

# Building Healthy, Biblically-based Christian Marriages & Families: What Christian Counselors Need to Know (Myths & Research)

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**NEW ORLEANS**  
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# Session Description.



- ◉ Ethical codes identify the spiritual dimension as a necessary component of competent counseling; however, evidence suggests that many counselors lack comprehensive training in the value of religion in such areas as marriage and family counseling. This workshop will look at the role of religion and spirituality in Christian marriages and families, and examine some of the myths and research in the field.

# Objectives



- Participants will:
  - Review the importance of addressing the spiritual dimension in counseling
  - Examine the role of religion and spirituality in Christian marriages and families
  - Identify some of the myths and research associated with conservative Christian families and the implications for counseling
- (Primarily focus on perception and information that will inform practices)

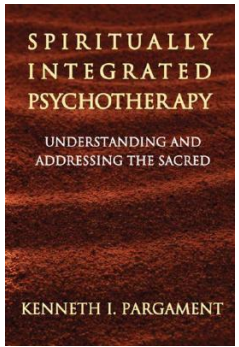
# The Current Situation in Counseling

- ◉ Mental health professionals are less likely than the general population to have a belief in God or, with the exception of marriage and family therapists, attend religious services.
- ◉ Secular therapists and their counseling philosophies historically have tended to maintain an attitude of antagonism or indifference toward religion, finding no therapeutic value in combining high levels of spiritual content in the counseling process.

# Exploring the Role of Spirituality in Counseling

- ◉ Past: Emphasis in counselor training on separating religion from counseling
- ◉ Historic view:
  - ◉ Religion as personal
  - ◉ Religion as unhealthy
    - ◉ Freud: “an illusion”
    - ◉ Religion reduced to psychological processes with naturalistic explanations
  - ◉ Religion as beyond the realm of competent counseling (“Don’t go there...”)

# Spirituality and Counselors



- ◉ Over 90% of the U.S. population reports belief in a personal God, and 58% report that religion is very important to them.
- ◉ Only 24% of clinical and counseling psychologists report belief in a personal God, and only 26% indicate that religion is very important to them (p. 9)
  - ◉ Pargament, Kenneth I. (2007). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. New York: Guilford Press.

# Religious Affiliation



- ◉ Between 2007 and 2014, Christians in the U.S.A. declined from 78.4% to 70.6%
  - ◉ Of the 70.6%, 25.4% (or 62 million) are evangelical Protestants
  - ◉ The 62 million represents an increase from 2007 of 2-5 million
- ◉ Unaffiliated (atheists, agnostics): 22.8%
  - ◉ Source: Pew Research Center

# Spirituality and Past Counselor Training

- ◉ “Most young professionals leave graduate school unprepared to address the spiritual and religious issues that they will face in their work” (p. 9).
- ◉ Survey of training directors: Less than 20% report offering a course on religion or spirituality in their counseling psychology graduate programs (p. 9).
  - ◉ Pargament, Kenneth I. (2007). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. New York: Guilford Press.
- ◉ In the early 2000s, the topic of religion/spirituality was being covered to some degree in most accredited clinical programs. However, a distinct minority of these programs approached this education and training in a systematic fashion, whereas other programs reported no educational or training opportunities in this area.
  - ◉ Brawer, P. A., Handal, P. J., Fabricatore, A. N., Roberts, R., & Wajda-Johnston, V. A. (2002). Training and education in religion/spirituality within APA-accredited clinical psychology programs. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 33(2), 203-206.



# The Gaping Spiritual Hole in Counselor Training Programs in the Past

- ◎ Kelly [1994] found that 84% (287 of 343) of counselor education programs had no course that specifically addressed spiritual or religious issues,
- ◎ 73% (250 of 343) of counselor education programs do not include religion or spirituality as part of any course in their program.

◎ Kelly, E. W., Jr. (1994). The role of religion and spirituality in counselor education: A national survey. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 55, 227-237. Cited in Onedera, J. B. (Ed.) (2008). *The role of religion in marriage and family counseling*. New York: Routledge, p. 10.

◎ (How many of you have had a graduate-level course on spirituality and counseling?)

# Spirituality and Counselor Training

- ◉ “This state of affairs is a reflection of the deeply seated assumption within the mental health field that spirituality is, at most, a side issue in psychotherapy, one that can be either sidestepped or resolved through an education to reality, I believe this assumption is just plain wrong” (p. 9).
- ◉ Pargament, Kenneth I. (2007). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. New York: Guilford Press.

# Review of Recent Research

- ◉ More recent research indicates that therapists are now more open to religious/spiritual issues, that clients want to discuss these matters in therapy, and that the use of religious/spiritual interventions for some clients can be an effective adjunct to traditional therapy interventions.

- ◉ Post, Brian C., & Wade, Nathaniel G. (2009). Religion and spirituality in psychotherapy: A practice-friendly review of research, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65(2), 131-46. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20563

# Changing Views on the Role of Religion In Counseling

- ◉ A national survey of American Counseling Association members found that they strongly support the importance of spiritual and religious competencies for effective counseling practice.
  - ◉ 68% Strongly Agreed that formal training in addressing spiritual and/or religious issues in counseling was important BUT
  - ◉ 43.5% indicated Strongly Disagreed, Disagreed, or Neutral on their ability to practice in accord with the ASERVIC (ACA) identified spiritual competencies.
    - ◉ Young, J. Scott, Wiggins-Frame, Marsha, & Cashwell, Craig S. (2007). Spirituality and counselor competence: A national survey of American Counseling Association members. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85, 47-52.

# Effectiveness of Christian Marriage Counseling

- ◉ In the past, Christian approaches to helping couples have lacked empirical support.
- ◉ More recent research has found that “In general, . . . evidence has shown that religious therapies and Christian couple approaches are about as effective as non-religious approaches, and may offer some spiritual benefits not found in non-religious approaches” (p. 221).
  - ◉ Hook, J. N., Ripley, J. S., Worthington, E. L. & Davis, D. E. (2011). Christian approaches for helping couples: Review of empirical research and recommendations for clinicians. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 30(3), 213-222.

