

Divorce-Proofing the Christian Home: A Preventive Model for Marital Sustainability

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Abstract

Marital breakdown rarely begins with a single catastrophic event. More often, it develops gradually through unresolved expectations, weakened communication, emotional disconnection, accumulated hurt, family pressures, and declining commitment. Within Christian communities, these relational difficulties are frequently addressed only after they have developed into serious crises. This article examines the value of a preventive, faith-informed pastoral counselling approach to strengthening Christian marriages within the Ghanaian context. Drawing on a qualitative phenomenological study involving six Christian couples who had experienced significant marital distress and subsequent reconciliation through counselling, the paper integrates participants' lived experiences with covenant theology, family systems perspectives, relational spirituality, and contemporary marriage and relationship education research. Four interconnected themes emerged from the analysis: **covenant renewal, emotional reconnection, forgiveness and healing, and communication restoration**. These themes form the basis of a proposed Preventive Pastoral Marital Sustainability Model, which understands marriage not merely as a relationship to be rescued during crisis but as a covenant requiring continuous emotional, relational, and spiritual formation. The findings suggest that pastoral counselling is most constructive when biblical teaching is combined with emotional literacy, empathic communication, conflict-management skills, forgiveness processes, culturally sensitive family awareness, and sustained couple mentoring. The article cautions, however, against interpreting "divorce-proofing" as a guarantee that every marriage should or can be preserved, particularly where abuse, coercion, serious danger, or persistent violation of human dignity exists. Rather, prevention should be understood as strengthening protective relational capacities before destructive patterns become entrenched. The study contributes a contextual Ghanaian perspective to scholarship on Christian marital care and calls for greater collaboration among churches, professional counsellors, and marriage educators in developing ethically responsible, preventive models of couple support.

Keywords: Christian Marriage; Pastoral Counselling; Marital Sustainability; Divorce Prevention; Ghana; Marriage Education

Introduction

Marriage occupies a deeply valued place within both Christian theology and Ghanaian social life. For Christian couples, marriage is more than companionship or legal partnership. It is frequently understood as a covenantal relationship before God, sustained through commitment, fidelity, mutual responsibility, love, forgiveness, and shared spiritual life.

Yet sacred conviction does not automatically protect couples from relational distress.

Couples may pray together and still struggle to communicate.

They may attend church faithfully yet carry unresolved resentment.

They may understand the biblical language of covenant while remaining emotionally disconnected.

They may love one another sincerely while lacking the skills necessary to manage disagreement, financial pressure, sexual expectations, extended-family involvement, parenting responsibilities, and changing life circumstances.

This distinction is important because marital breakdown is seldom instantaneous. It often develops quietly.

Conversation becomes functional rather than intimate.

Listening gives way to defensiveness.

Unresolved offences accumulate.

Affection decreases.

Assumptions replace curiosity.

One spouse begins to withdraw while the other pursues, criticises, or retaliates.

Eventually, emotional separation may precede legal separation by months or even years.

Pastoral counselling therefore requires more than intervention at the point of collapse.

It requires **prevention**.

The central argument of this article is that Christian marital care should move from a predominantly crisis-response model toward an ongoing process of relational and spiritual formation. Couples need preparation before marriage, support during marriage, and timely intervention when patterns of distress begin to emerge.

This argument is consistent with broader marriage and relationship education research. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that relationship education can produce improvements in couple communication, although effects on relationship quality vary across programmes and populations (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008). Longer-term reviews further indicate that relationship education may help some couples maintain relationship satisfaction, particularly where modifiable risk factors are present (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013).

Within Ghana, Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) found that religious premarital counselling commonly addresses beliefs and values, partner knowledge, marital expectations, roles, sex, parenthood, finances, communication, and conflict. These findings demonstrate that religious communities already occupy an important position in marital preparation. The pastoral challenge is to deepen

that role through psychologically informed, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded counselling.

From “Divorce-Proofing” to Marital Sustainability

The language of “divorce-proofing” is pastorally attractive because it expresses the desire to protect marriage. Scholarly and clinical caution is nevertheless necessary.

No counselling model can guarantee that divorce will never occur.

Neither should marriage preservation become an absolute goal irrespective of circumstances.

Relationships characterised by violence, coercive control, sexual abuse, serious threats, exploitation, or persistent violations of dignity require careful safeguarding and professional intervention. Forgiveness should never be used to compel a person to remain in danger.

