laughter ensued) In the post-interview attractional section, Rose's singing, dancing and caring were not mentioned. Instead Richard emphasized her faith and humour. The common factor in the two interviews was her cooking.

In the pre-interview, Rose said that what attracted her to Richard was the music, his sense of humour in which he made her laugh a lot, his having a lot of energy, and his enjoying her cooking. In the post-interview, Rose said that she was attracted to Richard's sense of humour in the midst of his looking serious, his creativity, his kindness, his being really there for her in trauma, and his love for the Lord. In the post-interview attractional section, music was not mentioned by Rose, while humour was re-

emphasized. The new attractional features were creativity, kindness, and love for the Lord. Perhaps the additional insights were fruits of the discussion times at the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

Neither Richard nor Rose distinguished in their pre-interview between what attracted them and what kept their marriage alive. In the post-interview, Richard said that what kept the marriage alive was their mutual commitment to evangelism. Rose in the post-interview said that what kept their marriage alive was the Lord as their centre, their love for the Lord and reading the Word together. She sees their marriage as an exciting journey with different valleys and hills. Rose said that as long as they keep our eyes on Jesus, they know that everything will work for the good. Part of our journey, said Rose, was going through this Strengthening Marriage workshop where they learned a lot. For both Richard and Rose, their common sense of faith and mission is key in keeping their marriage alive. Rose's post-interview emphasis on marriage as an adventure seems to reflect learnings at the Marriage Workshop.

With Lloyd and Linda Lindsay, what attracted Lloyd to Linda was that he just liked her smile when he first saw her, and he liked her companionship. In the post-interview, Lloyd said that he was attracted to her demeanor, the look about her, the way she is. (mutual laughter ensued)

Linda said in the pre-interview that what attracted her to Lloyd was that she had this mystery guy who had this mad crush on her, and she never really met him until one day he ran around my house at night, saying "I love you, J. I love you." (giggling). In the post-interview, Linda said that what attracted her is that she thought that Lloyd loved her.

As to what keeps their marriage alive, Lloyd in the pre-interview said that it was their companionship. Linda said that it was that they respect each other. In the post-interview, Linda said what kept their marriage alive was she believes that Lloyd loves her. Three times in the pre and post

interviews, Linda emphasized Lloyd's love for her being key in attraction and keeping their marriage alive. Lloyd did not distinguish in the post-interview between what attracted him and what keeps their marriage alive. Lloyd and Linda were both succinct and focused in their answers.

The second of the six questions that I asked the five couples was: What would you see as your marriage's strengths? With John and Julie, in their pre-interview John saw as strengths that they are a very compatible couple, they can be themselves, laugh, pray and have a lot of fun. John said that their number one strength was that they both want to be used of the Lord in Kingdom work and to be in the will of the Lord. In the post-interview, John saw as strengths that they have common goals and common values, they both kind of desire the same thing for our families and in ministry for themselves, and they laugh together very frequently. John's response was similar in both pre and post interviews. The clarified emphasis was on common goals and values, something emphasized in family systems teaching.

In the pre-interview, Julie said that she saw as a strength how they balance each other out well, saying "Where he is weak, I may be stronger and vice versa. Where I am weak, he is stronger as well." In the post-interview strength section, Julie once again said that they balance each other out, filling in the gaps for each other. Julie went on to say that they have a similar outlook on life, they are both heading in the same direction, they mostly parent the same way, and they have the same kind of goals. These new comments by Julie both reflect sameness but also marital direction and goals which were emphasized in the Marriage Workshop as key Family Systems Theory concepts.

With Burt and Bev, in their pre-interview Burt saw as their marriage's strengths that they are devoted, their working together on finances, having a deaf ear, being committed to integrity and doing what they say they will do. In the post-interview, Burt spoke of the strengths of working hard, knowing each other's strengths, not trying to take charge of things that one's spouse could do better, longing for

more and knowing how to achieve it. Hard work and devotion was expressed as strengths in both the pre and post interviews. Knowing each other's strengths is a new statement that may express learning from the Marriage Workshop.

In the pre-interview, Bev saw as strengths their devotion, their humour, their ability to cope with stress involving a blended family and finances, having a thick skin, their joint investment and vision of the future, not being defined by today, having bigger mutual goals, having integrity, and having great lovely children. In the post-interview, Bev said that the marital strengths were their ability to preserve, to see positive and optimistic outcomes despite negative circumstances, the strength of their children even with their stresses. Other strengths that Bev mentioned were that they are talented people who have good ingredients and capabilities, that they enjoy life together, that they create ritual and excitement and passion in everyday mundane things, and the brighter and more vivid colour in their marital vision and the way they live life.

With Sean and Susan, in their pre-interview Sean saw as a strength this sense of hope, that no matter how bad things seem to get, we can figure a way to get through it. In the post-interview, a strength Sean noted was their history together: "I realize that marriage is not just another relationship, not just another thing that goes for as long as it goes and then you let her go. It's become much more than that, our history together, we have woven a nest (a structure) around us, and we are aware of it. It is not visible necessarily but it surrounds us completely. It contains all of who we are with each other." Sean saw another strength as a sense of mystery between Sean and Susan. A really powerful strength, said Sean, is that there is essential communication possible under any conditions. The new emphases in the post-interview with Sean were the specialness of marriage, their history and structure as a nest, the sense of mystery between them, and the essential possible communication.

In the pre-interview, Susan saw as strengths that they are good around young people as a team, good at taking care of the home, good at managing money, and good with friends of many ages. Flexibility is also seen as a strength by Susan. In the post-interview, Susan saw as strengths that they give each other a lot of room, good as a team in running the home, and good with different maintenance skills. The new strength emphasis for Susan in the post-interview was their giving each other a lot of room, which may reflect the Marriage Workshop teaching about balancing closeness and personal space.

With Richard and Rose, in their pre-interview Richard saw as their marriage's strengths that they love the Lord Jesus and want to share their faith with others. Other strengths noted by Richard are that they both like the beach, different kinds of movies, and gospel music. In the post-interview, Richard identified as strengths that both have a moral code that centers around family, commitment and the Word of God. Richard also emphasized their focus on prayer. The new features in Richard's post-interview related to the moral code and prayer.

In the pre-interview, Rose emphasized as strengths their love for the Lord that holds them together, their passion to serve the Lord and witness to other people, and their ministry work in common. Another strength identified by Rose is that they are working on spending more quality time together outside of work. In the post-interview, Rose emphasized as strength their focus on prayer: "It is amazing that when we do pray, if you have your eyes on the Lord, everything works out if you put him first." The new and only emphasis in the post-interview was on prayer, similar to her husband's post-interview.

With Lloyd and Linda, in their pre-interview Lloyd saw their marriage's strengths as friendship, respect, same sense of humour, and commitment. In the post-interview, Lloyd saw their marriage's strength that they are good friends. Friendship came up for Lloyd in both the pre and post-interview.

In the pre-interview, Linda saw their marriage's strengths as friendship, respect, and same sense of humour, and loyalty. In the post-interview, Linda also saw their marriage's strength that they are good friends. Another strength Linda mentioned was that she trusted Linda. While Lloyd emphasized the strength of commitment in the pre-interview, Linda emphasized loyalty, a similar and overlapping concept. Friendship came up for Lloyd and Linda in both the pre and post-interview.

The third of the six questions that I asked the five couples was: What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change? With John and Julie, in their pre-interview John saw the most important turning points / times of change as being the first time that they were invited at a conference as a couple to minister. The other times that stand out, said John, were the times that they were able to be very vulnerable to each other about their past, to see it cherished and not crushed. In the post-interview, John said that the most important turning points / times of change were when one of them had been extremely vulnerable with the other person sharing something that has been risky to share, and seeing how the other person responded in love. The theme of vulnerable sharing and acceptance was mentioned by John in both the pre and post-interview, suggesting how important this was to him.

In the pre-interview, Julie shared her most important turning points / times of change as going through an intense church conflict in which they as spouses learned to really meld together, to fight for each other, and to be each other's encourager. In the post-interview, Julie emphasized that the more vulnerable they get, the stronger their relationship becomes and that during intense trials, they have pulled together, walked together and worked together. The theme of standing together in conflict was mentioned by Julie in both the pre and post-interviews.

With Burt and Bev, in their pre-interview Bev saw the most important turning points / times of change as being separated from Bev. In the post-interview, Burt said that the most important turning points / times of change have been when they hit rock bottom before making a shift. (mutual laughter)

In Bev's pre-interview, she said that the most important turning points / times of change were when they were separated from each other, when she changed her career, when Burt changed his career, and having their son. In the post-interview, Bev also said that the most important turning points have been when they hit rock bottom in our relationship: "I realized I couldn't take another breath without this person, and that we were connected in a way that we couldn't just extricate ourselves from." Another major turning point was when Burt began his new career bringing a new mutual partnership. While separation was mentioned by both, career change was mentioned extensively by Bev in both her pre- and post-interview.

With Sean and Susan, in their pre-interview Sean saw the most important turning points / times of change as creating characters as required to deal with particularly challenging situations, such as when they were in a bad situation on a lake trying to get home in a boat. A key time of change for Jerry was moving out west as a new beginning in life. This forced Sean and Susan to depend on each other like a couple of cats in a bag. In the post-interview, Sean identified turning points as related to death of family members. Other turning points involved adapting to crisis situations by turning it on its ear and basically saying "Ah, that's okay." Their decision to get married was a very important turning point: "one of the biggest things that I have ever done in my life, and everything has kind of followed from there." Facing serious health issues has been a key turning point for Sean and Susan. Another key turning point is the realization by Sean that it's getting harder to stay married and deal with things as they change: "the awareness that in order to make things work, I have to work a lot harder than I was prepared to." Sean

covered a lot of ground in his post-interview that suggest a deep reflecting that occurred in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

In Susan's pre-interview, she shared her most important turning points / times of change as moving out West. The friendships out West have been different, with the result that they had to depend more on each other. Growing older changes things. In Susan's post-interview, she shared her most important turning points / times of change as being health challenges faced by Sean and Susan. Health and aging issues stand out in Susan's post-interview.

With Richard and Rose, in their pre-interview, Richard saw the most important turning points / times of change as when the Lord chastened them and put them back together again. In the post-interview, Richard saw the most important turning points / times of change as when they were both spent forces and the Lord came and cemented them. Another turning point is that through the Strengthening Marriage workshop, Richard said that Rose is becoming more accepting of his personality type.