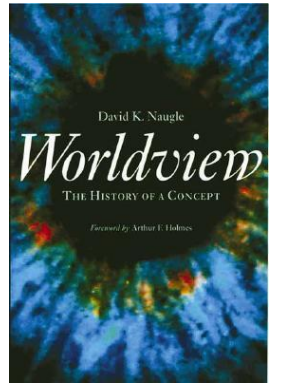
# Religious and Spiritual Diversity Training

- ◉ Counselor training in religious and spiritual diversity needs to be intentional.
- ◉ Need to have faculty with specialized expertise in religious and spiritual issues, incorporating these issues into courses and clinical training.
- ◉ Intentional collaboration with religious professionals is needed.
- ◉ “When programs with religious identities are up for accreditation, it is routine to receive public comments from constituencies within APA objecting to their accreditation bid, but we have never heard of a program being questioned because it does not pay adequate attention to religion or spirituality in training.”
  - ◉ McMinn, Mark, R., Bufford, Rodger K., Vogel, Michael J., Gerdin, Tyler A., & Goetsch, Brian Lee, et al. (2014). Religious and spiritual diversity training in professional psychology: A case study. *Faculty Publications—Graduate School of Clinical Psychology*, 115. [https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp\\_fac/115](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/115)

# Issue in Counselor Training: Competing Worldviews

- **Naturalism**--the material universe is the true reality; it has always existed (e.g., 20<sup>th</sup> Century western science & psychology)
- **Theism**--God is eternal or pre-existent and the Creator and sustainer of our universe.

# Christian Worldview



- ⦿ “...implies the objective existence of the trinitarian God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose word, wisdom, and law define and govern all aspects of created existence.”
  - ⦿ David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 260.
- ⦿ A Christian worldview begins with God and His revelation in history (Creation, fall, resurrection, ascension, redemption, consummation).
- ⦿ History is linear and intentional—a teleos with life having meaning and purpose



# Effect of Competing Worldviews

- ◉ What are some different ways that a conservative Christian client might define a problem in comparison to a non-theistic counselor?
  - ◉ ACA Code Section E.5.b. Cultural Sensitivity
    - ◉ Counselors recognize that **culture affects the manner in which clients' problems are defined**. Clients' socioeconomic and cultural experiences are considered when diagnosing mental disorders.

# Counseling as Biblical or Naturalistic: So What's the Big Deal?

- ◉ How would a secular counselor (e.g., Albert Ellis), using Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), respond to a person who revealed a feeling of overwhelming guilt due to sinful behavior?
  - ◉ A secular counselor would likely see such thinking as irrational and attempt to show the person that a belief in sin must be challenged and replaced with thoughts that result in more pleasant feelings.
  - ◉ Key Point: Secular cognitive therapy models tend to judge thoughts by their utility or **usefulness** (in helping you feel better) rather than their **truthfulness**. If you think that you are an evil sinner, then the goal is to change that thought, so that you will feel better.

# Biblical vs. Naturalistic Worldviews

- ◉ Secular counseling goals: happiness, avoidance of pain or suffering
- ◉ Christian counseling goals: holiness, peace with God (in spite of circumstances)

# Related Issues



- ◉ Problem of addressing the spiritual dimension—inadequate training
- ◉ Challenge of addressing the spiritual dimension—multiple views
- ◉ Personal views of religion—counselor and counselee
- ◉ Views even within a common faith tradition are not homogeneous
- ◉ Christians seeking help for problems prefer to have their faith incorporated in some way into their counseling experience.
- ◉ Research supports the effectiveness of Christian approaches to counseling, and religious therapy techniques have proven to be as efficacious as nonreligious ones for religious individuals

# ACA 2014 Code of Ethics

Cultural Sensitivity & Defining the Problem (Recognizing Worldviews)

ACA Code Section A.2.c. Developmental and Cultural Sensitivity

**Counselors communicate information in ways that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate.** Counselors use clear and understandable language when discussing issues related to informed consent. When clients have difficulty understanding the language used by counselors, they provide necessary services (e.g., arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator) to ensure comprehension by clients. In collaboration with clients, counselors consider cultural implications of informed consent procedures and, where possible, counselors adjust their practices accordingly. (*Emphasis added.*)

ACA Code Section E.5.b. Cultural Sensitivity

Counselors recognize that **culture affects the manner in which clients' problems are defined.** Clients' socioeconomic and cultural experiences are considered when diagnosing mental disorders.

# ACA 2014 Code of Ethics

Counselors must recognize religious and spiritual issues in assessment

- ⦿ ACA Code Section E.8. Multicultural Issues/Diversity in Assessment

Counselors **select and use with caution assessment techniques** that were normed on populations other than that of the client. **Counselors recognize the effects of** age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, language preference, **religion, spirituality**, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status on test administration and interpretation, and place test results in proper perspective with other relevant factors. (*Emphasis added.*)

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

- ASERVIC is an organization of counselors and human development professionals who believe spiritual, ethical, and religious values are essential to the overall development of the person and are committed to integrating these values into the counseling process.



# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

- ASERVIC has developed a list of competencies designed to assist the helping professional best address the spiritual and religious issues in counseling.
- The Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling are guidelines that complement, not supersede, the values and standards espoused in the ACA Code of Ethics. They are endorsed by the ACA.



# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

## Culture and Worldview

- ①. The professional counselor can describe the similarities and differences between spirituality and religion, including the basic beliefs of various spiritual systems, major world religions, agnosticism, and atheism.
- ②. The professional counselor recognizes that the client's beliefs (or absence of beliefs) about spirituality and/or religion are central to his or her worldview and can influence psychosocial functioning.