Accordingly, **divorce-proofing** is better understood in this article as the intentional strengthening of the protective capacities that support healthy marital sustainability.

These capacities include:

- realistic expectations;
- covenantal commitment;
- emotional literacy;
- empathic communication;
- constructive conflict management;
- forgiveness;
- relational boundaries;
- shared meaning;
- spiritual companionship; and
- timely help-seeking.

The goal is not to make marriage indestructible.

It is to help couples become more resilient, reflective, compassionate, and equipped to respond to inevitable differences before those differences develop into destructive relational patterns.

Theological Foundation: Marriage as Covenant

Christian theology locates marriage within a covenantal understanding of human relationship.

Genesis 2:24 presents marriage as a profound union in which two people form a new relational bond. Within the New Testament, Ephesians 5:21–33 places marital relationships within the larger Christian ethic of sacrificial love, service, and devotion.

The covenantal perspective differs significantly from an understanding of marriage based only on emotional satisfaction.

Emotion matters greatly.

Affection matters.

Companionship matters.

Sexual intimacy matters.

Yet covenant introduces another dimension: **faithfulness when emotional experience fluctuates.**

This does not mean tolerating mistreatment. Rather, covenant calls spouses to recognise that healthy marriage requires responsibilities that extend beyond immediate personal gratification.

Mahoney (2010) demonstrates that religion and spirituality can shape family relationships in constructive as well as difficult ways. Her relational spirituality framework suggests that sacred beliefs can influence the formation, maintenance, and transformation of family bonds.

Earlier meta-analytic work by Mahoney et al. (2001) likewise found modest associations between religiousness and marital functioning, while cautioning against overly simplistic conclusions about religion and family life.

Faith, therefore, is not automatically therapeutic.

Its relational effects depend partly upon how it is understood and practised.

A theology of covenant may nurture loyalty, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and shared meaning.

But religious teaching may become harmful if covenant is interpreted as requiring silence about abuse, unquestioning submission, or endurance without boundaries.

Pastoral counselling must therefore interpret covenant alongside human dignity, mutual responsibility, justice, and love.

Marriage as a Context for Christian Formation

The marital relationship can be understood as one context in which Christian character is formed.

Marriage frequently confronts individuals with the limits of self-centred expectations.

A person learns that love requires listening when one would prefer to defend.

Forgiveness when resentment feels easier.

Patience when change is slow.

Humility when one discovers that being right does not necessarily restore relationship.

Honesty when avoidance seems safer.

From this perspective, marriage becomes a form of relational discipleship.

The task of pastoral counselling is not merely to persuade couples to remain married. It is to help them develop healthier ways of being married.

This distinction is central.

Longevity without emotional safety is not sufficient evidence of marital health.

A sustainable Christian marriage should ideally cultivate dignity, trust, mutuality, growth, companionship, responsibility, and spiritual meaning.

Psychological Foundation: Marriage as an Emotional System

Bowen's (1978) family systems perspective provides an important psychological lens for understanding marital conflict.

Couples do not enter marriage as blank slates.

Each partner carries a family history.

They bring patterns of emotional expression, attachment, conflict, authority, affection, gender expectations, money management, parenting, spirituality, and boundaries learned within previous relationships.

Marriage therefore joins not only two individuals but two emotional histories.

When tension rises, spouses may respond through familiar defensive patterns.

Some pursue.

Some withdraw.

Some criticise.

Some become controlling.

Others avoid conflict until resentment accumulates.

Bowen's concept of differentiation is particularly useful because healthy intimacy requires both connection and the capacity to maintain an appropriate sense of self within relationship.

Preventive counselling can help couples identify these patterns before they become entrenched.

Rather than asking only, *“Who caused this problem?”*, the counsellor can help spouses ask:

“What cycle are we creating together?”

“What happens inside me when my spouse responds this way?”

“What did I learn about conflict from my family?”

“How can I respond differently?”

These questions move counselling from accusation toward reflection.

Communication and Relationship Education

Communication emerged strongly in the source study and remains central within contemporary relationship education.

Marriage education research does not support the claim that communication training alone can prevent every divorce. Nevertheless, communication is an important modifiable relational skill.

Hawkins et al. (2008), in a meta-analysis of marriage and relationship education, reported positive effects on communication and relationship quality. Fawcett et al. (2010), examining premarital education specifically, found more mixed results for relationship satisfaction but clearer evidence of improvement in communication.