In the pre-interview, Rose said that an important turning point / times of change was when they weren't spending any quality time together, which wore on their relationship. They were going in different directions. So they prayed and prayed, and God showed them where they were going wrong, and turned it around for them. In the post-interview, Rose said that an important turning point / times of change was when the intimacy was not there, they were going in different directions, not connecting, and wondering why they got married. God intervened as they prayed to the Lord. Another important turning point was when Rose came into recovery and her life was changed. Taking the marriage workshop was a turning point in helping them look at their strengths to bring them closer: "I like that. That was really good. I can remember that now. Certain things I can remember when I get in that



'corner'. I remember: "This is what I should do." It is starting to happen. I can see it happening now." Rose found the Marriage Workshop concept of celebrating our difference to be a turning point because now she can accept him for whom he is. She can just relax: "We are always growing. God is always changing us. That was really, really good." In the post-interview, Rose not only talked about prayer but also about recovery and Marriage Workshop concepts like looking at strengths and celebrating differences. Rose is finding those concepts to be practical and workable.

With Lloyd and Linda in their pre-interview, Linda saw the most important turning points / times of change as when we were divorced and then remarried to each other. In the post-interview, Lloyd said that the most important turning points / times of change was getting married again: "that was a real big shift. I think that was the biggest one of all. And from there, it was a lot different. That was a big change." In Lloyd's post-interview, the importance of remarrying each other replaced the importance of divorce.

In the pre-interview, Linda saw the most important turning points / times of change when they were remarried. Linda said that their time apart when divorced help them realize what value they had in the other person. In the post-interview, Linda spoke of tragically losing her dad and great aunt while divorced from Lloyd. Linda spoke of being together for ten years and then married when she was close to giving birth. Being married three times to Lloyd has been a significant turning point for Linda. Key turning points for Linda have been both times of tragedy and times of breakthrough.

The fourth of the six questions that I asked the five couples was "How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years? What are ways to grow in that area?" With John and Julie, in their pre-interview, John said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was learning what the triggers are in their marriage, and increasing self-awareness of the triggers so that when conflict arises, there is better understanding. In the post-

interview, John said the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was when one or both stepped outside the pattern the times of their normal response, causing them to differentiate from their common patterns: “That kind of breaks that cycle.” John commented that they deal with change fairly well. Triggers were not mentioned in John’s post-interview, though both interviews alluded to common patterns and new possible ways of responding. In the post-interview, differentiation was mentioned which is a key concept that had been taught in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

In Julie’s pre-interview, she said that the best way they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was when they are dealing with family conflict by hunkering down and getting through it. In Julie’s post-interview, she said that they are starting to grow in the area of conflict, and are starting to think like a scientist, to look at it from an outside perspective, become detached and observe what is going on. They are beginning, said Julie, to recognize triggers and things like that, what would cause certain reactions. She also said that they are also starting to realize their own reactions, and what might be causing them as well. Her final comment was “I think that we are growing and we will continue to grow.” In the post-interview, Julie gave strong indication of growth in dealing with conflict, quoting Marriage Workshop concepts like “thinking like a scientist, becoming detached, realizing their own reactions.” Both Julie and John said in their post-interviews that they handle change well, having much change in their lives.

With Burt and Bev, in their pre-interview, Bev said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was to just try to power through it. They try, said Burt, to find a way to get through the mud and into the clear water: “We usually find our way through it just by gritting our teeth and wanting to be out of the mess.” This does take some time: “We will hang out in that mess for a couple of days until we can both cool our heels a bit. Then we just get tired of being upset.” In the post-

interview, Burt said the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was that they have looked for a way that would be softer: “we say: ‘Okay, we are not soft with this. How can we be softer?’”

In Bev’s pre-interview, she said that the best way they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was that they were both committed to ongoing work and refinement so that they can learn: “we are still together at the end of conflict. We are still there.” In Bev’s post-interview, she said once again: “we are still here at the end of it,” expressing the importance of not giving up when conflict is painful. Bev named different ways of handling conflict that she learned at the Marriage Workshop: “...self-awareness which will help with our life of conflict, and being there in the moment of what is occurring for you. (I also learned about) the amygdala part of the brain and the differentiation between the phases of upset and being more aware of those. That was new. Another thing that I learned was about doing our own introspective work. That is something that I am constantly committed to...by being committed to our own work and each unto ourselves, we create a finer model.” Bev seems to have had a lot of new insights about self-awareness, the amygdala part of the brain, differentiation, and introspection that she has drawn from the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

With Sean and Susan, in their pre-interview, Sean said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage is ‘survival mode’: “it is almost like we have a series of skirmishing parties. It’s like you come together and you have a scrap. You fire off a few and then you go off. Then you figure out what happened and you figure out what is going to work the next time you meet. You might not shoot each other the next time you meet.” Sean said that ways to grow in that area are to do it, do the stuff that they have been afraid to do it: “We need to begin to

challenge that, that set, that willingness, that turn-awayness, that ‘I don’t want to look at it or face it’, ‘I don’t want to deal with it’, that hasn’t worked.”

In Sean’s post-interview, he said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was realizing that Susan has always surprised him with things that I don’t know. So he is trying to give up on trying to pretend that he knows, and see if he can just live with it. Sean spoke of a connection that they made with themselves during the marriage workshop which has brought everything into focus in a way that has been very, very valuable, in refocusing and reexamination on a constant basis. Like the child in the dark who can see past the shadow in the corner, said Sean, this refocusing has lessened the sense of desperation, hopelessness and aloneness that was growing in him. Sean sees that they have backed off from ‘going to the wall’ and that has calmed things down quite a bit: “We can look at things from a slightly different point of view and try to take it from there.” Sean’s post-interview comments indicate new insights from the Marriage Workshop in terms of refocusing and re-examining that has reduced confrontation and increased calmness.

In Susan’s pre-interview, she said that the best way they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was that that there is some thought on their parts from separate camps, and then some change will happen where Sean might finally hear something that Sean am trying to say, and then Sean might show it by doing something or Susan might do something. This would happen indirectly rather than directly. Susan said that they grow in that area by just relaxing and getting more comfortable with their style of managing conflict. Perhaps, said Susan, they could learn to talk over things.

In her post-interview, Susan said that one of their ways of handling conflict was by adopting fantasy roles and names that helped make it through stress times: “It started when we were on a canoe, caught in the storm. We were going in the wrong direction without realizing...So over the years in crisis,

we look at each other and we change names so that you become someone else who can handle it...it helped a lot.” Susan went on to say: “ I think that what we do now with the conflict is that we back off from each other...it has a positive effect in that you sort of feel yourself again. You’re not caught up in a big struggle or you’re not caught up being blocked. If someone doesn’t accept what you say, you can’t force them to accept it. You can’t force them to hear. So a lot of the things you said, I have thought about for a time. So you get on with your own activities and where your energy goes next. Even if I would like something to happen, if it is not, then I move to other things. So given that, from the point of calmness again, I can’t go back to it because it wouldn’t necessarily change things. We might even do something about what we are talking about without talking again. Or we just come back but more content inside of ourselves.” Susan’s post-interview comments suggest a lot of self-reflection, an area that was emphasized in the Marriage Workshop.

With Richard and Rose, in their pre-interview, Richard said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was that they just talk about it until they get resolution. Richard said that they have a very open and honest relationship. They don’t keep secrets from each other and they tell each other exactly what is going on. They want to do due diligence and that sort of thing in our relationship. He thought that a way to grow was to step down the anger and not get into that. Richard said that that the Lord has chastened and restored them: “We have gone through a real transformation. The home life...it is all evolving.” In Richard’s post-interview, he said: “since I got married, I think less about myself and more about the Lord and more about other people, particularly my wife and other people than I do about myself, less and less and less. I am being sanctified.” Richard said that Genesis Chapter 2 (which he read out a portion) is the basis of marriage.

In Rose's pre-interview, she said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was that God is refining them, sharpening them up where God can use them: "Now God is really speaking to me as to how I am treating Richard...I can't do anything without having a healthy stable marriage first. I had my priorities all mixed up." Ways to grow in the marriage, said Rose, were to show obvious love and to focus on each other: "You know how the Lord says to love each other as ourselves. So if we do that, I give 100%, Richard gives 100%, even 70%, then we won't be focusing on ourself. We will be focusing on each other. And then that love can grow."

In the post-interview, Rose said that the ways they have best dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was by just expressing herself, how she was feeling. Ways to grow in that area, said Rose, were to pray about it and consider how the Bible says that we should think about other people before ourselves: "Heal our hearts, teach us how to love." Rose said regarding marriage and sanctification: "We are dying, we are dying. We are dying daily." A huge part of being married, said Rose, is a huge part of being married now; it is looking at the other person's needs. It is about asking God to heal those wounds because we come from really broken lives: "God will show us the way. He always does. He will show us how to love each other." For both Rose and Richard, their Christian faith and language is a major part of what strengthens their marriage.

With Lloyd and Linda, in their pre-interview, Lloyd said that the best ways they dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was trying to find answers to the conflict, trying to overcome them somehow, trying not to just ignore it and trying to fix it. Lloyd said: "I like the phrase 'don't let the sun go down on your anger.' You try to resolve it." In the post-interview, Lloyd reemphasized that it is good to deal with conflict rather than just hide it and that he likes what it says in the Bible 'Don't let the sun go down on your anger.': "I don't like to go to bed after a big fight." It seems that Lloyd is determined to

work on conflict avoidance, an important area to address in Family Systems Theory. Lloyd saw ways of growing through just being together with things, and by not blaming each other. The non-blaming approach of Family Systems Theory was a major emphasis in the Marriage Workshop.

In the pre-interview, Linda said that they have best dealt with conflict and change in their marriage by ignoring Lloyd when it is not important, not relevant: "Sometimes you have to disregard". Linda also said "If I am in a bad mood, I say 'I am in a bad mood.' He knows and he just disregards." Linda went on to say that when you have a disagreement, you have to stay on the subject for what it is worth, not exaggerate it.

In the post-interview, Sheila said the ways they have best dealt with conflict and change in their marriage was by her trying to avoid, counting to ten, journaling, trying to be objective, and always having respect for each other. Avoidance of conflict seems to be a strong family of origin pattern. Journaling and being objective are key Family Systems approach taught in the Marriage Workshop.

The fifth of the six questions that I asked the five couples was "What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain? How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?"