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

## Counselor Self-Awareness

- ③. The professional counselor actively explores his or her own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion.
- ④. The professional counselor continuously evaluates the influence of his or her own spiritual and/or religious beliefs and values on the client and the counseling process.

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

## Human and Spiritual Development

- ⑤. The professional counselor can identify the limits of his or her understanding of the client's spiritual and/or religious perspective and is acquainted with religious and spiritual resources and leaders who can be avenues for consultation and to whom the counselor can refer.
- ⑥. The professional counselor can describe and apply various models of spiritual and/or religious development and their relationship to human development.

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

## Communication

- ◉ 7. The professional counselor responds to client communications about spirituality and/or religion with acceptance and sensitivity.
- ◉ 8. The professional counselor uses spiritual and/or religious concepts that are consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and are acceptable to the client.
- ◉ 9. The professional counselor can recognize spiritual and/or religious themes in client communication and is able to address these with the client when they are therapeutically relevant.

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

## Assessment

- ◉ 10. During the intake and assessment processes, the professional counselor strives to understand a client's spiritual and/or religious perspective by gathering information from the client and/or other sources.

## Diagnosis and Treatment

- ◉ 11. When making a diagnosis, the professional counselor recognizes that the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives can a) enhance well-being; b) contribute to client problems; and/or c) exacerbate symptoms

# Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC)

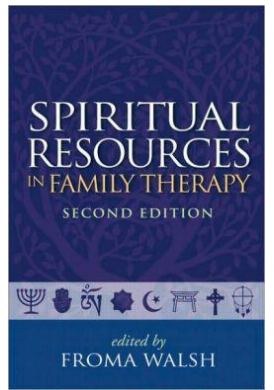
## Diagnosis and Treatment

- ◉ 12. The professional counselor sets goals with the client that are consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives.
- ◉ 13. The professional counselor is able to a) modify therapeutic techniques to include a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives, and b) utilize spiritual and/or religious practices as techniques when appropriate and acceptable to a client's viewpoint.
- ◉ 14. The professional counselor can therapeutically apply theory and current research supporting the inclusion of a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and practices.

# Research: Spirituality & Mental Health

- ◉ Around 90% of the world's population involved in some form or religious or spiritual practice.
- ◉ Koenig argues that “religion is a powerful coping behavior that enables people to make sense of suffering, provides control over the overwhelming forces of nature (both internal and external) and promotes social rules that facilitate communal living, cooperation, and mutual support.” (p. 283)
  - ◉ Koenig, H. G. (2009). Research on religion, spirituality, and mental health: A review. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(5), 283-291.
  - ◉ Harold G. Koenig, M.D., is a Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Associate Professor of Medicine, and Director of the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health at the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina.

# The Definition Problem: Spirituality



- ◉ “the quality or state of being concerned with religious matters”
  - ◉ Merriam-Webster
- ◉ “Spirituality: “an overarching construct, refers to a dimension of human experience involving personal transcendent beliefs and practices, within or outside formal religion, through family and cultural heritage, and in connection with nature and humanity.”
  - ◉ Froma Walsh (ed.), *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Guildford, 2009), 5.

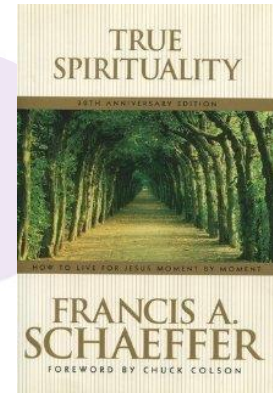


# Spirituality



- ◉ Harold Koenig, expert on the study of spirituality and health has said that the secular understanding of spirituality is humanism.
- ◉ Harold G. Koenig (Director, Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health, Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Duke University): “Conducting Research on Christian Interventions,” AACCC World Conference, September 14, 2013.

# Spirituality



## ◉ True Spirituality (Francis Schaeffer):

- ◉ “it is impossible even to begin living the Christian life, or to know anything of true spirituality, before one is a Christian.”
  - ◉ Jesus: “No one comes to the Father, except through me,” (John 14:6)
- ◉ “True spirituality is not achieved in our own energy. The ‘how’ of the kind of life we have spoken of, the true Christian life, true spirituality, is Romans 6:11: ‘Reckon ye also yourselves’ (there is the faith) then the negative aspect: ‘to be dead indeed unto sin’; but then the positive: ‘but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ this is the ‘how’ and there is no other. It is the power of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, by faith.”
  - ◉ Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1971), 3, 59.