Halford and Bodenmann (2013) further concluded that structured relationship education can assist some couples in maintaining relationship satisfaction over time, particularly those with modifiable risk factors.

The implication for pastoral counselling is important.

Christian couples require more than biblical commands to communicate well.

They may need to be **taught how**.

This includes:

active listening;

emotional validation;

appropriate assertiveness;
the use of “I” rather than accusatory “you” statements;
repair after conflict;
self-regulation;
timing difficult conversations appropriately;
and learning to distinguish disagreement from rejection.

James 1:19 offers an enduring pastoral principle: being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Counselling translates this spiritual wisdom into relational practice.

The Ghanaian Christian Context

Marriage within Ghana cannot be understood only as a private relationship between two individuals.

Family, community, church, ethnicity, social expectations, religion, and economic circumstances frequently shape marital life.

Extended-family systems may provide enormous support.

Parents and elders can offer wisdom.

Families may assist financially.

Church communities may provide prayer, companionship, mentoring, and practical care.

At the same time, communal systems may introduce tension.

In-law expectations may become intrusive.

Financial obligations to extended family may create conflict.

Gender expectations may produce unequal burdens.

Couples may struggle to establish boundaries while maintaining culturally appropriate respect.

Migration, urbanisation, education, changing employment patterns, digital culture, and evolving gender roles have further altered the environment in which Ghanaian couples negotiate marriage.

These realities make contextual pastoral counselling especially important.

Osei-Tutu et al. (2020), in research involving Christian and Muslim lay counsellors in four Ghanaian urban centres, identified communication, conflict, financial management, sexuality, parenthood, expectations, values, and marital roles among the issues commonly addressed in premarital counselling.

This suggests that Ghanaian religious counselling already engages many of the practical dimensions associated with marital sustainability.

The need is therefore not to abandon religious counselling but to strengthen its depth, training, evidence base, and professional accountability.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to explore how preventive, faith-informed counselling contributes to marital renewal and sustainability among Christian couples who had experienced significant relationship distress.

It specifically examined how participants experienced:

1. covenant renewal;
2. emotional reconnection;
3. forgiveness and healing; and
4. communication restoration.

A secondary aim was to develop a contextual pastoral framework integrating Christian theology, psychological insight, and Ghanaian relational realities.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological orientation.

Phenomenological research is appropriate where the purpose is to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The pastoral nature of the research also made such an approach particularly suitable because counselling itself depends upon careful attention to personal narrative, emotional meaning, and relational experience.

Participants and Context

Six married Christian couples—twelve individuals—participated.

Participants were drawn from Christian communities in Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast and represented Pentecostal, Methodist, Charismatic, and Evangelical backgrounds.

The couples had been married for at least five years and had previously experienced substantial relational difficulties, including communication breakdown, mistrust, emotional distance, or movement toward separation.

All had participated in structured counselling interventions.

Purposive sampling was used because the research required participants with direct experience of marital distress and subsequent counselling.

Data Collection

Data were drawn from three sources.

First, semi-structured individual and couple interviews explored participants' experiences of covenant, communication, forgiveness, emotional connection, and spiritual development.

Second, anonymised counselling documentation and follow-up notes were reviewed where permission was available.

Third, a focus-group discussion involving four couples explored broader Ghanaian marital concerns, including financial pressure, extended-family involvement, expectations, and cultural understandings of marriage.

The use of multiple sources allowed participants' individual narratives to be considered alongside relational and contextual perspectives.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed thematically within a phenomenological orientation.

Repeated reading of participant narratives allowed significant experiences to be identified and organised into recurring thematic patterns.

Four dominant themes emerged:

covenant renewal; emotional reconnection; forgiveness and healing; and communication restoration.

The findings were subsequently interpreted through an integrative framework combining covenant theology, family systems thinking, pastoral counselling, and Ghanaian cultural context.

Ethical Considerations

Participants gave informed consent, identifying details were removed, and pseudonymous or anonymised material was used in reporting sensitive marital experiences.

Particular care was required because marital research can reopen painful relational experiences.

The pastoral responsibility of the researcher therefore extended beyond gathering information to ensuring respectful treatment, confidentiality, and appropriate support where distress resurfaced.

For contemporary journal submission, formal institutional ethical-review information should be supplied where required by the target journal.

