

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A PROGRAM TO PREPARE YOUTHS FOR INTERFAITH CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES: PARKVIEW SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, ZAMBIA

Researcher: Webster Silungwe

Primary Adviser: David Odhiambo, PhD

Date Completed: March 2025

Interfaith Christian marriages are on an unprecedented rise, worldwide. However, there are challenges that these unions face. Therefore, Adventist youths need to be informed to avoid these consequences. The aim of this project was to educate and empower youth at Parkview Seventh-day Church in Lusaka, Zambia, about the challenges and pitfalls associated with interfaith Christian marriages. The program was implemented using four strategies namely, structured discussion, mentorship retreats, counseling sessions and interactive discussions. A total number of 30 youths participated in the program; a questionnaire was used to collect data. Three levels of evaluation, process, outcome, and impact were adopted to fully assess the effectiveness of the program.

The program revealed that, after the implementation of the program, 83.3% of the youths showed familiarity with interfaith Christian marriage issues. Similarly,

shift in attitudes was noted as many youths acknowledged that interfaith marriages are associated with more challenges compared to the same faith unions. Religious differences and practice, worship and church attendance were key challenges identified. Further, the program revealed that, Bible studies on faith and family life was identified as the key method to effectively promote awareness of challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriages.

In summary, the findings of this program indicate that structured educational interventions can play a vital role in shaping attitudes and decision-making regarding interfaith marriages. The increased knowledge among youths demonstrates the effectiveness of the program in addressing misconceptions and promoting awareness. The observed shift towards a preference for same-faith relationships further reinforces the importance of spiritual compatibility in marital success. Addressing these concerns through continuous education and supportive church initiatives will be essential in promoting informed relationship choices among youths.

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

A PROGRAM TO PREPARE YOUTHS FOR INTERFAITH CHRISTIAN
MARRIAGES: PARKVIEW SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH, ZAMBIA

A project

presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

by

Webster Silungwe

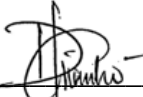
March 2025

A PROGRAM TO PREPARE YOUTHS FOR INTERFAITH CHRISTIAN
MARRIAGES: PARKVIEW SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH, ZAMBIA


A project
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

by
Webster Silungwe


APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:



Primary Adviser
David Odhiambo, PhD



Programme Director, MDiv
David Odhiambo, PhD



Secondary Adviser
Feliks Ponyatovskiy, PhD

Dean, Theological Seminary
Feliks Ponyatovskiy, PhD

Adventist University of Africa

Date: May 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Study objectives.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Significance of the Study.....	5
Definition of Terms	5
Delimitation.....	6
Methodology and Procedure.....	6
Expectations	7
2. BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION.....	8
Old Testament Perspectives of Interfaith Marriages	8
A Lesson from Abraham’s Example	9
Solomon’s Bad Example.....	10
Ezra on Mixed Marriages.....	11
Nehemiah on Mixed Marriages.....	12
New Testament Perspectives of Interfaith Marriages.....	13
Christ’s Word on Marriage.....	13
Pauline Principles of Unity in Marriage.....	14
Biblical Marriage and Faith	16
God’s Ideal Standard.....	16
Sparks Caused by Conflicting Beliefs.....	18
Not to Marry for Evangelism	20
Interfaith Relationships and Challenges	20
Inviolability of Marriage Covenant.....	21
Challenges of Mixed Marriages	22
Handling Marital Differences.....	23
Ellen White Writings	25
God’s Original Idea.....	25
The Dangers of Interfaith Marriages	26
Conclusion.....	27
3. METHODS AND ACTIVITIES.....	28
Methods for Program Implementation	28
Activities Done to Achieve the Goals and Objectives of the Program.....	29

Logic Model	30
Evaluation design	31
4. IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSIONS	32
Implementation of the program	32
Results	32
Discussion.....	35
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	38
Summary.....	38
Conclusion.....	38
Recommendations	39
APPENDIX.....	40
QUESTIONNAIRE	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	44

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church emphasizes the family as a unit ordained by God to bless its members and, ultimately, to all they encounter. Church regards and upholds the biblical teaching on family and enshrines it in the 28 fundamental beliefs. One of the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs upheld by the church, as supported by the Word of God is the teaching on the family and its well-being. The Church believes that “mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which reflects the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church.”¹

Currently, the Seventh-day Adventist world church, administered by the General Conference Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, stands at 21 912, 161 members spread out in 212 out of the 235 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations.² This shows what kind of a big family the church has become and the widespread influence it has attained worldwide.

In Zambia, the SDA Church is aligned into two major regions which are the Northern Zambia Union Conference as well as the Southern Zambia Union

¹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 329.

²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics February 2021,” accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.adventist.org/statistics/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2021/>.

Conference. The Southern Zambia Union Conference comprises five entities, namely, East Zambia Field, Lusaka Conference, South Zambia Conference, West Zambia Conference, and Woodlands Conference, with a membership of 626,485 as of June 2023.³

The focus of this research is on Park View Seventh-day Adventist Church (PVSDAC), which is found in Bedrock Mission district under Woodlands Conference. The Conference has 25 mission districts, with a total of 63,164 members.⁴ Bedrock Mission district has six organized churches with its growing membership hitting 1,927 while PVSDAC, the biggest church in the mission district stands at 674.⁵

In an endeavor to promote the establishment of strong Adventist homes, Southern Zambia Union Conference recently launched the *Adventist Wedding Handbook*, which core objective is to enhance the establishment of proper marriages as a recipe to having a strong church body of Jesus Christ. In the foreword for this remarkable volume, Vanny Munyumbwe postulates that “the strength of a community, or a nation is influenced to a large extent by the strength of its smallest unit, the family.”⁶ In the same vein, Ellen G. White profoundly observes that there is a vivid evidence of the manifestation of God’s grace that stands out as a witness to the world when Christian families maintain their biblical principles and lean of God for their welfare and lifestyle. This kind of real Christian living in the home is a powerful

³Southern Zambia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Membership Statistical Reports* (Lusaka, Zambia: Southern Zambia Union Conference, 2023).

⁴Woodlands Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Membership Statistical Reports* (Lusaka, Zambia: Woodlands Conference, 2023).

⁵Parkview Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Membership Statistical Reports* (Lusaka, Zambia: Bedrock Mission District, 2023).

⁶Southern Zambia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Adventist Wedding Handbook* (Lusaka: Zambia Adventist Publishing House, 2023), xv.

testimony that has the potential to draw others to Christ because the world is interested to see real life lived out in the fear of the Lord than artificial professionalism.⁷

Notwithstanding, it is disheartening to note that many marriages are still being established with less regard to the principles of God from the biblical perspectives, thereby rendering the unity, cooperation and harmony expected of a Christian home to be unguaranteed and unattainable. One of the stunning reasons to this deplorable fallacy is that the marriage aspirants usually down tread the clear precepts and overlook such important principles as shunning interfaith marriages which, often, wreck the marital affairs themselves.

Interfaith Christian marriages is referred to as the union between two individuals from different Christian faiths,⁸ in relation to this study it is the union between an Adventist and a non-Adventist. This program is critical, as many youths are exposed to different religious, be it in their communities, social groupings, and school. Marriage is a commitment, and it's important for them to maintain faithfulness to the fundamental beliefs of SDAs. Therefore, this program, prepares the youths for marriage and family life.

Due to compatibility issues, many interfaith Christian marriages are on rise, as youth find themselves in relationships without full taking into consideration of faiths they come from. The differences in church doctrines has an impact on interfaith Christian marriage, such as the Sabbath keeping, and the state of the dead, these may not only affect the couples, but in raising children as well.

⁷ Ellen. G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1881), 4:304.

⁸ W. D. Stanford et al., "Sources of Influence in Marriage and Parenting for Interfaith Couples." *Marriage & Family Review* 61, no. 4 (2025): 374.

Statement of the Problem

Many Adventists young people are faced with the challenge of choosing partners for marriage from within the circles of their faith and are enticed to cross the bar by selecting from the members of other faiths. This practice is becoming more prevalent as more Adventist youths are exposed to diverse beliefs. Unfortunately, such notions have in the long run proven futile and gravely devastating to the union of marriage against God's original intent for it. Statistics shows that, (31%) of SDA members marrying from non-Adventist,⁹ this kind of union, more especially, when doctrines are different, if this is not addressed can lead to spiritual confusion, higher rates of marital dissatisfaction. It is against this backdrop that the researcher sought to develop a program that addresses the issue of interfaith Christian marriages at PVSDAC and offers a biblical response to it.