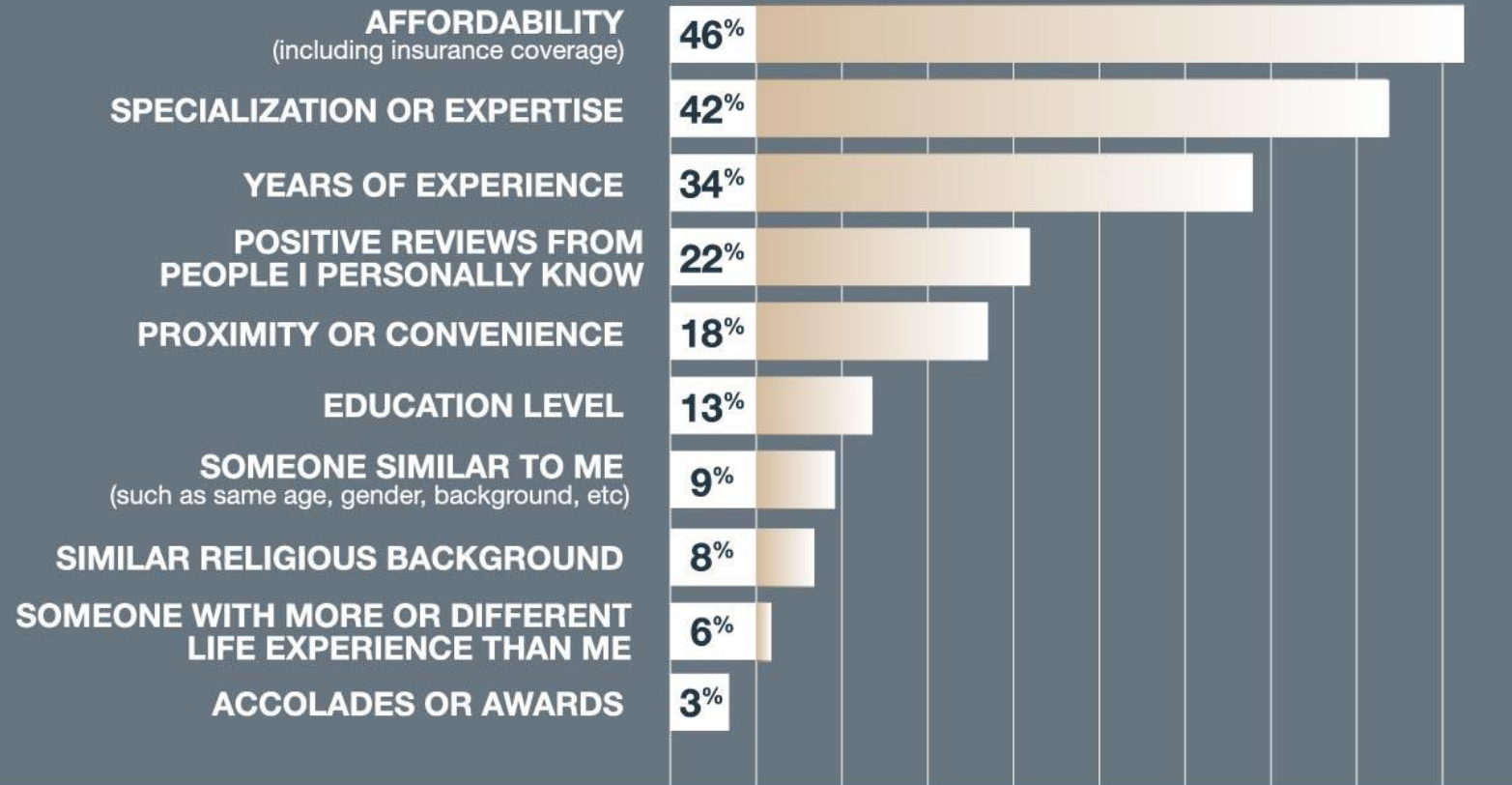
## ◉ (A Different Worldview)



# True Spirituality & Life's Basic Questions

- ◉ Basic Questions in Life:
  - ◉ *Who are you?*
  - ◉ *Who am I and what is my purpose? (Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life?)*
- ◉ In the biblical worldview, our life story is part of a bigger story, with an Author/Creator, a beginning, and an end that gives life meaning and purpose.
- ◉ (Note: Science, the authority in the naturalistic worldview, is ill-equipped to answer these questions)

Of the attributes below, which two are most important to you in choosing a counselor?



n=1,021 | February 8-14, 2017

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# Counselor Must Have a Similar Religious Background?

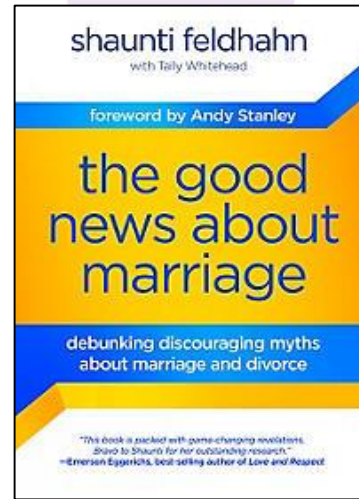
- ◉ While only 8 percent of U.S. adults say a similar religious background is one of the most important factors, this is much more essential to some. For example, **among conservatives, one out of five (20%) indicates a similar religious background matters greatly to them**, far more than the 3 percent of liberals who say the same. **Among evangelicals, almost half (47%) also list this factor among their top two**, a striking comparison to the few of no faith (1%) who look for a therapist with a similar faith experience.

- ◉ [https://www.barna.com/research/americans-feel-good-counseling/?utm\\_source=Barna+Update+List&utm\\_campaign=6cd4244584-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_12\\_28&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_8560a0e52e-6cd4244584-172181801&mc\\_cid=6cd4244584&mc\\_eid=13846be090](https://www.barna.com/research/americans-feel-good-counseling/?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=6cd4244584-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-6cd4244584-172181801&mc_cid=6cd4244584&mc_eid=13846be090)

# Religion and the Therapist-Client Relationship

- ◉ Kelly and Strupp (1992) study found that “salvation” (an explicitly religious variable) was the only client-therapist value that therapists and clients significantly differed (due particularly to the non-religiosity of the therapist) BUT
- ◉ Patient-therapist similarity on religious variables may be one of the best predictors of successful therapy outcome.
  - ◉ Kelly, T. A., & Strupp, H. H., (1992). Patient and therapist values in psychotherapy: Perceived changes, assimilation, similarity, and outcome. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60, 34-40. DOI: 10.1037//0022-006X.60.1.34

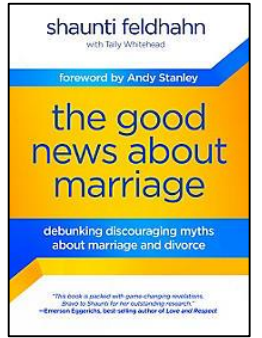
# Christian Marriages & Families : Myth and Research



- ◉ Feldhahn, Shaunti (with Tally Whitehead) (2014). *The Good News about Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books.



# Christian Marriages & Families : Myth and Research



- ◉ The actual divorce rate has never been close to 50 percent.
- ◉ 50 percent number was based on projections, not measurements.
- ◉ The divorce rate peaked around 1980 and has since been declining.
- ◉ 72% of who have ever been married are still married to their first spouse. (Remaining 28% divorced? No, could be widowed. Guesstimate based on widows: 25% of first marriages end in divorce (p. 21)
- ◉ Most marriage problems are not caused by big issues.
  - ◉ Feldhahn, Shaunti (with Tally Whitehead) (2014). *The Good News about Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books.