Findings

Theme One: Covenant Renewal—Rediscovering the Meaning of Marriage

One of the clearest themes was the change that occurred when participants reconsidered what marriage meant to them.

For couples in prolonged conflict, the marriage had increasingly become defined by injury.

Spouses began to think primarily about what the other person had failed to provide.

Counselling encouraged them to revisit the meaning of commitment and to distinguish covenant from passive endurance.

One husband who had seriously considered separation described a renewed awareness that his marriage involved responsibility not only toward his spouse but also before God.

Another participant explained that covenant reflection helped her stop viewing her husband primarily as an adversary and begin seeing him again as a partner.

Psychologically, covenant renewal functioned as a form of meaning reconstruction.

The external circumstances did not disappear immediately.

Rather, the interpretive frame changed.

The couple moved gradually from:

“How has this marriage disappointed me?”

toward:

“What kind of relationship are we trying to build together?”

This shift is important.

Commitment should not replace necessary problem-solving.

But commitment can provide the motivation required to remain engaged in difficult relational work.

Relational spirituality scholarship similarly indicates that sacred meaning can shape how couples form, maintain, and attempt to repair family relationships (Mahoney, 2010).

Theme Two: Emotional Reconnection—Learning to Feel Safe Together Again

Marital stability involved more than recommitment.

Several couples needed to rediscover emotional companionship.

Long-term conflict had produced guardedness.

Some spouses stopped speaking openly because previous conversations had ended in criticism or misunderstanding.

Others had become emotionally distant as a form of self-protection.

Counselling placed considerable emphasis on listening.

Partners were encouraged to hear an emotion before defending against an accusation.

They practised summarising what the other person was saying.

They learned to distinguish the spouse's feeling from their own interpretation of that feeling.

Rogers' (1961) emphasis on empathic understanding remains valuable here. People are more willing to become emotionally open when they experience the relational environment as accepting rather than immediately judgemental.

One participant described the change simply:

“For the first time in years, I could talk without fear of being attacked.”

That statement captures an important element of marital health.

Intimacy requires emotional safety.

Spiritual practices also contributed to reconnection for some couples.

Shared prayer, Scripture reading, devotion, fellowship, and renewed participation in family routines were described not merely as religious obligations but as opportunities for companionship.

For one couple, reading Psalms together became what they described as their “evening medicine.”

The pastoral significance lies not in assuming that devotion automatically resolves marital distress, but in recognising that meaningful shared spiritual practice can create opportunities for reconnection when accompanied by honest relational work.

Theme Three: Forgiveness and Healing—Addressing Accumulated Hurt

Forgiveness emerged as another central theme.

Many of the couples were not struggling only with current disagreements.

They were carrying histories of remembered injury.

Past arguments were repeatedly introduced into new conflicts.

Apologies were distrusted.

Resentment became part of the emotional atmosphere of the marriage.

Christian counselling frequently speaks about forgiveness, but the participants' experiences demonstrated the need for a more careful understanding.

Forgiveness is not denial.

It is not pretending that injury did not occur.

It is not the immediate restoration of trust.

It does not remove accountability.

Neither should it be used to keep someone in an abusive or dangerous situation.

Rather, forgiveness can involve a gradual decision to stop allowing an offence to govern the future of the relationship.

Worthington's work on forgiveness has contributed significantly to psychological and theological discussions of how people process interpersonal injury (Worthington, 1998). More recent research likewise continues to identify associations between forgiveness processes and marital satisfaction (Kaleta & Jaśkiewicz, 2024).

Participants described counselling practices involving acknowledgement of hurt, apology, prayer, reflection, and in some cases written expressions of forgiveness.

For some, the important movement was from cultural pressure to “let peace prevail” toward deeper emotional processing.

This distinction matters in Ghanaian pastoral practice.

A reconciliation ceremony can restore social peace while emotional pain remains unaddressed.

Pastoral counselling must therefore move beyond superficial settlement toward genuine healing.

Theme Four: Communication Restoration—Changing the Pattern of Conflict

Communication was the most consistently recurring practical concern.

Many participants did not lack things to say.

They lacked safe ways to say them.

Conflict had often become repetitive:

criticism;

defensiveness;

raised voices;

withdrawal;

silence;

assumption;

and renewed criticism.

Counselling introduced more deliberate communication practices.

Partners were encouraged to listen before responding.

They practised expressing personal experience without attributing motives to the other person.