Study objectives

To educate and empower youth at Parkview Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lusaka, Zambia, about the challenges and pitfalls associated with interfaith Christian marriages, fostering informed decision-making and supportive attitudes within the community. The specific objectives are outlined as follows:

1. Assess young Christians' challenges in interfaith marriages within the Parkview Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. Evaluate biblical and theological perspectives on marriage and interfaith relationships.
3. Identify the role of mentorship, counseling, and premarital education in preparing youth for marriage.

⁹ Monte Sahlin, *Adventist Families in North America*, PDF file, March, 2010, <https://www.helpimaproarent.org/ZelChi/uploads/2018/11/Adventist-Families-in-North-America-Final-Report.pdf>.

4. Develop a structured program that equips young people with knowledge, decision-making skills, and support systems to navigate interfaith Christian marriages.
5. Determine the effectiveness of the proposed program in helping young Christians make faith-aligned marriage decisions.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to help young marriage aspirants understand that it is not God's plan to use the marriage union to evangelize nonbelievers into God's family or kingdom. While God eternally loves all people, including those that may have parallel belief systems, whether Bible based or otherwise, he desires to have those who have not believed in the saving truth get soaked with the saving truth without any strings or attached conditions of either winning or losing a love relationship.

Significance of the Study

This presents some biblically-based principles that need to be embraced by those contemplating marriage to live harmoniously and be able to inspire non-believers to righteous living by emulating the lives of those who live by the truth of God. These principles and their application are needed to address the situation about interfaith marriages in the church. Furthermore, it is to help young marriage aspirants at PVSDAC appreciate the fact that interfaith Christian marriages may have some unfavourable consequences and therefore need to be shunned.

Definition of Terms

Fundamental Beliefs: Major belief system or the core principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Sometimes referred to as the Fundamental doctrines or teachings.

Interfaith Christian marriage: This is a marriage union between two Christians who belong to different denominations or faiths.

Qualitative Research: An in-depth empirical study or inquiry of something in its natural setting.

Unbeliever: Used in the context of anyone who is not an Adventist.

Union Conference: An entity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that governs or oversees a two or more lower entities that are Called Conferences or Fields for the coordination of their works and collection of reports.

Delimitation

Even though the young people of the Adventist Church have often been found wanting in terms of selecting partners for marriage according to God's standards in the Bible, this research will be confined to PVSDAC and will be delimited to the young Adventists who worship within the targeted church.

Methodology and Procedure

This is program development research. The research has three main components: (1) biblical-theological foundation on related issues of marriage, (2) description of local church setting on the issue, and (3) program development and implementation to address the issue, followed by an evaluation.

A quantitative research approach through a questionnaire is included in the research. Bryman defines quantitative research as a "research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data."¹⁰

¹⁰Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32.

The study will be divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study. Chapter two focuses on the biblical and theological study of mixed-faith marriages from the Bible's point of view. Chapter three describes the issue in the local setting using qualitative methods through interviews. The fourth chapter presents a programme development, implementation, and evaluation. Chapter five will present a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

Expectations

This project, if established well and implemented, will stir a sense of belonging in the young people of PVSDAC and beyond, to be confident of the fact that partners for marriage are available both from within and outside the geographical boundaries of the church as long as they are God fearing members of the same faith – in this case, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It will be the researcher's greatest joy to see that the fundamental belief of the marriage relationship between "partners who share a common faith"¹¹ is adhered to and appreciated, for God's blessings to rest upon His church as it carries out its mission to the world that desperately needs the Savior, Jesus Christ.

¹¹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 329.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Old Testament Perspectives of Interfaith Marriages

This chapter presents a biblical and theological foundation of marriage with perspectives from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Ellen Gould White writings, the Adventist literature, and other non-Adventist writers, for a balanced view of the subject under research. The theology of the origin of marriage is traced back to the creation account when God brought the man and the woman to be joined together in a lifelong bond of love. “God celebrated the first marriage. Thus, the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe.”¹

God designed the marriage union as a covenant, a lifelong connection between a man and a woman, who decide to walk their journey of life together. It is a holy and honorable union (Heb 13:4), which should be an avenue of blessings to the spouses and those that they relate to and interact with. Samuele Bacchiocchi is on point when he states that the marriage covenant is a sanctified one which denotes a twofold blessing to the spouses’ relationship as well as their relationship with God.”²

¹Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 46.

²Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 16.

A Lesson from Abraham's Example

In a world marred by sin, marriage has not been spared from the challenges of misunderstandings and friction between spouses. This calls for the need to weigh the matters, especially when the decision is being made for a life partner, to determine whether one is getting into the sacred union with somebody who holds the same values as theirs, for a united couple to thrive. “The principle of marrying a believer of the same faith is a cardinal one.”³

One of the earliest allusions to the implications of interfaith or mixed marriages in the Old Testament is the account of the charge by Abraham who had instructed his servant, Eleazer, to strictly observe his directive, not to find a wife for his son, Isaac, from any of the people of Canaan, that were surrounding the place at the time (Gen 24:3, 4). The real issue behind this stance by the Patriarch was, he did not want his son to be negatively influenced by the ungodly practices and lifestyle of the Canaanites who were not worshippers of the true God of heaven. The matter about the real impact created by the mix up of religious standards in a marriage union and even general life was well known to Abraham.”⁴

The clear-cut injunction of not mingling with those of a different faith through the marriage union was to later be advanced by Moses through the divine precept in which he warned the children of Israel about its dangers. That was way before they would take possession of the land of promise, which had been occupied by the heathens who were not worshippers of the God of heaven. Moses had warned the Israelites that they would not entertain engaging their sons and daughters into the

³Daniel Chuunga, *Enjoy Your Marriage: African Secrets on Marriage* (Lusaka, Zambia: Adventist Press, 2018), 1:30.

⁴George Mwansa, *Ready to Say I Do: Practical Guidelines for Couples on the Verge of Taking Marriage Vows* (Lusaka, Zambia: Adventist Press, 2010), 24.

marriage union with those who do not bear the belief system with themselves (Deut 7:3). The reason for this forbiddance was that these worshippers of idols and despisers of the true God would swerve the children of Israel from the worship of their God and make them to forget the important values of their call as a holy nation, which would prompt God to punish them in His anger and wipe them off from the face of the earth (verse 4).

Solomon's Bad Example

King Solomon fell into the unexpected trap when at the height of his fame and power he engaged and married many foreign women who became a source of weakness in his devotion to the God of heaven. He gradually started to compromise the standards of worship for the sake of achieving peaceful relations with the surrounding nations (1 Kgs 11:1-3). The alluring danger of the apostasy took the king of Israel by surprise so much that he was not aware of how far he had wallowed into its deep waters.⁵ Despite being the wisest of all who ever lived, Solomon found himself falling from God's standard because he despised a waning of grave importance. The breaching of this sacred precept from the Lord and its consequence of spiritual degradation permeated the history of chosen people of God who should not have been victims of the deplorable situation.⁶

Solomon wallowed into a "series of marriage alliances that were his eventual undoing."⁷ The king of the holy nation was getting blinded to the divine indictment

⁵Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 55.

⁶"Unequally Yoked" [2 Cor 6:14], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 6:876.

⁷Carl E. DeVries, "Solomon," *New International Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1987), 952.

regarding the objectionable ties with the heathen nations. Furthermore, it is rightfully stated that “This is explicitly what the Lord had said would be the result of foreign marriages (Exod 34:16; Deut 7:4).” However, out of his own wisdom and human understanding, he went ahead, indulging himself into the mess, thinking it would work to his own advantage. King Solomon was not unaware of this divine instruction and therefore could not make any excuse for violating it in any way.⁸ Consequently, he learnt it more by experience than by precept.