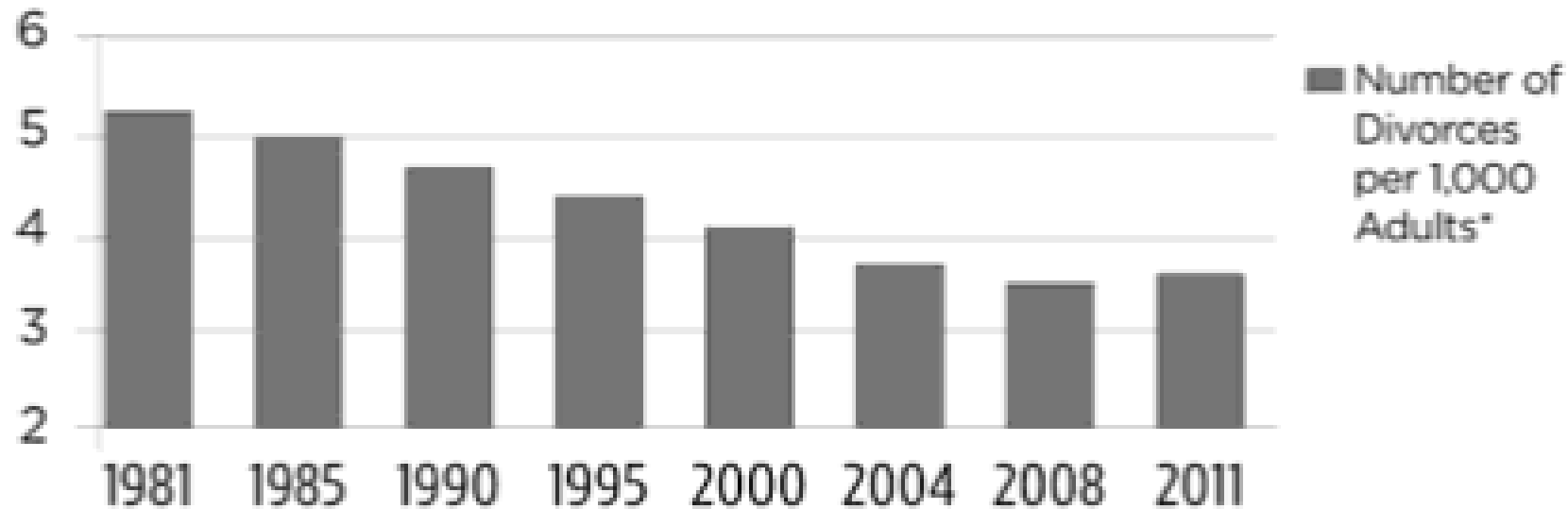


## Survey Results: What Percent of Marriages Have Ended in Divorce?

Study	Percent “Ever Divorced”*
US Census Bureau, 2009 SIPP (men and women; first marriage only)	<28% (probably less than 25%)
US Census Bureau, 2009 SIPP (women only; first or subsequent marriage) <sup>15</sup>	30.8%
University of Chicago, General Social Survey, 2012 <sup>16</sup>	35.5%
University of Texas-Austin, National Fatherhood Initiative Marriage Survey, 2005 <sup>17</sup>	23.4%
Barna Group, 2008 <sup>18</sup>	33%
Marist Poll for the Knights of Columbus, 2010 (divorced or annulled) <sup>19</sup>	37%

\*of those ever married

## The Declining Rate of Divorce Since the Peak Year



\*Note: This "crude divorce rate" is the only one for which we have a complete apples-to-apples comparison over this length of time.<sup>24</sup>

Source: Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract 2012 (table 78) and CDC/NCHS National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends (2011).<sup>25</sup>

- Feldhahn, p.27.
- Cohabiting increases risk of divorce. Divorce decline may be due to these people not getting married at all.

# Christian Marriages



- ◉ Christian couples (i.e., those who practice their beliefs and attend church regularly) don't divorce at the same rate as non-Christians. Numerous studies point to a rate of 15-20 percent.

# New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released: Barna Study

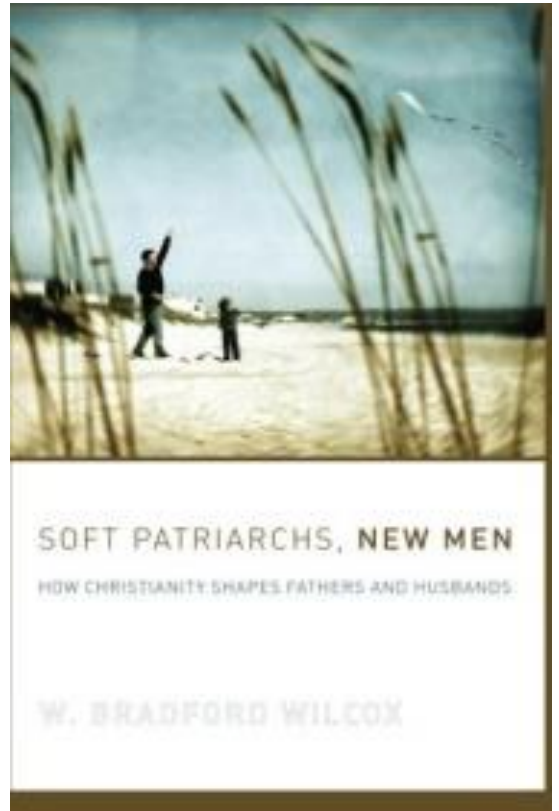
- The study showed that the percentage of adults who have been married and divorced varies from segment to segment. For instance, the groups with the most prolific experience of marriage ending in divorce are downscale adults (39%), Baby Boomers (38%), those aligned with a non-Christian faith (38%), African-Americans (36%), and people who consider themselves to be liberal on social and political matters (37%).
- Among the population segments with the **lowest likelihood of having been divorced subsequent to marriage are Catholics (28%), evangelicals (26%), upscale adults (22%), Asians (20%) and those who deem themselves to be conservative on social and political matters (28%).**
- **Born again Christians who are not evangelical were indistinguishable from the national average on the matter of divorce: 33% have been married and divorced.** The survey did not determine if the divorce occurred before or after the person had become born again. However, previous research by Barna has shown that less than two out of every ten people who accept Christ as their savior do so after their first marriage.
  - **“New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released”** The Barna Group of Ventura, California) ([www.barna.com](http://www.barna.com)). Retrieved from <https://www.barna.com/research/new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released/> 26 January, 2018