Difficult discussions were sometimes preceded by prayer, not as a technique for avoiding disagreement but as a means of reducing hostility and reminding spouses of the values they wished to embody.

One husband described a significant insight:

“I discovered that shouting was not leadership; listening was.”

This statement reflects both psychological and theological growth.

Communication became more than a skill.

It became a practice of humility.

Research on marriage and relationship education supports the usefulness of communication-oriented intervention, while also cautioning that such programmes should not be treated as universally sufficient (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008).

For the couples in this study, communication improved most meaningfully when technique was joined with emotional safety, forgiveness, and renewed commitment.

An Integrative Preventive Pastoral Model

The findings suggest a four-dimensional model of marital sustainability.

1. Covenant Renewal

Couples regularly revisit the meaning, values, responsibilities, and shared purpose of their marriage.

The pastoral question is:

“What are we committed to becoming together?”

Covenant renewal guards against reducing marriage to current emotional satisfaction alone.

2. Emotional Reconnection

Couples cultivate empathy, affection, companionship, emotional language, and the capacity to become vulnerable without fear of ridicule.

The central question becomes:

“Do I feel emotionally safe enough to be known by my spouse?”

3. Forgiveness and Repair

Couples develop processes for acknowledging injury, taking responsibility, apologising meaningfully, forgiving where appropriate, restoring trust gradually, and establishing necessary boundaries.

The important question is:

“How do we repair what has been damaged rather than repeatedly reopening it?”

4. Communication Restoration

Couples learn how to listen, disagree respectfully, regulate emotion, discuss expectations, negotiate differences, and resolve problems collaboratively.

The guiding question is:

“Can we talk about difficult matters without destroying one another?”

These dimensions operate together rather than sequentially.

Covenant without communication can become duty without intimacy.

Communication without forgiveness may become technically correct but emotionally cold.

Forgiveness without accountability may perpetuate injury.

Emotional connection without commitment may remain unstable.

Marital sustainability requires integration.

Prevention as an Ongoing Pastoral Process

The findings challenge the assumption that counselling belongs only to troubled marriages.

Preventive marital care should occur across the marital life cycle.

Premarital Formation

Premarital counselling should explore more than wedding preparation and doctrinal compatibility.

Couples should discuss:

family-of-origin patterns;

financial expectations;

sexuality;

faith;

communication;

conflict;

parenthood;

career aspirations;

gender expectations;
extended-family boundaries;
health;
and personal vulnerabilities.

The Ghanaian findings of Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) support the relevance of many of these domains within religious premarital counselling.

Early-Marriage Support

The first years of marriage involve adaptation.

Couples are learning how to combine expectations, routines, finances, intimacy, family loyalties, and decision-making.

Churches should therefore consider follow-up after the wedding rather than treating the marriage ceremony as the end of pastoral preparation.

Marriage Enrichment

Healthy couples can benefit from periodic enrichment.

Relationship education research suggests that preventive programmes can strengthen communication and, for some groups, help maintain relationship satisfaction (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2008).

Couple retreats, workshops, mentoring, and professionally facilitated relationship education can therefore serve preventive purposes.

Early Intervention

Counselling should be normalised before couples reach crisis.

Persistent contempt, emotional withdrawal, loss of affection, unresolved sexual difficulties, repetitive conflict, secrecy, financial dishonesty, and prolonged resentment should be treated as signals for early help rather than reasons for embarrassment.

The Role of the Church

The church remains strategically positioned to support marital health in Ghana.

However, effective marriage ministry requires more than preaching that divorce is undesirable.

Fear of divorce does not teach people how to communicate.

Condemnation does not resolve trauma.

Scripture quotation without careful listening may deepen rather than relieve marital distress.

Churches can strengthen their contribution in several ways.

They can establish professionally supported marriage and family ministries.

They can train pastoral workers in basic counselling competence and referral.

They can create mentorship systems involving mature couples while maintaining appropriate confidentiality and boundaries.

They can make marital enrichment an ordinary part of discipleship rather than an emergency intervention.

They can also distinguish between ordinary marital conflict and situations requiring specialist support.

Domestic violence, coercive control, suicidal risk, severe mental illness, addiction, child safeguarding concerns, and serious trauma require appropriate professional intervention.

Pastors should not carry every case alone.

Implications for Pastoral Counsellors

The study suggests several implications for practice.

First, counsellors should assess both the presenting conflict and the relationship history beneath it.