Ezra on Mixed Marriages

During the ministry of Ezra as a reformer, at the time of the restoration of the exiles who had been banished to Babylon in slavery the challenge of mixed faith marriages was encountered. This was in the era of the rule of the Persian empire. It was discovered that the Jews who had been mingling with the foreigners had associated with them and even practiced mixed marriages at will.⁹ They had sunk so low, to the point of embracing the detestable practices of the nations. Unpleasantly, they got stuck in the traditions of their once-upon-a-time masters.

Ezra was briefed about the dire situation, especially that it involved the leaders of the people amongst them, such as the priests and the Levites, who were even in the forefront, manifesting the detestable practices of such idol worshippers as the Canaanites, Perizzites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, Jebusites, and Amorites (Ezra 9:1). The servant of God went into mourning with deep grief. He adopted the way of showing grief by rending his garments and shaving his head and beard as was

⁸“Turned Away His Heart” [1 Kgs 11:4], *SDABC*, 2:785.

⁹ White, *Prophets and Kings*, 620.

the traditional practice¹⁰ in a moving and emotional mood in the presence of everyone. Remorsefully, the abrogators of God's precepts concerning marriage ties relented their practices and made amends accordingly. Ultimately, "It is the people who decided to send away all their wives and children."¹¹

Nehemiah on Mixed Marriages

After such remarkable strides advanced by Ezra about the reforms concerning the avoidance of mixed marriages, another leader of the post-exilic times came on the scene and found that the same challenge was still experienced among the Jewish community. As a matter of fact, the marriage relationship to foreign spouses went on to pose a serious challenge to society.¹² The reason to this recurrence or lack of total eradication of the uncalled-for practice is suspected to have been the fact that the Jews were so exposed to the multicultural marriages that had become so common because of the prevalent cultural norms of the Persian empire of the time. The real motive for such marital relationships seems to have been propelled from a political and selfish gain.¹³

The spirit of Nehemiah in dealing with the challenging issues of his time is one that cannot go unnoticed. His success in calling for such reforms as the principle of the wise selection of marriage partners were heightened because of his spirit of dedication, humbleness and earnest plea for divine favor."¹⁴ Nehemiah bravely and

¹⁰Nupanga Weanzana, "Ezra," *Africa Bible Commentary (ABC)*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 542.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nupanga Weanzana, "Nehemiah," *ABC*, 558.

¹³ Ibid., 558.

¹⁴ White, *Prophets and Kings*, 575, 576.

unsparingly condemned the evil practice, reminding the community of the detriment of their course of action from the lesson of Solomon's fall because of the foreign women that he too [Solomon] had embraced during his time as the king of Israel (Neh 13:25, 26). "These unions were a threat to the integrity of the Jewish faith."¹⁵

New Testament Perspectives of Interfaith Marriages

The subject of marriage in the New Testament finds its deep roots in the teachings of Christ and some of His apostles, particularly Paul. Here we are ushered back to the origin of the holy matrimony and its sanctity, as a blessing to the human family. The themes of love, submission, covenant relationship, family worship, among others, are significantly dealt with. The writings of the apostles reflect the principles of the Lord, which basically "became the rule of life in the early Christian communities."¹⁶

Christ's Word on Marriage

Jesus was responding to the question posed by the Pharisees on the matter of marriage and divorce. The truths that He brought out are fundamental to the understanding of the union of marriage from its very core. The Lord and originator of the marriage covenant responded to them by raising the fact that at the beginning of creation God had brought the Adam and Eve and joined them as one flesh. In this same manner the marriage partners leave their parents to be united into oneness of flesh (Matt 19:4, 5).

¹⁵Weanzana, "Nehemiah," *ABC*, 558.

¹⁶J. Paul. Sampley, "Paul's Direct Appeal for More Affection," *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2000), 9:66.

Jesus draws us to the original, the foundation of marriage between a man and woman who become one in mind and spirit with the fellowship of love, trustworthiness, unity and assuring dedication and cooperation which is manifested in the Trinity arrangement of the Godhead.¹⁷ In this passage Jesus calls the hearers' attention to God's foundational intent of marriage as portrayed in Genesis 2:24.¹⁸ Christ's response in this matter reveals that "men's hearts had become hardened against both God and their wives."¹⁹

Pauline Principles of Unity in Marriage

The writings of Paul bear such a substantial message about the need to uphold sound relationships, including the marriage union. The apostle categorically charges the believers saying, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (1 Cor 6:14, 15). Such questions are advanced to provoke one's mind and consider matters at stake squarely.

These provocative rhetoric questions, which have a bearing on the marital union, find their conclusive response in 1 Corinthians 7:1 where the author brings out the relevance of shunning away all aspects that defiles the person's being to maintain holiness and reverence for the Almighty God. Personal devotion to God is critical to the sound marriage relationship. A genuine lover of God usually has a better stance of experiencing happiness in marriage when they are attached or connected to a spouse

¹⁷Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," *ABC*, 1148.

¹⁸Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 96.

¹⁹Thomas Hale with General Articles Contributed by Stephen Thorson, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* (Eastborne, England: Kingsway Publications, 2000), 112.

of the same spirit.²⁰ While it is quite expedient for a married couple to have manifest certain commonalities and unity of purpose in various aspects of life, such as financial affairs, social standing, emotional burgages, and so many other matters of life, to be able to manage their life walk together, “above all these is the important concept of a shared faith.”²¹

Herbert Gray retaliates that there is usually failure in the blending process between the husband and the wife because of not observing this principle of upholding same faith or religion between the two that are getting married.²² The comparison that the Apostle uses when he talks about not being “yoked together” is that of a “double yoke under which two animals work side by side.”²³ It is simply absurd to think that an ox and a goat or sheep can do proper work when paired in such a manner. Paul could have derived this graphic illustration from Moses’ instruction to the Israelites not to pair two kinds of animals to labor under the same yoke (Deut 22:10) and not to crossbreed different kinds of animals together (Lev 19:19). This important concept has been employed by the apostle Paul who stresses the impracticability of believers being mated with unbelievers.²⁴ In the realm of the marriage union, to bring two people who are incompatible regarding their connection or disconnection to God is not the ideal situation.

²⁰Nancy Van Pelt, *We’ve Only Just Begun: A Guide to Successful Courtship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1982), 169.

²¹John W. Drakeford, *The Home: Laboratory of Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 69.

²²A. Herbert Gray, *Men, Women, and God: A Discussion of Sex Questions from the Christian Point of View*, 21st ed. (London: SCM Press, 1957), 116.

²³Philip Edgumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 244.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Moreover, understanding the context of Paul’s writing as he advances these principles is of grave importance. It would be a terrible misstep to conclude that the Apostle is here censuring all connections and interactions with those that may be deemed as un-Christian. Understandably, Paul is in no terms promoting “isolationism ... [because that] would necessitate departure from the world.”²⁵ The researcher will be able to deduce that “mixed marriages are forbidden all the way through the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.”²⁶ In other words, the restriction of not attaching oneself to a mate of a different faith is not a move to promote segregation or signify a downgrade of another’s faith. God, the institutor of the marriage union, and the one who prohibits a mingling of conflicting beliefs knows too well what the implications of these questionable attachments are bound to bring in a home.

Biblical Marriage and Faith

God’s Ideal Standard

God’s original intent for the marriage union, which He had founded on the sixth day of the creation week (Gen 1:26-28), was to set up a model for all future unions that would be established for the rest of all generations to come. In this regard, Jesus Christ profoundly validated this original idea. He provoked the minds of the Pharisees who had developed some misconception about this important divine invention by asking them saying, “Haven’t you not read ... that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’” (Gen

²⁵P. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 244.

²⁶Richard L. Strauss, *Marriage is for Love* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1973), 13.

2:24). This is a remarkable appeal back to the roots or origin of the biblical foundation of marriage. The life union can therefore be understood as an exclusively designed for the male and female partners, which is heterosexual in nature.²⁷

It is Satan's major business to blindfold many young people who desire to walk together in the corridors of life as with the joy of heaven through well blended relationships. "Just as ... caterpillars blindly follow in the path of the one ahead of them, so many young adults muddle through their dating years with no direction."²⁸ When two people are in courtship, they always see the best in each other. All is rosy and flowery. But, alas, after the wedding then comes the morning of real things and that is when marriage begins. It is at this point that real love needs to differentiate itself from the infatuation which usually harks many newlyweds.²⁹

Any couple that has one common belief in the God they worship and serve will ultimately easily blend into a strong pair and experience the so much needed harmony in their relationship. Every couple that exists does face challenges and huddles in one way or another. However, in the face of intense huddles of life the greatest determining factor is how much they relay their burdens to God through prayer. With this dependence on the divine, the source of all strength, to keep on going it is expedient to note that total dependance and reliance on the divine by faith will always make things well.³⁰ In view of the probable shaky mixed-faith marriages Alves, Barbosa, and Gomes purport that "in order to avoid such situations the Lord, in

²⁷Van Pelt, *We've Only Just Begun*, 169.