With John and Julie, in their pre-interview, John said that his family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that his mother was quite stoic and unemotional: "Any emotion on her would a sign that things are tough and really, really bad." His stepdad and stepmom are both quite emotional in the way that they deal with emotional pain: "My stepmom in particular does not deal with emotional pain well at all. My dad is quite a rescuer and deals with emotional pain usually by focusing on my stepmom." While John sees that his first reaction in the time of emotional pain is to cut off, he realizes that you can't deal with things if you cutoff. He is learning to not throw up walls and cut off but rather to stay engaged

with the process: “there are times, even now, when my first reaction, my first instinct, is to cut off, but by the grace of God I am learning to stay engaged.”

In his post-interview, John said again that his family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was his mother was very stoic and unemotional: “The only times I can ever remember her emotional pain was when her dad died and when my parents got divorced. Both times she was very very stoical. I never saw her deal with emotional pain.” John went on to say: “My mom was more of a ‘keep a stiff upper lip’ kind of person. So that is probably where I get it from.” Conflict seemed to be nonexistent and / or avoided: “In my family of origin, I have been thinking about this a lot over the course of the four weeks. I never saw my family deal with conflict because there wasn’t a lot of conflict. But when I think about it, I don’t know that there wasn’t conflict. I never saw them dealing with it.” With his dad and stepmom, there was conflict at times: My stepmother would have this huge mood swing and my dad was quite patient up until a point, and he felt that if she stepped over, he was quite firm about it. But up to that point, he could take a lot from her. “John said that the closer John and Julie are to the middle, the less cutoff there is: “We tend to polarize but when one or both of us comes closer to the middle, then it tends to avoid those extremes.” John’s post-interview comments reflect a family of origin awareness as taught in the Strengthening Marriage workshop.

In the pre-interview, Julie said that her family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was to be like ostriches, sticking their head under: “Nobody talks about anything. No one apologizes. There is no recognition that there is conflict. Nothing is resolved.” Julie said that when she is in conflict, she will start attacking almost to force emotional cutoff. She did not express the way that she has best avoid cutting off emotionally in her marriage.



In the post-interview, Julie reaffirmed that her family of origin pattern was “Don’t deal with it. Shove it under the rug, and don’t talk about it. Don’t bring it up. Don’t confront anyone. Just pretend that it didn’t happen.” In both pre and post-interviews, conflict avoidance was stated as her family of origin default. She realizes that she had ‘gone to the other extreme (where) she must confront it’: “I have swung to the other direction.” Julie says that she is learning how to not cut off emotionally and how not to be emotionally reactive. Both Julie and John developed through the Strengthening Marriage Workshop a greater awareness of how emotional cutoff functions in their marriage, and how to reduce its impact.

With Burt and Bev, in their pre-interview, Burt said that his family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that my parents were very, very involved mostly with his sibling because his sibling’s life was kind of a nightmare, due to a car accident and ongoing complications. Burt admits cutting off emotionally and tries to avoid cutting off emotionally by taking an interest.

In the post-interview, Burt said that his family’s pattern of dealing with emotional pain was to have a really heated discussion about it for about an hour, point fingers outside of the family, and then put it to rest and not address it any more... with a martini (mutual laughter). As to how Burt best avoided cutting off in their marriage, he said: “That’s when you have to be a scientist like we talked about in class.” Burt said because that he’s pretty good at cutting off, he has to turn a deaf ear to what’s being said and to try to reel in his own anger and frustration and what he’s feeling, and not voice it like there’s no consequence to it. Avoid cutting off, said Burt, is to not say the first thing that comes to your mind and not listening to anything that you are hearing as being anything but the frustration of the moment. How Burt has best avoided cutting off is to analyze the lead up to the cutting off. In the post-interview, Burt responded much more extensively in the issue of emotional cutoff, an area covered extensively in

the Strengthening Marriage Workshop. Burt was making a close connection between emotional detachment, systemic analysis, and reducing emotional cutoff.

In the pre-interview, Bev said that her family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was avoidance because it felt very futile and was never going to get resolved everywhere. With her mother being a violent alcoholic and her father always at work, Bev was scared of conflict and would just run and hide. Bev said that she cuts off emotionally during conflict and difficulties in order to protect herself. Conflict, emotional pain, and cutoff were described by Bev as being like black holes in their marriage.

In the post-interview, Bev said that her family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was 'Don't have any.': "No one is going to explain it away and certainly not apologize for it. It was very much a 'duck and cover' lifestyle, suck it up, this is the way it is and the way it isn't. That's been the pattern." Bev said in the post interview that most recently she has been avoiding cutting off in their marriage by starting to share with Burt what she is scared and upset about at the moment: "Whatever it is, I am actually just putting it on the table now, whereas before I wouldn't do that." In the past, she would talk to herself and not tell her husband because she assumed that she was all alone and that he would not understand. Bev elaborated, saying: "Avoiding cutting off emotionally is about sharing what is actually happening for me because then Burt actually knows. It gives him a chance to relate to me and see where I may be coming from, and for Burt to respond and say 'I'm feeling this way too.' ...or there is too much happening for Burt so he can't deal with it. At least I know that." Bev also said that avoiding emotional cutoff is sometimes leaving and giving things time to cool and dry out. While in the pre-interview Bev had no suggestions about how she avoided emotional cutoff, in the post-interview Bev described several new approaches including sharing what she is actually thinking and giving things time to cool down. It

would appear that the Strengthening Marriage Workshop gave Bev some new tools to reduce emotional cutoff in her marriage.

With Sean and Susan, in their pre-interview, Sean said that his family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was a clash between the drivenness of his mother and the easy-going style of his father: "Dad got hauled along. He went along. But he was hauled along, and that kind of was the defining relationship there." Sean experienced his childhood as terribly emotional: "All those difficulties, moving away, constant disappointments. Things turning out less than they hoped to. Always less than what they expected. Always more hard than they'd wanted to." Sean would usually side with his mother: "I found that being Mom was really painful, and being Dad was being on holidays!" Sometimes his wife Susan reminds him of this family pattern: "So when I see Susan doing things, it's like 'Not that way. I went through it.' It's like she's run away, and I can't find her." Sean avoids cutting off by not letting Susan run away, by going out and prying up the rock that she comes under, not letting her get away, not giving up. The pursuit / avoidance pattern, drawing on Family of Origin patterns, seems to be functioning in Sean and Susan's marriage.

In the post-interview, Sean said that his family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was to fight about it. His father was very effusive on the surface but very private inside, in a way that shut Sean out, leaving him very sad. His mother was very outgoing and serious, resulting in Sean concluding that everything was fake, that he was the bridge between everyone else: "I started to feel distrustful of everybody. I didn't trust anybody because everything that I saw was two-faced. It was all unreal, and I did a lot of stuff to pretend that I knew stuff." Sean's family way of dealing with emotional pain taught him that everything was 'everything was fake, but also that was real': "They were the reverse of everything that was going on." Sean became the rescuer with a great feeling of responsibility that he

hated and would run away from. He would also pretend that he knew things that he didn't. Sean says that he best avoids cutting off emotionally by continuing to fight, by acknowledging that he is always going to be a rescuer, and he is always ready with a sucker punch: "I am not going to let them beat me... So it's just the willingness to fight, the willingness to get up for another round." (mutual intense laughter) In the post-interview, Sean strongly emphasized fighting, distrust, and rescuing / pursuing as family of origin patterns that are still very operative.

In the pre-interview, Susan said that her family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that her father would rage silently or withdraw: "I never saw them talk over anything." Her mother always said that she became ill from her emotional life inside. Susan said that she finds it easiest to cut off emotionally and carry on with other parts of her life if they have hit a wall in their marriage: "Sometimes it is very overwhelming and lonely. But I am a strong person and sometimes it just feels the best thing to do." Susan best avoids cutting off emotionally when she has had a rest and there has been peace and quiet and done those things that are important to her: "Then I have energy again to relate."

In the post-interview, Susan said that her family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that they had a lot of sullenness and holding on to grudges from her father: "I am very capable of that, especially if something really bothers or is affecting me." Susan deals with emotional pain by spending time alone: "If I am alone, a lot of time I have a real sense of being happy to be alive. It's just a nice feeling, you know. I don't mind my own company." She best avoids emotionally cutting off through having a wonderful sense of humour which her mother also had: "My mother was quite a well-liked, loud, laughing woman. So I guess I got that from her." Humour reduces cutoff through bringing perspective: "Somewhere something bubbles up, comes up and it feels so much bigger than any serious

talk and stuff like that.” The therapeutic benefits of humour, as mentioned by Susan in the post-interview, were taught in the Marriage Workshop.

With Richard and Rose, in their pre-interview, Richard said that his family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that they were not demonstrative emotionally. With alcoholism, suicide, and mental health issues in the family, they came across coldly: “We kidded each other very coldly in our family. We were distant. We were business-like. We were all into sports.” Richard’s mother had a hard time and did not receive emotional nourishment from the all-male family. Richard says that he best avoided cutting off emotionally in their marriage through honest communication.

In the post-interview, Richard said that his family’s pattern of dealing with emotional pain was outward stability in a long-term marriage, but inwardly much anger from the father and desperation from the mother. Living in a hard-driving, workaholic / alcoholic family, they were either hurt emotionally or hurt physically:” “I used to get whipped to blackout, to blackout by my father with a belt buckle, the whole bit. He would come home and I used to hide under my bed. I was about eight to ten years old. He would grab me from under the bed and drag me out to the woodshed. He’d whip me, whip me, whip me, sometimes to blackout.” Richard still has a relationship with his father today. In the post-interview, the issue of anger and family violence was emphasized.

In the pre-interview, Rose said that her family’s pattern of dealing with emotional pain was abandonment and alcoholism. Sexual trauma heightened the turning to drug and alcohol usage: “I ran away from my problems. I would use alcohol and drugs to hide the pain in the past.” Rose says that she best avoids cutting off emotionally in their marriage by depending on the Lord: “I can deal with my problems because I have the Lord with me now. He has always been there but I didn’t know it. I just want to give my whole life to him. He changed my life. I really feel like with Him, we can solve any

problem now.” Another way that Rose best avoids cutting off emotionally in their marriage is by honest communication, something also mentioned by her husband Richard: “When we were angry, we could share that we were angry. We would tell each other how we felt, plus having the Lord. God is changing us. This workshop is all part of it. It is about loving one another.”