Second, spiritual beliefs should be integrated respectfully rather than imposed mechanically.

Third, counsellors should help couples translate theological ideals into observable relational behaviour.

“Sacrificial love” must eventually appear as listening, responsibility, kindness, faithfulness, boundaries, and repair.

Fourth, counsellors should distinguish forgiveness from unsafe reconciliation.

Fifth, Ghanaian cultural realities—including extended-family relationships, gender expectations, communal obligations, migration, financial pressure, and respect for elders—should be explored explicitly.

Finally, counselling should be developmental.

The question is not only, *“How do we stop this marriage from collapsing?”*

It is also:

“What capacities does this couple still need to develop?”

Discussion

The findings suggest that sustainable Christian marriage is built through both meaning and skill.

Theology gives couples a framework for understanding commitment.

Psychology helps them understand emotional and relational processes.

Culture explains many expectations carried into marriage.

Counselling brings these dimensions into conversation.

This integrative understanding avoids two extremes.

The first is excessive spiritualisation, in which every marital problem is reduced to prayer, sin, or spiritual warfare.

The second is psychological reductionism, in which spiritual beliefs are treated as irrelevant to Christian couples whose faith deeply shapes identity and meaning.

Effective pastoral counselling requires both professional understanding and theological sensitivity.

The findings also support a broader preventive orientation.

Marriage and relationship education research suggests that structured programmes can positively affect communication and may support relationship quality for some couples, although outcomes vary and should not be exaggerated (Fawcett et al., 2010; Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2008).

The present study adds a Ghanaian pastoral dimension to that evidence.

For these couples, prevention and restoration were strengthened when relational skills were connected to covenant, spirituality, emotional meaning, and community.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

The sample consisted of only six Christian couples and cannot represent all Ghanaian marriages.

Participants had already experienced counselling and reconciliation, which means the study primarily reflects the perspectives of couples for whom counselling was perceived as helpful.

Couples whose marriages ended despite counselling were not represented.

The researcher's pastoral relationship with some participants may also have influenced disclosure and interpretation.

Furthermore, the original study did not include a comparison group and therefore cannot establish that the counselling model itself caused the improvements described by participants.

The language of “divorce prevention” should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

The study demonstrates perceived mechanisms of marital renewal rather than proof that a particular programme prevents divorce.

Future studies should use larger samples, longitudinal designs, comparison groups, validated marital-outcome measures, and greater denominational and socioeconomic diversity.

Recommendations

Churches and counselling institutions should develop preventive marital programmes that combine theological formation with evidence-informed relationship education.

Premarital counselling should be followed by structured support during the early years of marriage.

Professional counsellors and pastoral caregivers should collaborate rather than operate as competing systems.

Couple mentoring should supplement—not replace—professional intervention.

Marriage programmes should include communication, conflict management, emotional literacy, sexuality, financial management, extended-family boundaries, parenting expectations, and mental-health awareness.

Research should also examine how Ghanaian couples understand covenant, forgiveness, gender expectations, intimacy, and changing family structures in contemporary society.

Most importantly, churches should create a culture in which seeking counselling early is understood as wisdom rather than failure.

Conclusion

Strong marriages are not marriages in which disagreement never occurs.

They are relationships in which couples gradually learn what to do with disagreement, disappointment, difference, and pain.

The Christian home is strengthened not simply by vows made once but by commitments renewed repeatedly.

Covenant must become practice.

Love must become behaviour.

Forgiveness must become a pathway to repair rather than a slogan.

Communication must become listening as well as speaking.

Faith must become a resource for humility, hope, responsibility, and compassion.

The study therefore reframes “divorce-proofing” not as the impossible promise that a marriage can never end, but as the intentional cultivation of the spiritual, emotional, and relational capacities that make healthy endurance more possible.

For pastoral counsellors, this is an important calling.

Some couples arrive when the marriage is already deeply wounded.

Others can be reached before the wounds become severe.

The church should be prepared for both.

Preventive pastoral counselling invites couples to attend to the health of their relationship before silence becomes estrangement, disappointment becomes contempt, and conflict becomes separation.

In this sense, marital sustainability is not achieved by fear of divorce.

It is nurtured through formation.

When covenant, emotional connection, forgiveness, communication, cultural wisdom, and professional counselling are held together, the Christian home can become more than a relationship that merely survives.

It can become a place in which two people continue learning how to love with truth, grace, courage, and hope.

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