²⁸ Nancy Van Pelt, *Smart Love: Straight Talk to Young Adults About Dating, Love and Sex* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2012), 10.

²⁹Jeffrey Brown and Pattiejean Brown, *The Total Marriage: A Guide to Successful Marriage* (Grantham, England: Autumn House Publishing, 2001), 9, 10.

³⁰Karen Holford et al., *The Family Book: Creative Ideas for Families* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2014), 81.

His mercy provided guidelines. His objective was for homes to be peaceful and happy.”³¹

As already stated, regarding the words of Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14 which say, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,” Calvin Rocks posits that “while the mandate of 2 Corinthians 6:14 speaks specifically to the union between a Christian and a Non-Christian. ... All distance occasioned by divergent views of reality and lifestyle increases the challenges to ‘oneness.’”³²

In other words, two people that adhere or subscribe to divergent or conflicting views of faith and beliefs can easily fall into conflicting situations even though they may be both Christians. The fact that they believe differently from the same biblical teachings can be a recipe for exhuming sparks and cracks in their marital relationship.

Sparks Caused by Conflicting Beliefs

George Mwansa elaborates the dilemma of marrying a partner who belongs to a different denomination through an account of a young Adventist lady, Juliet, who had been warned by her father not to go ahead in her plans to marry a man of another denomination, the Jehovah’s Witness. She simply brushed off her father’s advice and went ahead until the two got married. Apparently, the young people who were going to marry never discussed the matter of what they were going to do since they both belonged to two different Christian denominations. The lady was telling herself, (without knowing it, the man was, too) that she would maintain her own faith and coax the spouse to get to leave their lane for the other. Unfortunately, “Theological sparks soon started to blind their love for each other. In the eyes of Juliet, her husband

³¹Arleide Alves, Alacy Barbosa, and Marta Gomes, *101 Questions and Answers about Relationships* (Western Cape: Africa Publishing Company, 2010), 73.

³²“A Great Mystery” [Eph 5:32], *SDABC*, 6:1038.

had become a bad guy. ... In the eyes of Julius, Juliet, his wife was simply a stubborn brat!”³³

Professed Christians believe and live in accordance with what they profess. In this regard, the need to find someone who relate with oneself at the same wavelength with themselves in the matter of convictions and practices is fundamental. It is expedient to note that the link between one’s religious beliefs and one's lifestyle is critical to the success or failure of one's marital welfare.³⁴ On building spiritual oneness as a couple, Nancy Van Pelt observes that some secrets need to be embraced by those who are married and living together in harmony. The foremost among these secrets hinges on togetherness in church attendance. She elaborates on this point further through some research findings, which revealed some stunning outcomes. The study highlights the fact that such a practice can bind the couple and “make them feel better about their marriage than those who do not worship together.”³⁵

Though the ultimate choice of a life partner rests on the two that will decide who to go for in marriage, it is important to note that God has got great interest in their choices on such critical matters.³⁶ Of course, conflict in marriage is inevitable, even when the two who are married belong to the same faith. Having conflicting views in a marriage set up is a normal thing because each person thinks differently. However, for spouses who are usually inclined to getting heed of the same Master,

³³George Mwansa, *Women and Marriage: Why Marriage Means Everything to a Woman* (Lusaka, Zambia: Adventist Press, 2012), 193.

³⁴Julian Melgosa and Annette D. Melgosa, *To Couples: Enjoy a Stable, Lifelong Relationship* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz, 2013), 29.

³⁵Nancy Van Pelt, *Highly Effective Marriage* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2008), 188.

³⁶Miguel Angel Nunez, *111 Tips for Engaged and Newly-wed Couples* (Western Cape, South Africa: Africa Publishing Company, 2010), 11.

“their resolution is easier, as Christ lives in their home”³⁷ and attends to their various challenges.

Not to Marry for Evangelism

Regarding dating someone with different beliefs to convert him to your beliefs, Jeffrey and Pattiejean Brown candidly retaliate that the marriage relationship should never be taken as an opportunity to change one’s life partner in their beliefs or behavior. Marriage is not a tool of winning a spouse for conversion to the other party’s religious affiliation.³⁸ The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* contends that the marriage union is inclined to withstand the storms of life if the husband and wife are found to be cherishing the same or similar values or standards of behavior³⁹ Nancy Van Pelt discusses the same view and categorically alludes to the fact that complete oneness in a marital relationship encompasses a united worship experience, having a deep understanding of each other and being able to openly communicate with intimacy.⁴⁰

Interfaith Relationships and Challenges

The researcher has also investigated the writings of the non-Adventist authors about marriage, particularly on their perspectives of the biblical foundations and their stance on the question of interfaith or mixed faith marriages that are quite rampant in this modern cutting edge. Moreover, the different authors

³⁷ Alves, Barbosa, and Gomes, *101 Questions and Answers about Relationships*, 73.

³⁸ Jeffrey Brown and Pattiejean Brown, *Love Seasons: Finding Love in Unlikely Places* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2017), 37.

³⁹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2022), 160.

⁴⁰Nancy Van Pelt, *To Have and to Hold: A Guide to Successful Marriage* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2012), 164.

that have been interacted with generally agree to the fact that mixed faith marriages are not the idea for spouses that hope to stay in harmony and joy for the rest of their lives on earth.

Inviolability of Marriage Covenant

Considering the inviolability of the marriage covenant between a man and woman in light of the statement of Genesis 2:24 which says, “a man leaves father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh,” the researcher can deduce that this is a holy tie, a life covenant. The biggest unifying element or aspect in a marriage relationship is when the spouses who are joined together as one are blended through the power of the Holy Spirit and entire surrender to each other in the bond of intimate love. “Harmony and love are more important in a family than the abundance of possessions.”⁴¹ That is what the marriage relationship was created for.

This understanding is very critical for the marriage union to thrive and survive. The bond of marriage is so unique and the tie so mutual that all other human relationships become secondary to it because of its nature by divine design.⁴²

Remarkably, the male and female who are united together still maintain their respective personalities and human traits and full beings. However, the marriage union draws them “side by side,” to “become one entity, sharing each other’s lives.”⁴³

In view of the sacredness and implications of the marital affair, it is expedient to note that the lifelong union be not entered upon blindly or in a harried manner, but by seeking the originators’ desire and will for each spouse to fulfill His divine purpose

⁴¹D. E. Stedman, *God’s Message to All People* (Katunayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006), 370.

⁴²Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis,” *ABC*, 14.

⁴³*Ibid.*

accordingly. The physical, mental, and spiritual aspect all need to be employed positively and in the right perspective for blessings to be manifested. Too many spouses who missed such a trajectory ended up regretting their own cause of action. The regrettable reality of the mismatch in the blend of the marital union may come to dawn way after the establishment of the unworkable wedlock which result in a sad and painful experience.⁴⁴

Challenges of Mixed Marriages

J. R. Rice is a strong proponent of unmixed marriages. He suggests that those who contemplate marriage should not just be engrossed with what may be termed as a natural attraction for the opposite sex without considering serious matters than merely falling into the so-called love for pleasure. He illustrates his point with an example of a Catholic and a Protestant who in essence have conflicting views on various matters, “deep rooted prejudices, traditions, and convictions”⁴⁵ that govern their lifestyles. This is a scenario that would many times bear unpleasant outcomes and no good service to the marriage set up. In real terms, the relationships we choose ought to be selected and entered into, based on principles. It is good for Christians to join with those who are of a like faith. “There is more danger that the bad will damage the good than hope that the good will help out or assist the bad.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴Gray, *Men, Women, and God*, 112, 113.

⁴⁵J. R. Rice, *The Home, Courtship, Marriage, and Children* (Madras, India: Evangelical Literature Service), 1994.