In the post-interview, Rose said that her family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was that her mother would secretly drink: “I only saw her drunk once in my life. But I knew because I found her bottles everywhere. I would find her vodka bottles and stuff. That is how she deals with emotional pain.” Rose’s dad and stepdad wouldn’t deal with emotional pain. Her dad used to run away and leave them. Her mom and dad were very emotional: “They would fuse up with each other and argue and fight. There wasn’t ever anything that got dealt with. They would circle all the time.” Her mother’s default with emotional pain was to play the victim. Rose said that the way she has best avoided cutting off emotionally in her marriage was by expressing her feelings: “In the past, I clammed up, walked away and wasn’t really open and honest about my feelings.” Rose says that God is helping her avoid cutting off by refining them as a couple, breaking the chains, healing the wounds from the past, and sharpening them up so that they are not fighting as much. Alcoholism, communication, and God were mentioned by Rose in both the pre and post-interview. Emotional fusion was mentioned by Rose in the post-interview, a key Family Systems concept taught in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

With Lloyd and Linda, in their pre-interview, Lloyd said that his family’s pattern in dealing with emotional pain was keeping their distance with some family members not knowing each other’s private phone numbers. There was significant emotional cutoff with the mother and some of her adult children. Lloyd said that cutoff is a choice to ignore the other person, something that he tries not to do.

In the post-interview, Lloyd did not again mention his family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain. He again emphasized his perspective that emotional cutoff is a choice which you can choose not to do: "Cutting off is a decision too, so if you decided not to do that, then it doesn't happen."

In the pre-interview, Linda said that her family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain was keeping their distance: "There have been years with sisters not speaking to sisters, mother not speaking to daughters, father not speaking to daughters." The best way that Linda avoided cutting off emotionally in their marriage was talking it out and counting her blessings: "I look at my granddaughter and my daughter. I count my blessings."

In the post-interview, Linda said that her family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain is revenge. Linda has best avoided cutting off emotionally in their marriage by showing respect. Lloyd and Linda, both being shy and practical, spoke with brevity and focus.

The six of the six questions that I asked the five couples was "What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?"

With John and Julie, in their pre-interview, John said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that their relationship, should they continue to persevere in growing and all that, is going to be something that is more rewarding and more fulfilling than either of them can imagine right now: "I am so excited about our future...I can imagine a lot." John is excited that they will actually serving the Kingdom as a couple, not just for their own benefit: "I don't know what could be more exciting." John also said that the intimacy in their relationship is more than they have experienced with anyone else: "I know that this is something that is going to continue to develop and

grow. That is a very exciting future to look forward to.” John’s sense of excitement about their future is very strong.

In John’s post-interview, he said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is the greater intimacy. John sees this intimacy both as a spiritual thing, to know God and be known by God but also by another person: “I really believe that’s on its way. I already feel that I know more and am known more than I have been by any other person in my life. I know that is going to continue and I find that very exciting.” These comments built on his pre-interview thoughts about greater intimacy. John reaffirmed that he is very excited about what God has in store for them in the way of working for his Kingdom.

In the pre-interview, Julie said that what excites her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that as they continue to grow and heal and face up to all their old communication patterns, they will continue to experience a new level of intimacy that they’ve never known possible. Through keeping on God’s track, Julie sees that they are going to becoming stronger and stronger. She is looking forward to having all of their garbage worked out so that they can finally just be.

In the post-interview, Julie said that what excites her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that the more they are getting to know each other, the more they are growing and the more they are doing self-work, the better they are learning, the better they are meshing together and the better it is with their family: “There has been a large amount of growth with ourselves and our family.” Once they figure out communicating during conflict, Julie believes that they will both bring out the best in each other. Julie holds that they have the potential to be really strong together and create a really safe, happy environment in their house. Julie’s post-interview comments tie in with the Strengthening Marriage Workshop teaching on doing self-work and working on conflict.



With Burt and Bev in their pre-interview, Burt said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that he is looking forward to much more softness from both of them. He is also really looking forward to a balance in leadership between the two of us: “I want us both to be on equal footing in making decisions and in leading.”

In Burt’s post-interview, he said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that there are many super-positive things, such as the possibilities as to where we are going professionally. Burt is excited about what the Marriage Workshop was about in terms of how we deal with conflict and not being so quick to go to anger: “Oh really, is this what you are feeling? Well then I’m going to tell you everything in the world that is bothering me, even things that I didn’t know were bothering me.”

In Bev’s pre-interview, she said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage’s future are areas in her husband Burt that she has yet to experience and build her own strengths off of. Bev is excited by what strengthening in the area of handling conflict and emotional pain can create for their future. She is excited by what is possible with a brand new combination of skills, events and ideas, a whole new arsenal of armour that create a whole different experience every day: “It’s the power of this that is really exciting. Plus all the things that we have in our future...” Greater marital fulfillment and closeness excite Bev: “Every day being more fulfilled and closer is far more exciting than how much we might own.”

In Bev’s post-interview, she said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage’s future are a shared prosperity and the ability to withstand conflict with new tools and new ways to understand each other through conflict: “if we are always stuck and unable to get through the conflict, then there is a breakthrough that we are also missing out on. I like that with the new tools that

the future looks a lot more intuitive and closer. That will be exciting.” Bev in the post-interview highlighted the conflict management skills that were taught in the Strengthening Marriage workshop.

With Sean and Susan, in their pre-interview, Sean said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that he still has a dream for them: “...a dream of the way that I would like to live that includes you. That dream is somehow to be better, to be happier, to have my dreams come true without having to give you up.” Sean hopes for more, hopes for the realization of the kind of things that a person should / could have, for the potential of their marriage: “I don’t believe what my parents had to go through as the way it is supposed to be. I still have ideals for myself personally. That is selfish but I think that it includes other people, especially you (Susan.)” Sean said that he still want to invite Susan and himself to ‘come on out’: “We’re not bringing guns. We’re bringing roses.” (mutual laughter)

In the post-interview, Sean said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is the possibility of improving as a couple and staying married. Sean says that he has learned from the Strengthening Marriage Workshop to listen more to what Susan is truly saying to him instead of imagining what she is saying: “it is important to not overvalue my contribution versus what Susan has done. That’s easy to do.” Sean wants to make more time for Susan: “That’s what you are asking for...We always want something in return, and that is something that we will continue to talk about in the future. I realize that is something that I haven’t talked about. But that’s a good place to start.” Sean’s post-interview comments suggest that he had learnings during the Strengthening Marriage Workshop that have deepened his desire to listen and to be there more for Susan.

In the pre-interview, Susan said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that she is looking forward to some mutual projects: “We might someday travel

a bit. I have travelled. We both have our passports. We might go somewhere new. We are very good as soon as we get out of our own little world, the universe says 'hi'." Susan said that it always surprises her when things are tough in some ways and then good luck keeps coming at us: "we are very good luck as a couple... I think that someday the universe or the gods are going to say 'we keep giving you a good thing. When are you going to realize it, you know? We keep affirming that you guys are a good team.'" Susan noted as an example of working on a mutual project how much their friends enjoyed a wedding that they had planned: "our friends talked about for years because it was just so much fun, and people could be whoever they were, and eat where they wanted and what they wanted. They could dance. They could not. It was a really good time. So that kind of thing."

In her post-interview, Susan said that what excites her most about the possibilities for their marriage's future is what Sean said in his post-interview about listening more and being more present to her. Susan said that it would be lovely if there was a little more kindness and support between them and more laughs again. She is interested in learning more about doing the genogram as done in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop.

With Richard and Rose, in their pre-interview, Richard said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that they both believe that Jesus is coming soon. In his post-interview, Richard reaffirmed the second coming theme: "We are just really keen on being taken up by the Lord and being with the Lord. That is what we want to do." Richard expressed that they're just working at whatever the Lord tells them to do.

In Rose's pre-interview, she said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is that she loves the person that Richard is: "He is really imaginative. He is really

creative and he's fun. I enjoy being with Richard...I am starting to see his strengths now. God is opening all that up to me now. It's neat. Yeah. We enjoy being with each other."

In the post-interview, Rose agreed with Richard's second coming focus: "We have our mind set on eternity. So that's good. He says: seek first the Kingdom and everything will be added." Rose wants to dwell on where God wants to take them and his journey for them: "It says in the Word that he makes us his vessels so that he can use us." She wants to keep her eyes on Him and where he wants to take them, and not worrying too much about the small things. Both Rose and Richard have a similar way of integrating their sense of mission and marriage in light of the second coming and eternity.

With Lloyd and Linda, in their pre-interview, Lloyd said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is just being together. In his post-interview, Lloyd said that what excited him most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is just being together. His three-word answer was identical in both the pre and post-interview, the only response of the five couples that was identical, word for word.

In her pre-interview, Linda said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is spending time together, a virtual identical answer to Lloyd's answer.

In her post-interview, Linda said that what excited her most about the possibilities of their marriage in the future is their whole family, our granddaughter, and our son-in-law, and all being one, being family. The theme of family brought up by Linda reflects a family systems perspective as taught in the Strengthening Marriage workshop that marriage is more than just two individuals in isolation, but rather is part of a wider context of family relationships. Both Lloyd and Linda were people of few words who know clearly what they value in the restoration of their marriage after six years of divorce.

In the post-interview, I added a three-part seventh question about the Marriage Workshop itself:  
a) How was the workshop for you? b) How has the workshop strengthened your marriage? c) How could the workshop be strengthened? Responses to part a and b for John and Julie tended to overlap.

With John and Julie, John said that he knows a bit about Family Systems Theory and enjoyed the workshop because he found it is good to hear those things again and to see them applied in different ways. For John, there were some good 'aha' moments. He took notes all the times: "I would like to go back over each of those four sessions and kind of really take time to process, because when you are there, you can have information overload. Get it down on paper and go through and process it." The workshop, said John, provided him with some good material and questions for some self-evaluation, self-work, couple evaluation and couple work. John found it helpful that a couple of times in the workshop, he would have this 'sense of a feeling' and hear it spoken out by someone else: "You go 'Okay, I'm not crazy. Or actually that is a normal desire. I understand that.'" In that sense, it was also kind of relieving in some ways. I said: 'Okay, these are good desires or whatever. "' John found it helpful to realize that it is normal for there to be times when you want to be together and times when you want some space. John valued and named several teachings in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop, including self-evaluation / differentiation and the balancing of closeness with personal space. John, like others in the workshop, valued hearing others speak out in similar ways to his own personal thoughts and desires. John said that the workshop's benefit to their marriage is still a work in progress, because it has given them some food for thought and some things to reflect upon: "I know that over the summer, when it is a little quieter time and we can look at some of the marriage stuff, there is going to be some good seeds of conversation that we can talk about." Their final comment was "Thank you so much for sharing your selves and your marital wisdom with us in our 'marriage class' –we appreciated it very much."