# Identifying “Christian” Marriages Dilemma

- ◉ “active conservative Protestants” who regularly attend church are 35 percent **less likely** to divorce compared to those who have no affiliation. Nominally attending conservative Protestants are 20 percent **more likely** to divorce, compared to secular Americans
  - ◉ W. Bradford Wilcox and Elizabeth Williamson, “The Cultural Contradictions of Mainline Family Ideology and Practice,” in *American Religions and the Family*, edited by Don S. Browning and David A. Clairmont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) p. 50.
  - ◉ Wilcox is a sociologist at the University of Virginia and director of the National Marriage Project.

# Christian Marriages & Families: Myth and Research

- ◉ The Myth of the Abusive Fundamentalist Christian Father
- ◉ Wilcox, W. Bradford (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



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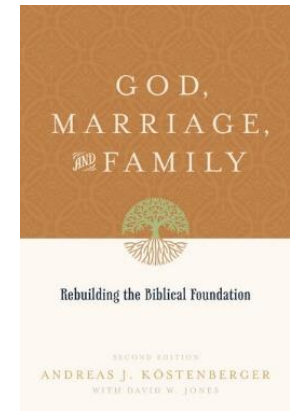
# The Perception vs. The Reality

## (An Example)

- ◉ Stereotypical view of conservative/ fundamentalist Protestant fathers:
  - ◉ Disengaged from their children's emotions
  - ◉ Hold rigid, authoritarian views of marital relations and parenting
  - ◉ Enforced dominance over their wives
  - ◉ Higher rates of domestic violence and harsh discipline towards their children (Wilcox, 2004).
- ◉ (If this view is true, then how can you hold this theological position and counsel effectively?)

# The Perception vs. The Reality

## (An Example)

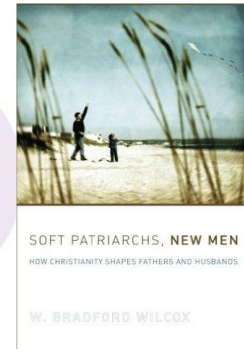


- Reality Check—the Biblical Model:
  - Requires fathers to love their wives and to nurture or instruct and encourage their children, following the model of Christ (Eph. 5:21-6:4, Col. 3:18-21).
  - Kostenberger & Jones (2010, p. 63) challenge the “improper caricature” that we find in modern culture of the fundamentalist Christian father demanding submission from his wife.
  - The “biblical model of marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband’s loving leadership is met with the wife’s intelligent response (pp. 63-64).”
    - Kostenberger, Andreas, & Jones, David W. (2010). *God, marriage and family: Rebuilding the biblical foundation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Crossway Books.



# The Perception vs. The Reality

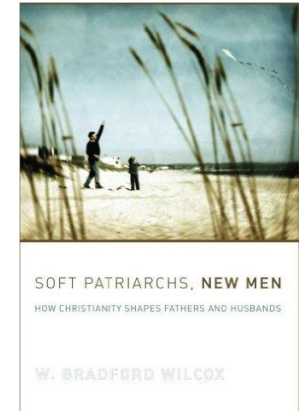
## (An Example)



- ◉ Reality Check—The Empirical Research Evidence:
  - ◉ Wilcox (2004) examined data from three national surveys, representing over 30,000 fathers: the General Social Survey (GSS), the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), and the Survey of Adults and Youth (SAY).
  - ◉ He defined conservative Protestant men as individuals who represented churches that hold a “high view of biblical authority, usually expressed as the view that the Bible is the literal Word of God; a belief in Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation; and a belief that the Bible provides the primary guide to moral life (p. 15).”
  - ◉ Wilcox compared these fathers to mainline Protestant men, who practice an accommodationist approach towards cultural changes in marriage and family, and to men with no religious affiliation. The result:
    - ◉ Wilcox, W. Bradford (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