⁴⁶Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, *2 Corinthians* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1935), 503.

David O' Brien asserts that the matter raised by Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14 is indeed a warning against marriages with unbelievers, showing that the attempts to unite two individuals with assorted belief systems is not commended by God.⁴⁷ Marriage is ordained by God as already established. However, marriage cannot be used as an instrument of soul winning because unfortunately, it is the unconverted party that is likely to negatively influence the righteous or believing spouse. And once it has been entered upon, there is no turning back. The marriage union is deep and not easily reversible. In the wake of such serious irrevocable tie, it is of grave importance for marriage aspirants to take the necessary precautions and never be rushed into making a commitment by vow or whatever means before jumping into it unforwarned.⁴⁸

Handling Marital Differences

In the words of Ajith Fernando, "Being a committed Christian does not automatically insulate one from marital problems."⁴⁹ This statement seems to suggest that Fernando clearly understands that marital issues and puzzles are an order of the day in marriage circles. There is need to wholly grasp the implications of the relationship of marriage especially in the realms of spiritual footing and understanding. "Christian marriage is expected to lead on to greater growth of mind and soul"⁵⁰ and not to pose a threat to these aspects of any or both of those that are hooked into it.

⁴⁷David E. O'Brien, *Today's Handbook for Solving Bible Difficulties* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House), 1990.

⁴⁸Gene Madeira, *The Purposes of Scripture in Your Life: An Individualized Bible Study Program* (Katunayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006), 111, 112.

⁴⁹Ajith Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy* (Mumbai, India: GLS Publishing, 1988), 68.

⁵⁰Martha Boone Leavell, *Christian Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1956), 18.

Contrary to these assertions is Jim Conway and Sally Conway's viewpoint in which they argue that it does not matter what denomination or creed or affiliation one may find themselves. According to the duet, what matters most is that a spouse should have a deep and unwavering faith in God. If the two have a full trust of each other and they both believe in God all is well with them.⁵¹ However, this has turned out to be a cause of great havocs in many so-called Christian homes. Many spouses tend to pretend that they have it all smooth and are walking the way of life in harmonious understanding with their partners and yet other underlying issues remain unresolved in their marital affairs. It is pathetic to note, as does Tim LaHaye that an "increased number of divorced people are found in the church today because so many exciting conversions are taking place."⁵²

The conclusion of the views of the non-Adventist authors is that interfaith or mixed faith marriages are not the ideal at all. All these authors do recognize the fact that God in His word has not left this matter to suspension but showed His people what is expected of them in terms of the marriage ties. As Richard Strauss profoundly observes, "Mixed marriages are forbidden all the way through the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament."⁵³

⁵¹Jim Conway and Sally Conway, *Ten Keys to an Intimate Mid-life Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 7, 8.

⁵²Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Family* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982), 14, 15.

⁵³Strauss, *Marriage Is for Love*, 13.

Ellen White Writings

God's Original Idea

Ellen Gould White extensively wrote about the subject of marriage from the biblical point of view. Considering one of the foundational biblical passages on the union of the marriage institution as invented by God, that is, Genesis 2:18 – 24, she highlights that it was God who made Adam and Eve with the intent of uniting them as one in a life companionship blend. She states that the partner (Eve) that God gave to Adam was intended to be a “helper corresponding to him – one who was fitted to be his companion and who could be with him in love and sympathy.”⁵⁴

God's original desire for the marriage union that He established was for perfect unity and a mutual intimacy that would ultimately be a blessing to the couple as they would spend the rest of their lives together. Even though sin entered the world and affected the very first marriage ever to be instituted by God, the family remains as a unique blessing to humanity with its tender and dignified nature so divinely designed.⁵⁵ Through the toughness and the roughness of this life and the marriage journey of a couple, through the ups and downs that the couple may experience, the will of the Lord is that the seed of hope prevails in the relationship that He ordained from the beginning of human existence. Whatever happens after this life is lived has a bearing on the way the two would have lived their lives together. “Marriage affects the afterlife both in this world and in the world to come.”⁵⁶

For this reason, it is of no little magnitude that those who make decisions for life partners need to do so in tune with his standard and principles so that they get the

⁵⁴White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

⁵⁵Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952).

⁵⁶Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 359.

blessing that He intends for them to get and avoid the curse of disobedience in this regard. All will need to understand that as we pursue different spheres and issues of life, “the very first victories are to be won in the home life.”⁵⁷ There is therefore great need to consider and weigh the matters of who a faithful Christian is going to attach themselves as they make choices for a marriage partner squarely and unhurriedly. Ellen White makes a pertinent assertion that many unnecessary ties and improper connections are entered upon without the presence and blessing of God in such unions.⁵⁸ Many of our young people have made a shipwreck of their lives by being unteachable and difficult to advise. It is pathetic to note that there is an overwhelming disregard to the teachings of the divine dictates that sound a warning in the common stance of engaging in the union of marriage between Christians and unbelievers.⁵⁹

The Dangers of Interfaith Marriages

The Spirit of Prophecy unswervingly cautions believers from entangling themselves in marital affairs with unbelievers. Interestingly, it does not end there, but in a world of so many denominations that have mushroomed under the same umbrella of Christianity, it further warns against the growing tendency of Christians uniting themselves with those who have “not accepted the truth of this time.”⁶⁰ An Adventist would need to be honest about his or her life by and consider the matters at stake, saying, “I believe the Seventh-day of the week to be the Sabbath of the Bible. Our faith and principles are such that they lead in opposite directions. We cannot be happy

⁵⁷Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 6:354.

⁵⁸White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 102.

⁵⁹White, *The Adventist Home*, 61.

⁶⁰White, *Testimonies for the Church* (1948), 5:364.

together.”⁶¹ All this is not to look at oneself as being more special than the others who are not Adventists or even believers at all. It would be expedient to note that despite the popular view of alluding that one can still maintain principle in whatever relationship they find themselves the likelihood is for the unbelieving spouse to swerve the partner who purports live by the divine oracles.⁶²

Conclusion

The biblical foundation of marriage from the perspective of the Old Testament passages, the New Testament messages, especially from the Pauline writings, the Adventist authors, the writings of Ellen G. White as well as the widely selected non-Adventist writers have been investigated and compared in this chapter. The researcher has been able to establish the fact that all these various authorities recognize God as the founder of marriage.

To this end, it is just the best thing to understand the marriage relationship from God’s original intent and His desire for it today. True intimacy and mutual understanding can be experienced in any couple’s life if the two who get united by the inventor of life continues to draw them in the daily lives and activities. Having a unified affiliation of religion and faith is very critical to the understanding of the couple that desires to walk their lives together. Just as Amos poses the rhetorical question; “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3).

In this same regard, the husband and wife both need to have something in common that will always draw them closer to each other in their lives. That something is the divine Maker who establishes homes. A home that is founded on its true founder, God Himself, is a home that will enjoy peace and joy.

⁶¹White, *The Adventist Home*, 67.

⁶²White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 174.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

Methods for Program Implementation

The program, understanding of the challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriages among youths at Parkview Seventh-day Adventist, was implemented using several methods such as structured presentations, mentorship retreats, counseling session, and interactive discussion. These methods ensured that the youth at this church both informed about the challenges of interfaith marriages and equip them with information that was necessary for helping to reflect on their decision and belief about relationships and marriages.

Implementation of this program began with, presentations on the subject which was done during youth gatherings, and church services were the topic of interfaith marriages was introduced and was backed by the biblical perspectives. This was followed by involvement of married couples within the church who shared their experiences and provided practical advice to the youth. Counseling sessions were also introduced to provide a comfortable space for the youths to bring out their issues and seek guidance from the church.

In ensuring effective and encourage youth participant in the program, question and answer session were introduced. This allowed them to actively follow the process, ask where they were not clear, as well as them bring out their opinions and relate to their personal understanding. Questionnaire was utilized to gain knowledge on the issue, ensuring that the program objectives were met.

Activities Done to Achieve the Goals and Objectives of the Program

First, overnight prayer session was held in December 2024, to close the year. In the session, a presentation was made, which was focused on the importance of choosing wisely a marriage partner, and principles on marriage, faith, and challenges with interfaith unions from biblical point of view were highlighted. This served as the ignition session to open the discussion of interfaith relationships to the youths.