Julie's response to how the workshop was for her was that she thought that the workshop got them both really thinking about their strengths: "There was a lot of good that came out of it." Julie said that the Strengthening Marriage Workshop got her really thinking: "Who are we as individuals here? Who am I as an individual and what am I bringing to this marriage? How are we similar and different? It sounds commonsense. I haven't reflected on that as much as I should have. That was helpful to me to start getting that kind of mindset. I am still thinking about it and still processing a lot of this stuff. That was helpful for me." Julie said that it definitely has planted some seeds: "I definitely need time to think about it all, because I said it was a lot, but I think that it will continue to grow because it has been planted and it is all in the back of my head now, and I am starting to be more aware of things in our marriage. So, yeah, I think that its benefits will continue past the four weeks." Julie appreciated hearing the other people talk and she would go "I'm not the only one." It was encouraging for Julie to hear that it is okay to be in conflict, to be arguing and sorting stuff out: "We are trying to figure out how to communicate. It doesn't always go well. It's encouraging to think 'Okay, we're probably pretty normal. And it's okay.'" Julie went on to say that is nice to know that she can still be herself and feed into the things that she needs: "I don't have to totally absorb into a house or a home or a family or anything. So that got me thinking too." Julie appreciated some of the Strengthening Marriage teachings such as looking at strengths, self-examination, looking at similarities and difference, the normalcy of marital conflict, being herself, self-defining rather than emotional fusing and giving up self.

As to how the Workshop could be strengthened, John said that after presenting the theory, he would appreciate more about the how: "Now here is how you take this theory home and apply it in your relationship." John's learning style is that he likes having notes. Because he asked for notes, I began supplying after the first session a one-page summary of that session's teaching: "There was almost a

sense of angst, because I want to get the information done right, and I want to get it down right and organized, to have it an outline like that first where it is already organized.” John asked that I give him the summary before I taught the session which I was happy to do: “Then I have the main thing, and as certain things come up, certain words and senses, I can just write it down underneath. Having that in advance was very, very helpful to me. I don’t know if it would have been to other people or not.” For the other couples, I handed out the one-page summary at the end of each session. John said that it would have been great to have had a fifth class where the fifth one is purely a social one.

As for how the Workshop could be strengthened, Julie suggested that maybe four weeks is too short: “Because I had no idea what Family Systems Theory was, I found that there was a lot of new information. At a certain point, I would just stop learning. I found that it was extremely helpful, but there was too much new stuff, so it made me...at a certain point, there was so much new information that I couldn’t take any more. Julie said that the workshop could easily have gone double that time or at least two more classes, and put all that information in a longer time. She would also like to have seen more practical application to go with the theory to help me understand the terms better. Julie recommended taking more breaks as a way to getting people to hash it out together and learn better: “When we took the time to have breaks and to put the learning into practice, that really help solidify it in me, and that was really helpful as well.” She found that the notes were helpful to follow along together. Julie said, “Despite all that, I think that it was still a very good experience.” She wished that we were meeting regularly instead of just the four weeks.

With Burt and Bev, Burt said that for him, the workshop was great: “We loved it. I am sad that it is over.” Using the analogy of baseball, he said that the workshop helped keep him in the game, to be good at what you are doing in a marriage: “When you are practicing being married, as opposed to just

coasting like we do every day, making dinner, fetching the kids and that, it keeps you in the game.”

Jerry appreciated the co-leadership of the workshop by a husband and wife couple, especially with Janice’s ability to set boundaries: “My favorite one was when you would say ‘Janice, would you like to share about that? ...and she would say ‘no’.” (laughter) And then you wouldn’t push, because if you had pushed and made her, it would have been so forced. I really enjoyed that she could say ‘no’ and that was it.”

When asked how the workshop was for her, Bev said that she found that the workshop was easy to attend: “I liked how close to our home it was. It was community-based.” She found it very relaxing: “It was a nice break from our lives.” Bev said that the workshop was brilliantly executed: “You both did tremendous jobs, and the information was easy to understand and relevant.” She loved the gift book *Family Ties that Bind*: “It is a really good read. I really enjoyed that.” Bev said that Ed and Janice’s commitment to marriage renewal came across throughout the entire workshop: “You really did a huge service to the community to offer it...You did an incredible job.” With the workshop having no charge, which Bev said was awesome, she said that she found it very affordable. (laughter). Not only Bev but her husband Burt and her children looked forward to it: “Our kids looked forward to it. They were very supportive. It was very, very positive.” Bev found the workshop very entertaining: “I liked ‘Pirate Day’. It was good when Ed showed up as a pirate.” Bev valued the co-leading of the workshop by a husband and wife couple: “I enjoyed Janice. I wouldn’t drop Janice from the team. (laughter) She is just great. I loved the way she explained family dynamics. She was a great complement.” Bev particularly appreciated that Ed and Janice had such a nice and easy way in Janice had the option to say ‘no’ to Ed’s request for Janice to share: (laughter) “It was almost comical. That was really entertaining. So I think that she was elemental. She was really lovely.” Their final comment was “Thank you so much for your wisdom, generous sharing and kindness.”



As to how has the Marriage workshop strengthened their marriage, Burt said that they learned in the workshop different ways of responding to conflict, reasons why we have traditionally responded to conflict, and ways of looking at the backgrounds and origins of how we responded to conflict.

As to how the workshop has strengthened their marriage, Bev said that it has given them very interesting insights into the way that things are and why they are that way. “When you don’t have those insights, you are busy feeling bad about yourself: ‘Oh, why do I do this? This is so terrible. I am such a bad person.’” Bev found it so enlightening and soothing to look at patterns and to see where things are coming from: “That gave me greater peace and insight into my background with my mother, and that she is just who she is because of her own background, and how unfortunate that is for her.” She said that it was really nice, and inspiring to learn so many things that are great takeaways that they can continue to meditate on, incorporate and better themselves with: “My biggest single takeaway would be to approach conflict like a scientist, just taking in the facts, not taking anything personally but just taking in the facts.” Bev found it so relevant to discover how with family systems, we have the hard-wiring to repeat certain things: “I have been very fascinated in sharing that even with our children. They have been saying ‘What is this course you are going to? And what is that book about?’ I have said to them ‘you should read this too, because as you move on in your life, you are creating your own family systems based on the ones you had before, and just awareness creates a different way of being. You can create something totally different.’” Their final comment was “We both grew closer as a result of your work with us.”

As to how could the workshop be strengthened, Burt after a long pause said: “I don’t know. I really enjoyed the workshop.” Burt went on to say that while he knows that for people to be comfortable, they couldn’t feel obligated to share. But he found it really powerful when people shared. The only thing that Burt would have wanted more of was even more sharing: “So for me, if sharing was a

richer component, I think that would have been beneficial for me. Sometimes when a person shares, I go 'Totally. I get that.'" Burt recommended additional longer breaks as a way of allowed them to get to know the other participants better: "There was one couple that we never got to interact with because the breaks were so short."

As to how the workshop can be strengthened, Bev's two-word answer was "Serve vegetables." Bev went on to say that the food was so tempting: "It was really difficult. I broke down a few times. I found that it was very generous. You and your wife really hosted a great event, and worked very hard to do it, but serve vegetables. That would be awesome. It's just a little oversight. We were just grateful anyway." Bev also said that the workshop could be strengthened by having a less abrupt ending: "It would have been nice to have a recap...a quick overview: 'Okay, we have done these four weeks. This is where we journeyed through, and did anyone have any questions about any of these phases?'" Bev suggested that the recap could include the question: "What was your biggest takeaway?" Another way to strengthen the workshop, said Bev, was to have twice as many times for personal work for the couples: "I liked the personal work for us to do together. Good stuff came out of those conversations." Bev suggested adding another half hour to the weekly sessions to increase the socialization: "You could have stretched it out a little longer, and asked more of people, and given more in that interpersonal stuff." She recommended offering a Phase 2 to the Marriage Workshop which they would like to attend. If the workshop was to be held again, Bev said that it would be nice to have a different space because we probably want to have more couples there. (Burt said that it was the perfect space for that size of group.)

With Sean and Susan, Sean said regarding the workshop that he felt really good, extremely good, that they were going to something that was bringing fresh-air vents into their lives. Sean said that it was

a good thing that the workshop was abridged, condensed and abbreviated: “Focused is a good word.” Sean affirmed the value of the husband and wife co-leadership of the Marriage Workshop: “Janice is a real pistol. She’s awesome. She really is. She’s a real match for you. (laughter)” Sean affirmed the cross-generational mix of those attending the workshop: “We enjoy meeting people at different stages in our life.”

When asked how the workshop was for her, Susan said that as busy people scrambling around, it felt like an easy thing to get to and go to for both of them. It felt good, said Susan, to be around fine people. Few of their married friends, said Susan, are truly happy and reflective: “it was very pleasant being with people who wanted good marriages, who are training.” Susan said that the workshop teaching was very interesting: “...some of which I had thought about already, some of which I didn’t, some of which I didn’t agree with, but that was okay.” The workshop for Susan was a good-hearted and good experience, full of dignity for everybody: “Respect and dignity was very strong, including with each other. That was a good lesson to see that every week for four weeks. Very pleasant.” Similar to Sean, Susan affirmed the husband and wife co-leadership of the Marriage Workshop: “You and your wife are frank and open...Janice’s eyes sparkle. They do. You melt with the look of her eyes. Magnetic. She doesn’t stage it. It’s just the way she expresses her self. She is a real cutie pie, that wife of yours.”

As to how the Workshop strengthened their marriage, Sean said that the workshop flipped everything on its head: “It was ‘oh great, I don’t have to leave. I don’t have to break the marriage up just to get refocused regarding the anxiety that I have been feeling.” He remembers feeling desperately that maybe this would help change the marriage dynamic. He learned from the Marriage Workshop the importance of effort: “I saw how much effort you guys (Ed and Janice) put into this, preparing it, talking back and forth, showing us the examples of behaviour like ‘don’t worry. It’s okay. It’s okay to say things.