# The Perception vs. The Reality

## (An Example)



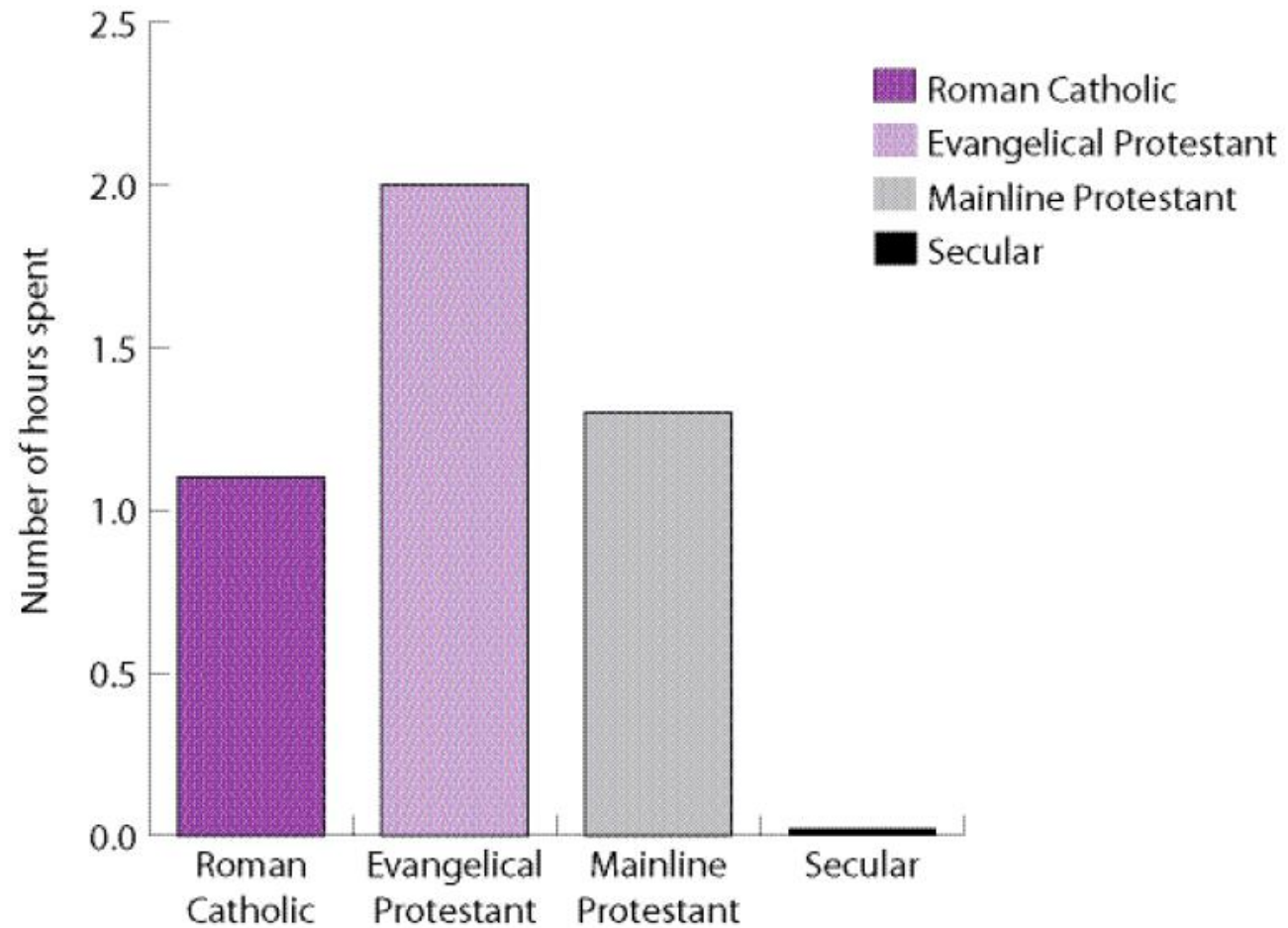
### Reality Check—The Empirical Research Evidence

- The result:

- In the domains of marital emotion work and fatherhood we have found no evidence that religion, or conservative Protestantism in particular, is a force for reaction. Instead, we see that **churchgoing family men—especially conservative Protestant family men—are more progressive than their peers: they spend more time with their children; they are more likely to hug and praise their children; their wives report higher levels of satisfaction with the appreciation, affection, and understanding they receive from their husbands; and they spend more time socializing with their wives. We have also seen that, contrary to the predictions of their critics, churchgoing conservative Protestant men register the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in this study.** ...conservative Protestant family men have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any major religious group in the United States. (pp. 206-207)

- Wilcox, W. Bradford (2004). *Soft patriarchs, new men: How Christianity shapes fathers and husbands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Figure 3. Fathers' Involvement in Youth Activities,  
by Religious Affiliation**



Source: Data calculated from W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*, 2004.

# Positive Effect of an Active, Intrinsic Faith

- What accounts for the family-oriented effects of religion on family men? **First, the rituals and preaching men encounter in religious institutions**—from baptisms to Father’s Day sermons—underline the moral responsibilities that bind them to their wives and children, endowing them with a sacred character. In the last twenty years, churches—particularly evangelical Protestant churches—have focused more of their family rhetoric on men in an effort to encourage them to take a more active role in the lives of family members. **Second, religious congregations also provide men with multiple opportunities**—from worship to youth groups—to spend time with their wives and children. This time often allows men a chance to get to know their family members better and to signal how much they care about them. **Third, the social networks in churches tend to be family centered**, and these networks offer informal and formal support for norms that sustain marriage and family life. For instance, fathers experiencing difficulty in disciplining a toddler can turn to their religious networks in search of advice and encouragement, thereby becoming a more effective parent. Similarly, studies suggest that churchgoing encourages sexual fidelity, in part because church-based social networks monitor the behavior of their members. **Finally, by imposing a meaningful order on the normal challenges of family life**—not to mention unusual traumas, such as unemployment, illness, and death—religious faith can help family men deal constructively with the ordinary and extraordinary stresses in their lives. This is important because stress often undercuts men’s abilities to be active and affectionate husbands and fathers.

◦ Wilcox, W. Bradford (June 2008). Is religion an answer? Marriage, fatherhood, and the male problematic. *Research Brief No. 11*. Center for Marriage and Families, Institute for American Values.

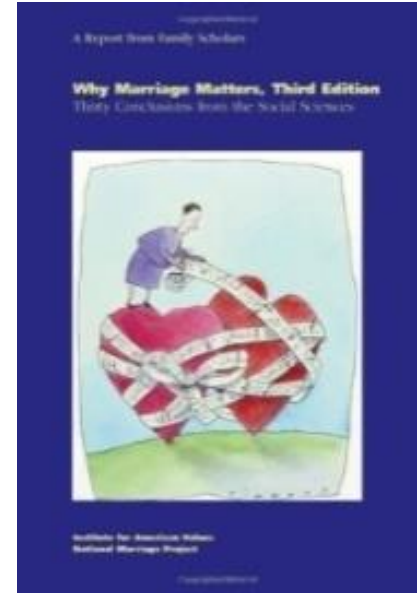
# The Family that Prays Together...