Secondly, counseling sessions were introduced from January to February 2025. These were done in a series of group and one on one basis, to hear the aspirations and challenges of the youths at personal level regarding marriage. This provided a platform for expressing their desires, fears regarding marriage and relationships. Experienced counsellors from the church and as well the church elders shared on the biblical perspective of the interfaith marriages and their challenges and the value of unity in one faith in relationships.

Thirdly, in the month of February 2025, a special retreat was organized and Christian couples from the church were invited to share to the youths, their experiences, challenges, and testimonies encountered in their marriages, put more emphasis on the importance and gains in same faith relationships. This was aimed to inspire youth through showing them real-life experience of successful same faith-based marriages, and to encourage them to seek for counsel before committing to relationships.

Fourthly, in the month of March 2025, during one of youth week of prayer, a question-and-answer session were conducted to allow the youth seek clarifications, ask questions regarding interfaith marriages. This session was backed by discussions where biblical teachings were strongly enforced, this helps them to critically assess their choices on relationships.

Lastly, to get feedback, be able to evaluate the program, in the same month of March 2025, questionnaires were distributed to the youths, this was necessary to collect feedback on the impact of the program.

Logic Model

The flow of activities for the program is shown in Figure 1 below.

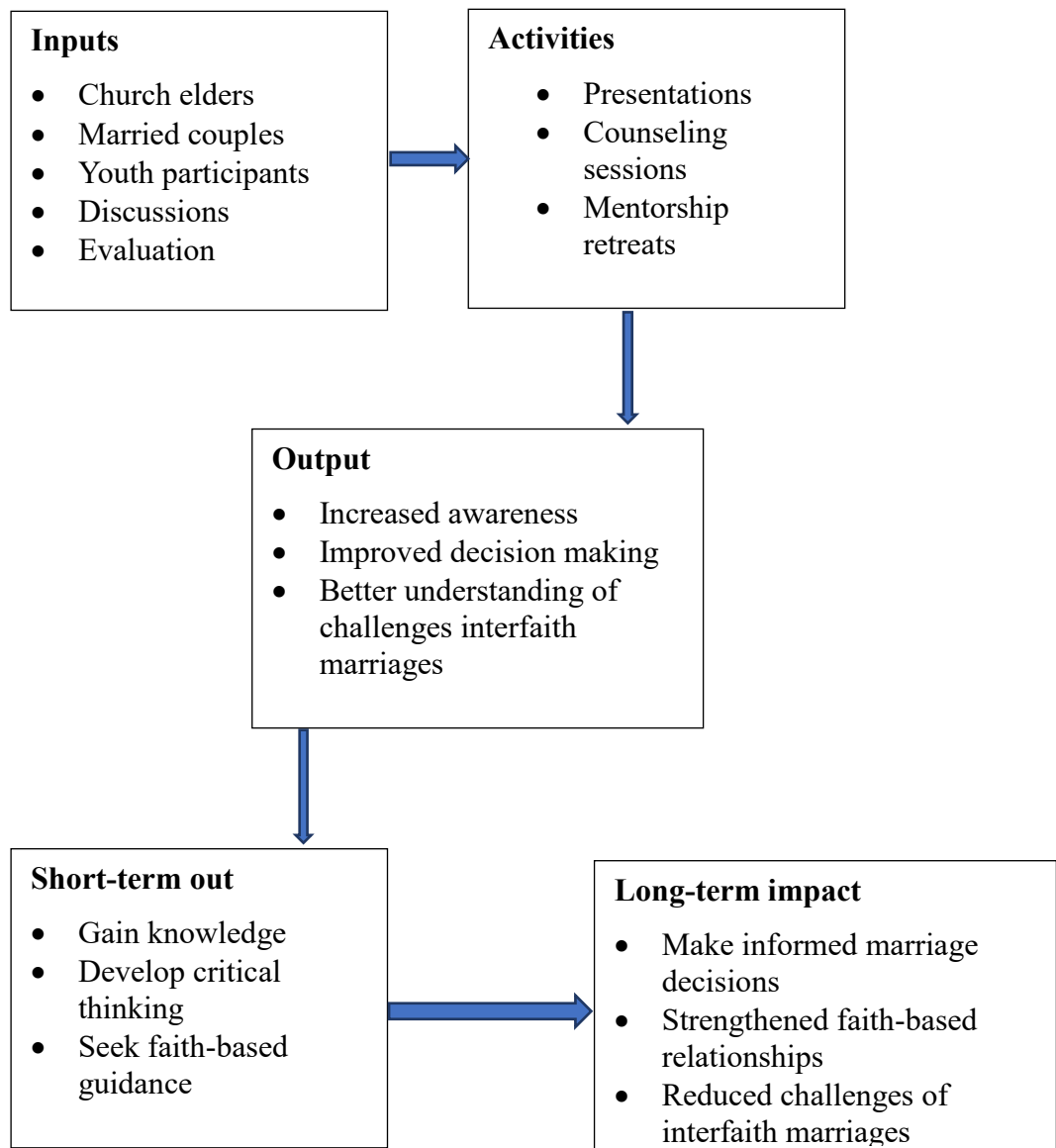


Figure 1. The Logical Model

Evaluation design

This program adopted three levels of evaluation namely, process, outcome, and impact evaluation. The process evaluation was meant to check the implementations of the activities, in ensuring that all the outline activities were successfully done. Attendance records of the youths, and feedback were collected to check whether, activities were done as planned. This process evaluation confirmed that, all the planned activities were done and (85%) of the youths participated.

The outcome evaluation assessed the influence or effects of the program through measuring knowledge and decision making among youths. Data from the survey showed that awareness of challenges and pitfalls of interfaith marriages. Majority of the youths at Parkview Seventh Day Adventist, showed stronger preference for same faith-based relationships and a commitment to seek biblical counsel before making final decisions on marriage.

The impact evaluation was adopted, it focused on investigating whether the program had an influence on the actual decision and choices for relationship, and early signs shows that youths were more carefully about relationship choices. Some of the youths at this church reported that they would continue seeking more information and counseling as the result of this program, indicating the lasting effect on their decision-making processes.

In summary, the all the three evaluations results agree that the program met its objectives through increasing awareness of challenges and pitfalls of interfaith marriages, shifting in attitudes, and stimulating faith-based decision-making regarding marriages among youths at Parkview SDA Church.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of the program

The program, understanding the challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriage at Parkview SDA Church among youths, took from December 2024 to March 2025. Several well packed activities were lined up for the youths as outlined in chapter three, so to engage them and provide critical insights on the challenges of interfaith marriages, dangers, and how to avoid these from biblical perspective.

Results

During the implementation of the program, thirty youths took part, of which (53.3%) were males, and (46.7%) were female, in terms of age, most youths (63.3%) were in age group of 15-25. On marital status, most of them (83.3%) were single. This program as resulted in changes in perspective of interfaith marriage, as (83.3%) of youths were familiar with the concept of interfaith Christian marriages. The result also indicates that, most youths had improved understanding of the challenges and implications of interfaith marriages, as (83.3%) identified differences in religious and practice, and (63.3%) worship and church attendance as main challenges of interfaith marriages. They acknowledge that spiritual compatibility is an important factor for marriage to succeed, and majority identified risks associated with interfaith marriages.

The result of the program, as obtained from the survey, resulted in attitude shift as the result of counseling sessions, mentorship retreat. Most youths showed

positive support of same faith-based relationships and expressed greater commitment to find marriage partners within the church.

Further, the result of the program show that youths felt more empowered to make informed decisions regarding relationships and marriages. Most acquired the knowledge and confidence to discuss the topic of interfaith marriages with their fellow youths, and rarely on biblical standpoint when faced with such situations. The program improved their communication skills, as they became comfortable with issues of marriage, and most youths showed the desire to continuously seek for more of such activities going forward within their youth groups.

The demographic picture of the characteristics of the group that was engaged in the study is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	16	53.3
	Female	14	46.7
Age group	15-25 years	19	63.3
	26-35 years	11	36.7
Marital status	Single	25	83.3
	Married	3	10
	Have a child, but not married yet	1	3.3
	Seeing someone	1	3.3

Table 2 displays the issues raised in the questionnaire conducted and the responses that came from those that took part in the exercise involved.