It's okay to tell stories. It's okay to show them what the bathroom looks like. It's okay." Sean learned through the workshop the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage: "It was also the sense how important this workshop was to you to us. The last session which was a bit of a ringer and caused all kind of ears go up which I noticed...what it got to me was how important this was to you...re-declaring a sense of sacrament. I thought about that. That's what it is. It's a sacrament. It's sacred." Using the analogy of a car, Sean said that he learned that their marriage is not disposable: "You can throw it away. It's not disposable. You can repair it. You can replace parts. You can repaint it but it is still the same car that you bought when you were a kid. And you're still driving it..." Sean agreed that the workshop is a good precursor and introduction towards marriage counseling: "It is a bit like the smell of pollen to a bee, like people are naturally attracted to something like this because they understand the need. They want that. So I felt that for us as well." Through the workshop, Sean said that he had made a connection with people and with the workshop leaders: "Whatever we choose to do with it, it's something that we didn't have before. I feel better for it." Taking the workshop, said Sean, took a sense of desperation out of his thinking, the attitude that he "can't figure it out. No one else is going to do it. So it's all going to go down." Sean said that they are much better now knowing that there are ways that they can deal with things, that they are not relying on their meager resources, and on trying to pry secrets out of each other that they don't want to do.

As to how the workshop strengthened their marriage, Susan said that they always felt good afterwards: "We didn't do a lot of talking about individual pieces except we both thought that it was very interesting." Susan gave more information about her experience of the workshop, and less information about how it strengthened their marriage.

Regarding how the workshop can be better, Sean recommended doing the workshop again and again and again and see what happens.

Regarding how the workshop can be better, Susan said that she could do with renewal exercises. She recommended a follow-up maybe in a month to see if things are the same or not. She also suggested meeting once a month or so to talk about being families and marriages. Susan said that the topics covered in the workshop were so huge that she had more thoughts getting home: "You had to do so many ideas." She said that she would appreciate little workshops on some of the individual topics.

With Richard and Rose, Richard said regarding the workshop that he liked the fellowship with the other people: "They were all on the same journey." He liked how the workshop was formatted: "How you structured it was good, and the way you paced it was good, and the length of it was good." For Richard, there was a little too much theory.

When asked how the workshop was for her, Rose said that it was a little too theoretical: "I understand that a lot of people are not spiritually inclined yet. So that would work for them. God works things in their time...I like the simplistic viewpoint of the Bible."

Regarding how the workshop strengthened their marriage, Richard said that the workshop gave them some ideas, a framework for thinking about their marriage: "This room had a framework in its being built. Without the right framework, you would not be able to conduct a business or run the fish shop or whatever. You helped us with the structure of the marriage. It is up to us to put the furniture in."

Regarding how the workshop strengthened their marriage, Rose said that she really liked focusing on their strengths: "Our differences can become our strengths as a team. I really loved that."

As to how the workshop could be strengthened, Richard said that it could be less theoretical: "I'm quite simplistic in my outlook."

As to how the workshop could be strengthened, Rose said that communicating their feelings is very important. She questioned whether the workshop teaching about not pursuing and overfunctioning was workable: "I don't know if it would have worked for me to leave Richard alone and wait for him to call me." Both Rose and Richard are very practical, hands-on people who struggled with the theoretical nature of Family Systems Theory.

With Lloyd and Linda, Lloyd said regarding the workshop that it was good because it helped remind him how important marriage is: "It's good to learn things about it, how to make it better."

When asked how the workshop was for her, Linda said that she enjoyed it: "It was nice to hear people's perspective on things. It was good. I learned a lot."

Regarding how the workshop strengthened their marriage, Lloyd said that it was helpful in the area of conflict, how to make it better and not make it worse.

Regarding how the workshop strengthened their marriage, Linda said it gave her a lot of little reminders of the things that she might be doing. She learned about handling conflict and that sometimes things are not really that important.

As to how the workshop could be strengthened, Linda said that it could be longer: "The people that I talked to in the workshop really enjoyed it. They really thought that it was helpful, but they all complained that it was too short. It ended too quickly. They wanted more sessions over more weeks." Steve said that it would be good to have a follow-up down the road some time.

As to how the workshop could be strengthened, Linda recommended more sessions but not longer sessions because a lot of people have to work.

ix) **New Features in the Post-interview research data**

Question 1a) What attracted you to your spouse?

- 1) godliness I
- 2) He could see and sense her faith. I
- 3) love for the Lord. I
- 4) The relativity of what they were experiencing in life at that time: the disappointment of losing a marriage, having the children, expecting more from your marriage, expecting more of himself, and being able to keep their family together. I
- 5) The chemistry which goes back to their backgrounds, having gone through the same thing at the same time, being able to express themselves with each other, to open right up with each other, and see what each of them had to offer, and what they were lacking too. I
- 6) her strength, her being a match for him, her being able to stand up to him, and her independence. I
- 7) Their being different, Canadian and very fresh I
- 8) She is a classic woman in a lot of ways. I
- 9) sense of humour I
- 10) creativity I
- 11) kindness I
- 12) her demeanor, the look about her, the way she is. I
- 13) Her future spouse loved her. I

Question 1b) What keeps your marriage alive?

- 1) Spending time together doing things. II
- 2) Best friend II
- 3) That her spouse loves her. I
- 4) Laughing I
- 5) Getting times (breaks) from the kids every week. I
- 6) Determination, in particular his wife's determination for success in all aspects of life and whatever is needed to make that happen. I
- 7) Where they are, they are in the same place, having the same challenges before they met, and now having the same challenges together, turning those challenges into possibilities. I
- 8) They both share a passion for family. Coming from a large family, she needed a family, and he gave her his family. She remembers him saying: 'You can cook like crazy and you love family. You've got me on both points.' I
- 9) Hadn't lost the faith that getting married was a right decision. I
- 10) maybe it was stubbornness. I
- 11) they have a history together. I
- 12) their mutual commitment to evangelism. I
- 13) Their marriage is an exciting journey with different valleys and hills. I
- 14) As long as they keep our eyes on Jesus, they know that everything will work for the good. I
- 15) Having the Lord as their centre, their love for the Lord and reading the Word together. I
- 16) Going through this Strengthening Marriage workshop where they learned a lot. I

Question 2) What would you see as your marriage's strengths?

- 1) They have common goals and common values. II



- 2) They have a similar outlook on life. I
- 3) The brighter and more vivid colour in their marital vision and the way they live life. I
- 4) They are both heading in the same direction. I
- 5) They mostly parent the same way. I
- 6) Knowing each other's strengths as talented capable people. II
- 7) Trying not to take charge of things that one's spouse could do better. I
- 8) Their ability to see positive and optimistic outcomes despite negative circumstances. I
- 9) The strength of their children even with their stresses. I
- 10) They enjoy life together. I
- 11) They create ritual and excitement and passion in everyday mundane things. I
- 12) Their history together. I
- 13) They have woven a nest (a structure) around themselves, and they are aware of it. It contains all of who they are with each other. I
- 14) A sense of mystery between them. I
- 15) There is essential communication possible under any conditions. I
- 16) They give each other a lot of room. I
- 17) Their moral code that centers around family, commitment and the Word of God. I

18) Their focus on prayer. II

19) Trusting each other. I

Question 3: What stands out for you in your marriage as its most important turning points / times of change?

- 1) When they hit rock bottom before making a shift. II
- 2) death of family members. I
- 3) adapting to crisis situations by turning it on its ear and basically saying "Ah, that's okay." I
- 4) Their decision to get married. I
- 5) Facing serious health issues. II
- 6) The realization that it's getting harder to stay married and deal with things as they change. I
- 7) When they were both spent forces and the Lord came and cemented them. I
- 8) The spouse is becoming more accepting of their personality type. I
- 9) The Marriage Workshop concept of celebrating our difference because now they can accept their spouse for whom they are. I
- 10) Going into recovery and their life was changed. I
- 11) Taking the marriage workshop was a turning point in helping them look at their strengths to bring them closer: "It is starting to happen. I can see it happening now." I
- 12) Tragically losing her dad and great aunt while divorced from her husband. I
- 13) Being together for ten years and then married when she was close to giving birth. I
- 14) Being married three times to her husband. I

Question 4: How have you best dealt with conflict and change in your marriage over (the year) or years?

What are ways to grow in that area?"

- 1) When one or both stepped outside the pattern the times of their normal response, causing them to differentiate from their common patterns: "That kind of breaks that cycle." I
- 2) They are starting to grow in the area of conflict. I
- 3) They are starting to think like a scientist, to look at it from an outside perspective, become detached and observe what is going on. I
- 4) Trying to be objective. I
- 5) They are beginning to recognize triggers and things like that, what would cause certain reactions. I
- 6) They are also starting to realize their own reactions, and what might be causing them as well. I
- 7) They are looking at things from a slightly different point of view and trying to take it from there. I
- 8) Doing our own introspective work. I
- 9) They have looked for a way that would be softer: "we say: 'Okay, we are not soft with this. How can we be softer?'" I
- 10) Having respect for each other. I
- 11) Self-awareness which will help with our life of conflict. I
- 12) Being there in the moment of what is occurring for them. I
- 13) This person learned about the amygdala part of the brain. I

- 14) This person learned about the differentiation between the phases of upset and being more aware of those. I
- 15) Their spouse has always surprised them with things that they don't know. I
- 16) They are trying to give up on trying to pretend that they know, and see if they can just live with it. I
- 17) They made a connection with themselves during the marriage workshop which has brought everything into focus in a way that has been very, very valuable, in refocusing and reexamination on a constant basis. I
- 18) This refocusing has lessened the sense of desperation, hopelessness and aloneness that was growing in him. I
- 19) They have backed off from 'going to the wall' and that has calmed things down quite a bit. II
- 20) Counting to ten. I
- 21) Adopting fantasy roles and names that helped them make it through stress times. I
- 22) They might even do something about what they are talking about without talking again. I
- 23) They just come back but more content inside of themselves. I
- 24) They are thinking less about themselves and more about the Lord and more about other people, particularly their spouse and other people. I
- 25) They are being sanctified. II
- 26) Dying daily to self. I
- 27) Prayer and reading the bible. I

28) Asking God to heal their wounds and their spouse's wounds. I

29) Expressing how they were feeling. I

30) Journaling. I

Question 5a: What is your family's pattern in dealing with emotional pain?