Table 2. Interfaith Christian Marriages and Challenges

Statements	Frequency	%
<i>Familiar with the concept of interfaith Christian marriages</i>		
Yes	25	83.3
No	5	16.7
<i>Interfaith Christians marriages face more challenges than same-faith marriages</i>		
Agree	27	93.1
Disagree	2	6.9
<i>Main challenges in interfaith Christian marriages</i>		
Differences in religious beliefs and practices	25	83.3
Pressure to convert religious practices	16	53.3
Challenges in worship and church attendance	19	63.3
Family and community rejection	7	23.3
<i>Discuss interfaith relationships with your peers or in church</i>		
Yes	23	76.7
No	7	23.3
<i>Need more education on interfaith Christian marriages</i>		
Yes	28	93.3
No	2	6.7
<i>Methods would be effective in promoting awareness about interfaith Christian marriages</i>		
Church seminars	13	43.3
Panel discussion with interfaith couples	13	43.3
Online discussion	6	20
Bible studies on faith and marriage	20	66.7
Personal testimonies from church members	11	36.7
<i>Willing to mentor interfaith couples in your church</i>		
Yes	22	75.9
No	7	24.1
<i>Type of support that is most important for interfaith couples</i>		
Family mediation and conflict resolution	5	16.7
Theological guidance on faith and marriage	15	50
Church and community support groups	10	33.3
<i>Participate in an open discussion on interfaith Christian marriages at church</i>		
Yes	29	96.7
No	1	3.3
<i>Concerns that might prevent from participating in such discussion</i>		
Lack of knowledge on the topic	14	53.8
Belief that interfaith marriages are not a major issue	4	30.8
Fear of judgment from church members	8	15.4
<i>Confident in making informed decision about interfaith relationships</i>		
Not confident at all	25	83.3
Very confident	5	16.7

Discussion

The implementation of the program, aimed at understanding the challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriage among youths at Parkview SDA Church, yielded significant findings. The structured activities, including seminars, counseling, and mentorship retreats, provided a platform for knowledge acquisition and attitude transformation regarding interfaith marriages.

The program involved 30 youths, with a gender distribution of 53.3% males and 46.7% females. The majority (63.3%) were aged between 15-25 years, and 83.3% were single. This demographic composition highlights the program's relevance, as it primarily engaged individuals in the decision-making phase of relationships and marriage. One of the major outcomes was an increase in awareness regarding interfaith Christian marriages. Before the program, only a limited number of youths were familiar with the concept. However, post-implementation, 83.3% of participants demonstrated familiarity with interfaith marriage issues. This suggests that the program effectively bridged knowledge gaps and enhanced understanding of the subject matter.

A significant shift in attitudes was observed. Prior to the intervention, many youths lacked a clear perspective on the risks associated with interfaith marriages. The results indicate that, post-program, 93.1% of participants acknowledged that interfaith marriages face more challenges than same-faith unions. Furthermore, 83.3% identified religious differences and practices as key challenges, while 63.3% noted worship and church attendance as major areas of concern. These findings suggest that the program successfully highlighted the complexities of interfaith marriages and instilled a deeper understanding of their implications.

The findings reveal that the program empowered youths to make informed decisions regarding relationships. Most participants expressed greater commitment to forming relationships within their faith community, citing spiritual compatibility as a crucial factor for marital success. Additionally, 83.3% of youths felt more confident in discussing interfaith marriages, compared to their previous reluctance.

The demand for further education on interfaith Christian marriages was evident, with 93.3% of participants expressing the need for continued learning. Various methods were identified as effective for promoting awareness, including Bible studies on faith and marriage (66.7%), church seminars (43.3%), panel discussions with interfaith couples (43.3%), and personal testimonies from church members (36.7%). Additionally, 75.9% of participants expressed willingness to mentor interfaith couples, indicating a shift toward a proactive approach in addressing interfaith marriage challenges within the church.

Despite the willingness of most youths to discuss interfaith marriages, certain barriers were identified. The primary concern was a lack of knowledge (53.8%), followed by the belief that interfaith marriages are not a major issue (30.8%) and fear of judgment from church members (15.4%). These findings highlight the need for continuous education and open dialogue within the church to address misconceptions and reduce stigma surrounding the topic.

The findings from the program demonstrate that structured interventions significantly enhance knowledge, shape attitudes, and empower youths to make informed relationship choices. The program successfully shifted perspectives, with most participants supporting same-faith relationships and expressing a desire for continued education on interfaith marriage challenges. To sustain these positive outcomes, church leaders should consider ongoing mentorship programs, structured

Bible study sessions, and community discussions to reinforce the importance of spiritual compatibility in marriage.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The program on understanding the challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriage among youths at Parkview SDA Church was implemented successfully over a period of four months. The structured activities helped enhance the awareness and understanding of interfaith marriages among the participants. Many youths became more knowledgeable about the challenges posed by interfaith marriages, with 83.3% acknowledging religious differences and practices as a key issue.

Additionally, the program led to a positive shift in attitudes, as many participants expressed a preference for same-faith relationships and a greater commitment to making informed marriage decisions. The data also revealed the need for further education and continuous discussion on this topic, as many youths desired more opportunities to engage in learning and mentorship programs.

Conclusion

The findings of this program indicate that structured educational interventions can play a vital role in shaping attitudes and decision-making regarding interfaith marriages. The increased knowledge among youths demonstrates the effectiveness of the program in addressing misconceptions and promoting awareness. The observed shift towards a preference for same-faith relationships further reinforces the importance of spiritual compatibility in marital success.

However, the program also highlights the challenges that still exist, including limited knowledge and fear of judgment, which may prevent open discussions on interfaith marriages. Addressing these concerns through continuous education and supportive church initiatives will be essential in promoting informed relationship choices among youths.

Recommendations

To build on the success of this program, several recommendations are proposed.

Firstly, the church should continue organizing structured programs, including Bible studies, panel discussions, and seminars, to provide continuous education on interfaith marriages.

Secondly, mentorship and counseling programs should be strengthened to support youths in making informed marital decisions.

Thirdly, more opportunities for open discussions should be created within church groups to encourage dialogue and reduce the stigma associated with interfaith marriages.

Lastly, collaboration with church leaders and religious scholars should be encouraged to provide theological guidance and ensure that biblical perspectives are well integrated into relationship discussions. Implementing these recommendations will help sustain the positive impact of the program and further enhance the youths' ability to navigate the complexities of interfaith relationships.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

A PROGRAM TO EQUIP YOUTH: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS OF INTERFAITH CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES ZAMBIA

Dear participant

This questionnaire is designed A PROGRAM TO EQUIP YOUTH: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS OF INTERFAITH CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES ZAMBIA to explore the *challenges and pitfalls of interfaith Christian marriages among youth*. The study seeks to understand the experiences, concerns, and perspectives of young individuals regarding interfaith relationships, with the aim of developing a program to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate such marriages successfully. Your insights will be invaluable in shaping this initiative. All responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes.

1. What is your gender?

Male []

Female []

2. What is your age group?

15-25 []

26-35 []

3. What is your marital status?

Single []

Married []

4. Have you ever been in a love relationship before?

Yes []

No []

5. Are you familiar with the concept of interfaith Christian marriages?

Yes []

No []

6. Interfaith Christians marriages face more challenges than same-faith marriages?

Agree []

Disagree []

7. Which of the following do you think are the main challenges in interfaith Christian marriages? (**check all that apply**)

Differences in religious beliefs and practices []

Pressure to convert religious practices []

Challenges in worship and church attendance []

Family and community rejection []

8. Do you discuss interfaith relationships with your peers or in church

Yes []

No []

9. Do you think you need more education on interfaith Christian marriages?

Yes []

No []

10. Which methods would be most effective in promoting awareness about interfaith Christian marriages? (**choose two**)

Church seminars []

Panel discussion with interfaith couples []

Online discussion []

Bible studies on faith and marriage []

Personal testimonies from church members []

11. Are you willing to mentor interfaith couples in your church

Yes []

No []

12. Which type of support do you think is most important for interfaith couples

Family mediation and conflict resolution []

Theological guidance on faith and marriage []

Church and community support groups []

13. Would you participate in an open discussion on interfaith Christian marriages at church?

Yes []

No []

14. What concerns might prevent you from participating in such discussion?

Lack of knowledge on the topic []

Belief that interfaith marriages are not a major issue []

Fear of judgment from church members []

15. Are you confident in making informed decision about interfaith relationships?

Not confident at all []

Very confident []

Thank you for your time

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. *Marriage Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Alves, Arleide, Alacy Barbosa, and Marta Gomes. *101 Questions and Answers about Relationships*. Western Cape, South Africa: Africa Publishing Company, 2010.
- Arnold, Johann Christoph. *Sex, God and Marriage*. Farmington, PA: The Bruderhof Foundation, 2002.
- Assohoto, Barnabe, and Samuel Ngewa. "Genesis." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006. 9-84.
- Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001.
- Balswick, Jack O., and Judith K. Balswick. *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Bell, Robert R. *Marriage and Family Interaction*. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1979.
- Britten, Bruce, and Carol Britten. *Answers for Your Marriage*. Katunayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006.
- Brooks, Elizabeth E., and Cephas D. Yandila. *Marriage is for Life*. Chingola, Zambia: Copperbelt Christian Publications, 1987.
- Brown, Jeffrey, and Pattiejean Brown. *Love Seasons: Finding Love in Unlikely Places*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2017.
- _____. *The Total Marriage: A Guide to Successful Marriage*. Grantham, England: Autumn House Publishing, 2001.
- Christenson, Larry. *The Christian Family*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1970.
- Chuunga, Daniel. *Enjoy Your Marriage: African Secrets on Marriage*. Vol. 1. Lusaka: Zambia Adventist Press, 2018.

- Cole, Edwin Luis. *Communication, Sex and Money: Overcoming the Three Common Challenges in Relationships*. Southlake, TX: Watercolor Books, 1987.
- Conway, Jim, and Sally Conway. *Ten Keys to an Intimate Mid-life Marriage*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991.
- Daugherty, Billy Joe. *Building Quality Relationships*. Tulsa, OK: Victory Christian Center, 1996.
- DeVries, Carl E. "Solomon." *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1987. 952-954.
- Drakeford, John W. *The Home: Laboratory of Life*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy*. Mumbai, India: GLS Publishing, 1988.
- Garland, Jean, and Mike Blyth. *AIDS is Real, and It's in Our Church*. Bukuru, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2005.
- Gray, A. Herbert. *Men, Women and God: A Discussion of Sex Questions from the Christian Point of View*. 21st ed. London: SCM Press, 1957.
- General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022.
- _____. "Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics, February 2021." Accessed October 4, 2023. <https://www.adventist.org/statistics/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2021/>.
- _____. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005.
- Hafemann, Scott J. *2 Corinthians*. New International Version Application Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Hale, Thomas, with General Articles Contributed by Stephen Thorson. *The Applied New Testament Commentary*. Eastborne, England: Kingsway Publications, 2000.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Harris, Joshua. *I Kissed Dating Goodbye: A New Attitude toward Romance and Relationships*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1997.

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol. 6, 2 *Corinthians*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1935.
- Hernandez, Roger. *Seven Enemies of the Family and How to Conquer Them*. Western Cape, South Africa: Africa Publishing Company, 2018.
- Holford, Karen, Sam Davies, Cyril Sweeney, and Richard Willis. *The Family Book: Creative Ideas for Families*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2014.
- Hughes, Kent, and Barbara Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Family*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995.
- Hughes, Philip Edggumbe. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Kapolyo, Joe. "Matthew." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006. 1105-1170.
- Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Kimathi, Grace. *Your Marriage and Family*. Potchefstroom, South Africa: Potchefstroom University, 1994.
- Kostenberger, Andeas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- LaHaye, Tim. *The Battle for the Family*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982.
- Lake, Stephen. *Marriage: A Practical Guide to the New Services*. Using Common Worship. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.
- Leavell, Martha Boone. *Christian Marriage*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1956.
- Madeira, Gene. *The Purposes of Scripture in Your Life: An Individualized Bible Study Program*. Katunayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006.
- Marshall, David. *God's Good News*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 1998.
- Mason, Mike. *The Mystery of Marriage: As Iron Sharpens Iron*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985.
- Mathis, David. *Preparing for Marriage: Help for Christian Couples*. Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Foundation, 2012.

- Melgosa, Julian, and Annette D. Melgosa. *To Couples: Enjoy a Stable, Lifelong Relationship*. Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz, 2013.
- Meyer, Heinrich August Wilhelm. *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*. Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983.
- Minirth, Frank, Mary Alice Minirth, Brian Newman, Deborah Newman, Robert Hemfelt, and Susan Hemfelt. *Passages of Marriage: Five Growth Stages that Will Take Your Marriage to Greater Intimacy and Fulfillment*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991.
- Mitchell, Clemency. *Vibrant Health: A Guide to Family Health*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2016.
- Musharhamina, Mulago Gwa Cikala. *Traditional African Marriage and Christian Marriage*. Kampala, Uganda: St Paul Publications, 1981.
- Mwansa, George. *Ready to Say I Do: Practical Guidelines for Couples on the Verge of Taking Marriage Vows*. Lusaka: Zambia Adventist Press, 2010.
- _____. *Women and Marriage: Why Marriage Means Everything to a Woman*. Lusaka: Zambia Adventist Press, 2012.
- Nichol, Francis, ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980.
- Nunez, Miguel Angel. *III Tips for Engaged and Newly-wed Couples*. Western Cape, South Africa: Africa Publishing Company, 2010.
- O'Brien, David E. *Today's Handbook for Solving Bible Difficulties*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1990.
- O'Donovan, Wilbur. *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa*. Kutanayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006.
- Orji, Gospel. *Causes and Cure for Delay in Getting Marriage*. Lagos, Nigeria: Pathfindaz Publishing, 2019.
- Page, Janet. "God and the Marriage Bed." *The Journal: A Resource for Ministry Spouses* 33 (2016): 3-4.
- Parkview Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Church Membership Statistical Reports*. Lusaka, Zambia: Bedrock Mission District, 2023.
- Rainey, Dennis, ed. *Building Strong Families*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002.
- Rice, J. R. *The Home, Courtship, Marriage, and Children*. Madras, India: Evangelical Literature Service, 1994.

- Riddle, James R. *The Complete Personalized Promise Bible for Women*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2005.
- Roberts, Carol M. *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing and Defending Your Dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2010.
- Sahlin, Monte. *Adventist Families in North America*. PDF file. March, 2010. <https://www.helpimaprofessor.org/ZelChi/uploads/2018/11/Adventist-Families-in-North-America-Final-Report.pdf>.
- Sampley, J. Paul. "Paul's Direct Appeal for More Affection." *New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2000. 9: 100-107.
- Southern Zambia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *Adventist Wedding Handbook*. Lusaka, Zambia: Adventist Publishing House, 2023.
- _____. *Church Membership Statistical Reports*. Lusaka, Zambia: Southern Zambia Union Conference, 2023.
- Stanford, W. D., J. J. Hendricks, T. G. Futris, L. D. Marks, and D. C. Dollahite. "Sources of Influence in Marriage and Parenting for Interfaith Couples." *Marriage & Family Review* 61, no. 4 (2025): 373-408.
- Stedman, D. E. *God's Message to All People*. Katunayake, Sri Lanka: New Life Literature, 2006.
- Strauss, Richard L. *Marriage Is for Love*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1973.
- Van Pelt, Nancy. *Highly Effective Marriage*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2008.
- _____. *Smart Love: Straight Talk to Young Adults About Dating, Love and Sex*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2012.
- _____. *To Have and to Hold: A Guide to Successful Marriage*. Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 2012.
- _____. *We've Only Just Begun: A Guide to Successful Courtship*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1982.
- Weanzana, Nupanga. "Ezra." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006. 531-542.
- _____. "Nehemiah." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006. 543-558.
- White, Ellen G. *The Adventist Home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952.
- _____. *Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948.

_____. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923.

_____. *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890.

_____. *Prophets and Kings*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917.

White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. 9 vols. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948.

Woodlands Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. *Church Membership Statistical Reports*. Lusaka, Zambia: Woodlands Conference, 2023.