1) They never saw their family deal with conflict. I

2) There were mood swings by the stepmother with the father being patient to a point. I

3) Their family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain was to have a really heated discussion about it for about an hour, point fingers outside of the family, and then put it to rest and not address it any more... with a martini. I

4) It was very much a 'duck and cover' lifestyle. I

5) Running away and leaving. I

6) Everything was fake and real at the same time. I

7) Sullenness and holding onto grudges. I

8) Anger from the father and desperation from the mother. I

9) Fighting about conflict. I

10) They would fuse up with each other and argue and fight. I

11) Living in a hard-driving, workaholic / alcoholic family, they were either hurt emotionally or hurt physically. I

12) Being whipped to blackout. I

13) Secret drinking. I

14) The dad and stepdad wouldn't deal with emotional pain. I

15) Their dad used to run away and leave them. I

- 16) Their mom would play the victim. I
- 17) Their family's pattern of dealing with emotional pain is revenge.

Question 5b: How have you best avoided cutting off emotionally in your marriage?

- 1) They tended to polarize but when one or both came closer to the middle, then it tended to avoid those extremes. I
- 2) They are learning how to not cut off emotionally. I
- 3) They developed through the Strengthening Marriage Workshop a greater awareness of how emotional cutoff functions in their marriage, and how to reduce its impact. I
- 4) Analyzing the lead up to the cutting off. I
- 5) One has to be a scientist as they talked about in the Workshop. I
- 6) They are learning how not to be emotionally reactive. I
- 7) Turning a deaf ear to what's being said and to try to reel in one's own anger and frustration and what one's feeling, and not voice it like there's no consequence to it. I
- 8) Not saying the first thing that comes to one's mind. I
- 9) Not listening to anything that one is hearing as being anything but the frustration of the moment. I
- 10) Sometimes leaving and giving things time to cool and dry out. I
- 11) Sharing with their spouse what they are scared and upset about at the moment. II
- 12) Putting it on the table now, whereas before one wouldn't do that. I
- 13) Fighting. I
- 14) Rescuing. I
- 15) Spending time alone. I
- 16) Humour brings perspective. I
- 17) Expressing one's feelings. I

- 18) God is breaking the chains. |
- 19) God is healing the wounds from the past. |
- 20) Showing respect. |

Question 6: What excites you most about the possibilities of your marriage in the future?

- 1) They know more and am known more than they have been by any other person in their life. They know that is going to continue and find that very exciting. |
- 2) The more they are getting to know each other, the more they are growing and the more they are doing self-work, the better they are learning, the better they are meshing together and the better it is with their family. |
- 3) There has been a large amount of growth with themselves and their family. |
- 4) There are many super-positive things, such as the possibilities as to where they are going professionally. |
- 5) Shared prosperity. |
- 6) They have the potential to be really strong together and create a really safe, happy environment in their house. |
- 7) Once they figure out communicating during conflict, they will both bring out the best in each other. |
- 8) There is an excitement about what the Marriage Workshop was about in terms of how they deal with conflict and not being so quick to go to anger. |
- 9) The ability to withstand conflict with new tools and new ways to understand each other through conflict. |
- 10) With the new tools, the future looks a lot more intuitive and closer. |
- 11) The possibility of improving as a couple and staying married. |
- 12) Listening more to what one's spouse is truly saying to them instead of imagining what they are saying. |
- 13) Making more time for one's spouse. |

- 14) What their spouse said in the Strengthening Marriage post-interview about listening more and being more present to their spouse. I
- 15) It would be lovely if there was a little more kindness and support between them and more laughs again. I
- 16) Interested in learning more about doing the genogram as done in the Strengthening Marriage Workshop. I
- 17) They're just working at whatever the Lord tells them to do. I
- 18) Having their minds set on eternity and seeking first God's Kingdom. I
- 19) Dwell on where God wants to take them and his journey for them. I
- 20) Keeping their eyes on God and where he wants to take them, and not worrying too much about the small things. I
- 21) Their whole family, their granddaughter, and their son-in-law, all being one, being family. I

Question 7a) How was the workshop for you?

- 1) There were some good 'aha' moments. I
- 2) Taking notes all the time to cope with information overload. I
- 3) Some good material and questions for some self-evaluation, self-work, couple evaluation and couple work. I
- 4) The information taught in the workshop was easy to understand and relevant. I
- 5) The gift book *Family Ties that Bind* was a really good read.
- 6) A couple of times in the workshop, one would have this 'sense of a feeling' and hear it spoken out by someone else, normalizing one's experience. II
- 7) The workshop was great: "We loved it. I am sad that it is over." I
- 8) "I really enjoyed the workshop." I
- 9) It felt really good, extremely good, that they were going to something that was bringing fresh-air vents into their lives. I



- 10) The Marriage Workshop was good because it helped remind them how important marriage is. I
- 11) It was good to learn things about marriage, how to make it better. I
- 12) One enjoyed it: "It was nice to hear people's perspective on things. It was good. I learned a lot." I
- 13) It was a good thing that the workshop was abridged, condensed and abbreviated: "Focused is a good word." I
- 14) The workshop was brilliantly executed: "You both did tremendous jobs." I
- 15) The workshop was a good-hearted and good experience, full of dignity for everybody: "Respect and dignity was very strong, including with each other." I
- 16) The workshop teaching was very interesting: "...some of which I had thought about already, some of which I didn't, some of which I didn't agree with, but that was okay."
- 17) The workshop was very relaxing: "It was a nice break from our lives." I
- 18) The workshop was very entertaining: "I liked 'Pirate Day'. It was good when Ed showed up as a pirate." I
- 19) The workshop helped keep one in the game, to be good at what one is doing in a marriage. I
- 20) The workshop gave them some ideas, a framework for thinking about their marriage: "You helped us with the structure of the marriage. It is up to us to put the furniture in."
- 21) One liked focusing on their strengths: "Our differences can become our strengths as a team. I really loved that." I
- 22) "Thank you so much for your wisdom, generous sharing and kindness." I
- 23) The leadership couple's commitment to marriage renewal came across throughout the entire workshop: "You really did a huge service to the community to offer it...You did an incredible job." I
- 24) The co-leadership of the workshop by a husband and wife couple was appreciated IIII
- 25) You and your wife are frank and open. I
- 26) Janice's ability to set boundaries and say 'no' was appreciated. II
- 27) "Janice's eyes sparkle. They do. You melt with the look of her eyes. Magnetic. She doesn't stage it. It's just the way she expresses her self. She is a real cutie pie, that wife of yours." I

- 28) One loved the way that Janice explained family dynamics: "She was a great complement." I
- 29) The workshop was easy to attend: "I liked how close to our home it was. It was community-based." I
- 30) As busy people scrambling around, it felt like an easy thing to get to and go to for both of them. I
- 31) With the workshop having no charge, which was awesome, one found it very affordable. (laughter) I
- 32) Not only the couple but also their children looked forward to the workshop: "Our kids looked forward to it. They were very supportive. It was very, very positive."
- 33) It was really powerful when people shared. I
- 34) They enjoyed meeting people at different stages in their lives. I
- 35) It felt good to be around fine people: "it was very pleasant being with people who wanted good marriages, who are training."
- 36) One liked the fellowship with the other people: "They were all on the same journey." I
- 37) One liked how the workshop was formatted: "How you structured it was good, and the way you paced it was good, and the length of it was good." I
- 38) The workshop was a little too theoretical. II

Question 7b) How has the workshop strengthened your marriage?

- 1) The Marriage Workshop definitely has planted some seeds. I
- 2) The Marriage workshop got them both really thinking about their strengths. I
- 3) The Marriage Workshop got one thinking: Who are we as individuals here? Who am I as an individual and what am I bringing to this marriage? How are we similar and different? I
- 4) The Marriage workshop has given them very interesting insights into the way that things are and why they are that way. I
- 5) They always felt good afterwards: "We didn't do a lot of talking about individual pieces except we both thought that it was very interesting." I

- 6) It was so enlightening and soothing to look at patterns and to see where things are coming from. I
- 7) It was really nice, and inspiring to learn so many things that are great takeaways that they can continue to meditate on, incorporate and better themselves with. I
- 8) As one moves on in one's life, one is creating their own family systems based on the ones one had before, and just awareness creates a different way of being: "You can create something totally different."
- 9) It gave one greater peace and insight into one's background with one's mother, and that she is just who she is because of her own background. I
- 10) It was so relevant to discover how with family systems, one has the hard-wiring to repeat certain things. I
- 11) Several teachings in the Marriage Workshop were valuable, including self-evaluation / differentiation and the balancing of closeness with personal space. I
- 12) It was helpful to realize that it is normal for there to be times when you want to be together and times when you want some space.
- 13) It is nice to know that one can still be themselves and feed into the things that one needs: "I don't have to totally absorb into a house or a home or a family or anything." I
- 14) One's biggest single takeaway would be to approach conflict like a scientist, just taking in the facts, not taking anything personally but just taking in the facts." I
- 15) It was encouraging to hear that it's OK to be in conflict, to be arguing and sorting stuff out. I
- 16) They learned in the workshop different ways of responding to conflict, reasons why we have traditionally responded to conflict, and ways of looking at the backgrounds and origins of how we responded to conflict. III
- 17) One learned that sometimes things are not really that important. I
- 18) "We both grew closer as a result of your work with us." I
- 19) The Marriage workshop flipped everything on its head: "It was 'oh great, I don't have to leave. I don't have to break the marriage up just to get refocused regarding the anxiety that I have been feeling." I
- 20) The Marriage Workshop gave one a lot of little reminders of the things that one might be doing. I

- 21) The Marriage workshop reduced the sense of marital desperation. I
- 22) One learned from the Marriage Workshop the importance of effort: "I saw how much effort you guys (Ed and Janice) put into this, preparing it, talking back and forth, showing us the examples of behaviour like 'don't worry. It's okay. It's okay to say things. It's okay to tell stories. It's okay to show them what the bathroom looks like. It's okay.'" I
- 23) One learned through the Marriage workshop the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage: "It was also the sense how important this workshop was to you to us. The last session which was a bit of a ringer and caused all kind of ears go up which I noticed...what it got to me was how important this was to you...re-declaring a sense of sacrament. I thought about that. That's what it is. It's a sacrament. It's sacred." I
- 24) Using the analogy of a car, one learned that their marriage is not disposable: "You can throw it away. It's not disposable. You can repair it. You can replace parts. You can repaint it but it is still the same car that you bought when you were a kid. And you're still driving it..." I
- 25) The workshop is a good precursor and introduction towards marriage counseling: "It is a bit like the smell of pollen to a bee, like people are naturally attracted to something like this because they understand the need." I
- 26) Through the workshop, one made a connection with people and with the workshop leaders: "Whatever we choose to do with it, it's something that we didn't have before. I feel better for it." I
- 27) They are much better now knowing that there are ways that they can deal with things, that they are not relying on their meager resources, and on trying to pry secrets out of each other that they don't want to do. I

Question 7c) How could the workshop be strengthened?

- 1) After presenting the theory, one would appreciate more about how to take this theory home and apply it in their relationship. II
- 2) One-sheet summary notes for each of the four sessions. II
- 3) Having a fifth session that was purely social. I
- 4) At least two more sessions. I
- 5) Meeting regularly instead of just the four weeks. I

- 6) Doubling the time. I
- 7) Adding another half hour to the weekly sessions to increase the socialization. I
- 8) Taking more longer breaks as a way to getting people to hash it out together and learn better. II
- 9) Have twice as many times for personal work for the couples. I
- 10) Even more sharing by the couples. I
- 11) Serve vegetables. I
- 12) Communicating their feelings is very important.
- 13) One questioned whether the workshop teaching about not pursuing and overfunctioning was workable. I
- 14) Having a less abrupt ending: "It would have been nice to have a recap...a quick overview" I
- 15) The recap could include the question: "What was your biggest takeaway?" I
- 16) Do the workshop again and again and again and see what happens. I
- 17) Have Marriage renewal exercises. I
- 18) Little workshops on some of the individual topics. I
- 19) A follow-up session maybe in a month to see if things are the same or not. I
- 20) Offering a Phase 2 to the Marriage Workshop which they would like to attend. I
- 21) It would be nice to have a different space because they probably want to have more couples there. I
- 22) It was the perfect space for that size of group. I

x) Glossary of Terms used in Family Systems Theory

Anxiety: The fear of a real or imagined threat which brings heightened reactivity. It is a physiological arousal preparatory to action to preserve the safety of the individual. Anxiety can be acute and short term or chronic and long term, even crossing the generations in a family system. As the most contagious emotion, it is the crucial issue.

Basic self: The core self rooted in guiding principles, goals, vision and values. It is the inner guidance system, the 'person of the person'. This contrasts with the pseudo or functional self which gives away self, lacks healthy boundaries and is emotionally fused to others.

Boundaries: Delineations between people and between systems. Boundaries, when clear and permeable, are an expression of self-differentiation, permitting people to be close without emotional fusion. Rigid boundaries are an expression of anxiety and unresolved emotional attachment.

Bowen theory (or "family systems theory"): A theory developed by Murray Bowen which involved eight interlocking concepts for understanding systemic biological patterns. It is inherently multigenerational, seeing the present as rooted in past family relationships, in one's family of origin. Bowen Theory involves systemic thinking in contrast to a linear cause-and-effect approach. It sees the family as an emotional unit, a network of interlocking relationships.

Cutoff (or "emotional cutoff"): Bowen defined his last Family Systems Theory concept 'emotional cutoff' as the process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family. It primarily describes how people disconnect from their past in order to begin their lives in the current generation. Emotional Cutoff is the extreme form of unresolved emotional distance. As an expression of closeness-anxiety, it is the polar opposite of emotional fusion. Cutoffs are either primary when directly related to one's parents, or secondary, indirect, and inherited when based on interlocking triangles and on the multigenerational emotional process which can be traced back to the primary parental cutoff. In light of Bowen's use of the phrase "separation of people from each other" to describe cutoff, the term 'cutoff' can be applied to other relationships than just the parent-child relationship.

Detriangulate: the process of emotional detachment from family triangles, while remaining calmly present, so as not to be emotionally fused and colluded with other members of a triangle.

Differentiation (or "differentiation of self" or "self-differentiation" or "individuation"): It is the foundation and cornerstone concept of Family Systems Theory. Differentiation involves distinguishing between the thinking, feeling, and emotional systems. Bowen saw differentiation as equivalent to identity and individuality. It is the use of the cognitive, the neo-cortex, to control the instinctual, the

amygdala. As the antidote to emotional cutoff, differentiation is a lifelong process rather than a completed state.

Emotions: Bowen used the term *emotion* as synonymous with instinct rather than with feelings. Instinct is seen biologically rather than psychoanalytically. He acknowledged that this was a minority position. Such automatic responses involved the fight, flight or freeze reactions that are connected to the amygdala part of the brain.

Emotional Fusion: It involves a loss of self and a lack of boundaries in relationships. Emotion and reason merge in a way that reduces thoughtfulness and choice. Togetherness swallows individuality and increases anxiety.

Family emotional processes (or “nuclear family emotional processes”): Multigenerational emotional patterns such as 1) emotional distance 2) symptoms in one’s spouse or family 3) significant marital and / or family conflict 4) projection of anxiety onto one’s children.

Family projection process: The projection of anxiety and conflict onto other family members, particularly in a multigenerational manner. Such projection reduces the ability of the child to self-differentiate and relate to one’s future spouse and family. Such a pattern is closely involved with blaming and scapegoating others as the IP- (Identified Person Negative).

Family of Origin: One’s family background in which a person was either born or adopted. Work on one’s family of origin is key to breakthrough in self-differentiation, even more so than with personal counseling. The use of the Genogram is invaluable in family of origin exploration.

Genogram: A multigenerational map that one draws to more objectively show the emotional processes and patterns of one’s family, including emotional cutoff, distance, conflict, emotional fusion, and triangling.

Homeostasis: The polarized rejection of change and the mandating of 'business as usual' in an emotional family system. Sameness and apparent security are reactively chosen over transformation and the embracing of a thoughtful new future. This fear of upsetting systemic equilibrium brings a loss of flexibility, curiosity, and growth. Homeostatic 'stuckness' is usually multigenerational in nature and impact, resulting in both emotional fusion and cutoff.

Identified person or patient (or "I.P."): In family emotional systems and triangles, there is often a person who is initially pedestalized and treated as the IP positive rescuer. Another person, perhaps the same person in another relationship phase, will be treated as the IP negative, the outsider, the scapegoat and the alleged cause of the family anxiety. Having Identified People (I.P.) is a common way to avoid dealing with our own anxiety and unwillingness to change.

Marital Conflict: a patterned way of reacting to anxious emotional fusion. Projection of blame is common. Chronic marital conflict is that which lasts two years or longer on one or numerous issues. Bowen describes marital conflict as involving an intense amount of emotional energy where neither spouse gives in to the other on major issues.<sup>415</sup> Conflict can bring greater marital intimacy and self-differentiation when differences are embraced and appreciated.

Morphogenesis: The process of transformation within a family emotional system by which there is lasting rather than recycled temporary change. This brings about a preferred future based on one's self-defined vision, values and goals. Morphogenesis is the opposite of rigid homeostasis and stuckness.

Multigenerational transmission process: This is the focus of family systems theory coaching, rather than concentrating on presenting issues or linear causes. Becoming more aware of one's family of origin patterns allows people to objectively learn about where they have come from generationally and where they are potentially heading.

Over-functioning: Doing too much in a way that brings emotional fusion with others, loss of self, and a reduction of others' functioning. Overfunctioning involves an unhealthy over-responsibility for and rescuing of others.

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<sup>415</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, p. 204.



Pseudo-self (or “functional self”): The pretend self that is highly shaped by other’s expectation and by anxious reactivity. During times of stress, it either disappears into fused togetherness or becomes rigidly reactive. The pseudo-self is the imitation of the core or solid self.

Reactivity: Homeostatic emotional patterns which develop when anxiety and conflict are high.

Reactivity, in contrast to responsiveness, expresses the instinctive nature of the amygdala and lacks the thoughtful contribution of the neo-cortex. The lower the self-differentiation, the higher the reactivity.

Responsiveness: Thoughtful interaction with other members of a family or family system.

Responsiveness involves the power of choice rather than just instinctively reacting. It is heightened by family of origin work and self-differentiation.

Societal emotional process: One of the two last Family Systems Theory concepts added by Dr Murray Bowen in the 1970s. In times of anxious stress and societal triangling, social regression and polarization often develop. Such cultural regression affects other systems like marriages, families and work settings. Social regression heightens both emotional fusion and emotional cutoff. It encourages the homeostatic recycled quick fix rather than lasting morphogenesis.

Symbiotic Relationship: An emotionally-fused relationship where emotion and reason so merge than there is a loss of self and calm thinking. The mother / child symbiosis is the original paradigm observed by Bowen in the development of Family System Theory.

System (or “emotional system”): A network of interconnected relationships. Such emotional units may include marriages, families, church, community groups, etc. Bowen taught that any relationship with balancing forces and counter forces in constant operation is a system. Richardson describes a system as like a hanging mobile with interconnected pieces.

Triangle: Triangles, as the smallest stable emotional unit, are the universal unit of analysis. Anxiety causes the marriage dyad to bring in a third person, be it a child, friend, relative or counselor. Triangles, a fact of nature, describe the what, how, when and where of marriage relationships, not the why. Most triangles unhelpfully treat one member of the triangle as an outsider or as the IP negative / scapegoat.

Triangulation: The playing of the child by one parent against the other parent during conflict. Such behaviour produces calmness by projecting the marital anxiety onto the child. Triangulation is an effective way to avoid working on one's own self-differentiation.

Undifferentiated ego mass: This term was originally used by Bowen to describe emotional fusion before he discarded the term. It represents conglomerate emotional oneness where there is poor differentiation and low ego boundaries.

Unresolved emotional attachment: This is defined by Titelman as the emotional degree to which a person is unable to move forward in the process toward increasing independence, unable to be a self and define a self in relationship to important others. It defines the relationship between emotional and intellectual functioning, bringing a rigid, dependent fusion dominated by the automatic emotional system.

xi) <sup>416</sup> Marital Statistics for the North Shore and for BC.

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	<b>West Vancouver-Capilano</b>	<b>BC</b>
<b>Population 15+ years</b>	46,070	3,394,905
Single, never married	27%	32%
Legally married	56%	51%
Separated	2%	3%
Divorced	7%	8%
Widowed	7%	6%

	<b>North Vancouver-Seymour</b>	<b>BC</b>
<b>Population 15+ years</b>	41,760	3,394,905
Single, never married	30%	32%
Legally married	56%	51%
Separated	3%	3%
Divorced	7%	8%
Widowed	4%	6%

	<b>North Vancouver-Lonsdale</b>	<b>BC</b>
<b>Population 15+ years</b>	45,590	3,394,905
Single, never married	37%	32%
Legally married	43%	51%
Separated	4%	3%
Divorced	11%	8%
Widowed	6%	6%