- ◉ In-home family devotional activities and shared religious beliefs are positively linked with reports of relationship quality.
- ◉ Couples in same-faith relationships who share core religious beliefs and values, and “those who attend religious services regularly tended to report greater relationship satisfaction than do others” (p. 972).

◉ Ellison, C. G., Burdette, A. M., & Wilcox, W. B. (2010). The Couple that Prays Together: Race/Ethnicity, Religion and Relationship Quality. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 963-975.



- ◉ Wilcox, W. Bradford (2011). *Why marriage matters, third edition: Thirty conclusions from the social sciences*. New York: Institute for American Values.

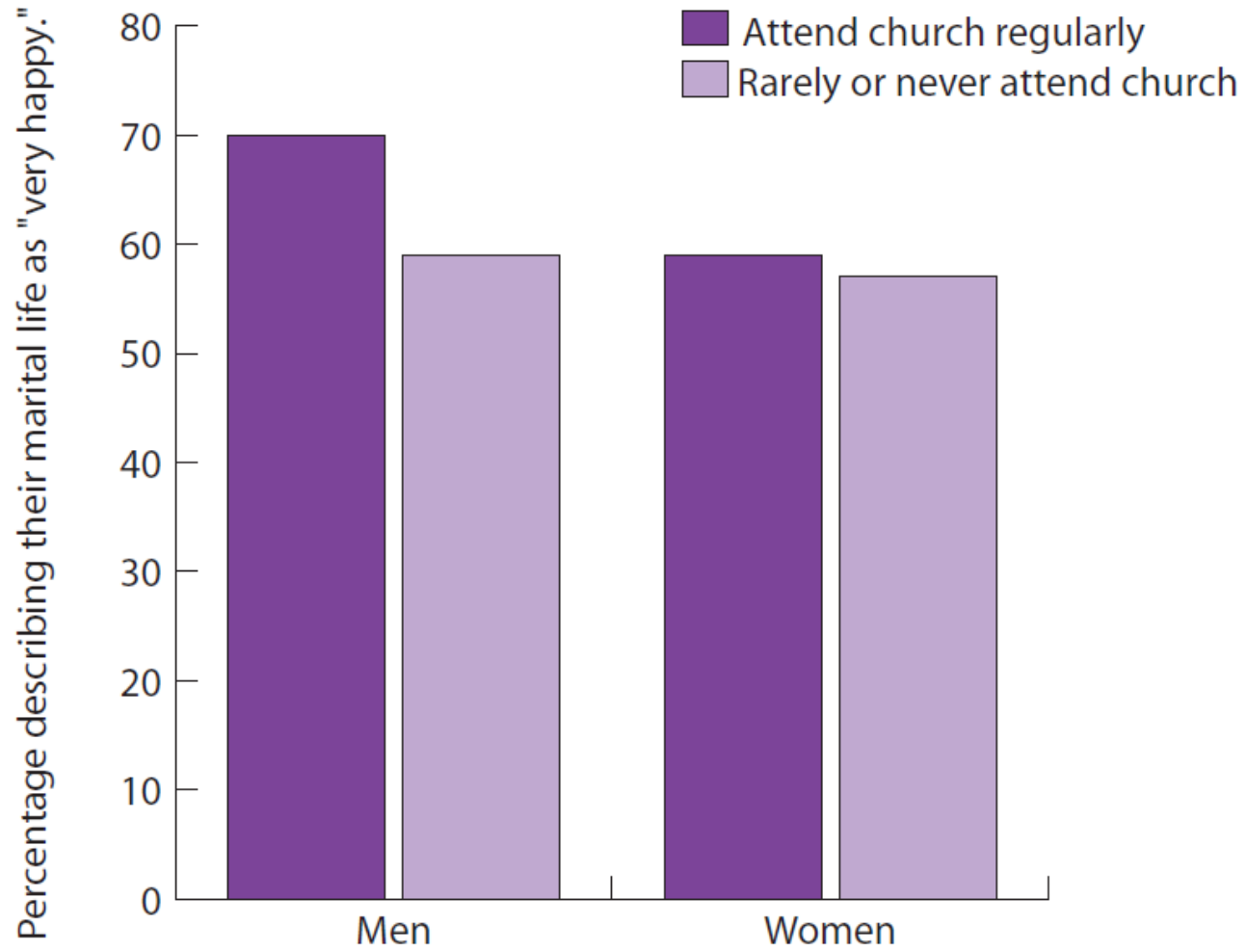




# Church Attendance Beneficial to Marriage

- ◉ Using three nationally representative surveys - the General Social Survey (GSS), the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), and the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) - Wilcox found that married church-going Americans across denominational and racial classifications were more likely to describe themselves as "very happy" than their non-religious counterparts. Key: they attend together.
- ◉ Wilcox explained that regular church attendance offers certain positive benefits to a married couple: "Churches supply moral norms like sexual fidelity and forgiveness, family-friendly social networks that lend support to couples facing the ordinary joys and challenges of married life, and a faith that helps couples make sense of the difficulties in their lives-from unemployment to illness-that can harm their marriages."  
"So, in a word, the couple that prays together stays together," said Wilcox.

**Figure 1. Marital Happiness, by Sex and Church Attendance**



Source: General Social Survey (2000-2006).



# Myth vs. Reality

- ◉ “Negative statistics about Christianity receive more attention than positive ones, and consequently are more likely to become conventional wisdom” (p. 135) (Yet the conventional wisdom is often wrong. Example: Christians have higher divorce rates.)
- ◉ “Essentially, people who associate themselves with Christianity, as compared to the religiously unaffiliated, are **more likely to have faithful marriages, commit less crime, interact honestly with others, and not get into as much trouble with drugs or alcohol.** What’s more, the more committed Christians are to their faith, as measured by church attendance, the greater the impact the church’s teachings seem to have on their lives” (p. 152).
  - ◉ Wright, Bradley R. E. (2010). *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites...and Other Lies You’ve Been Told*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

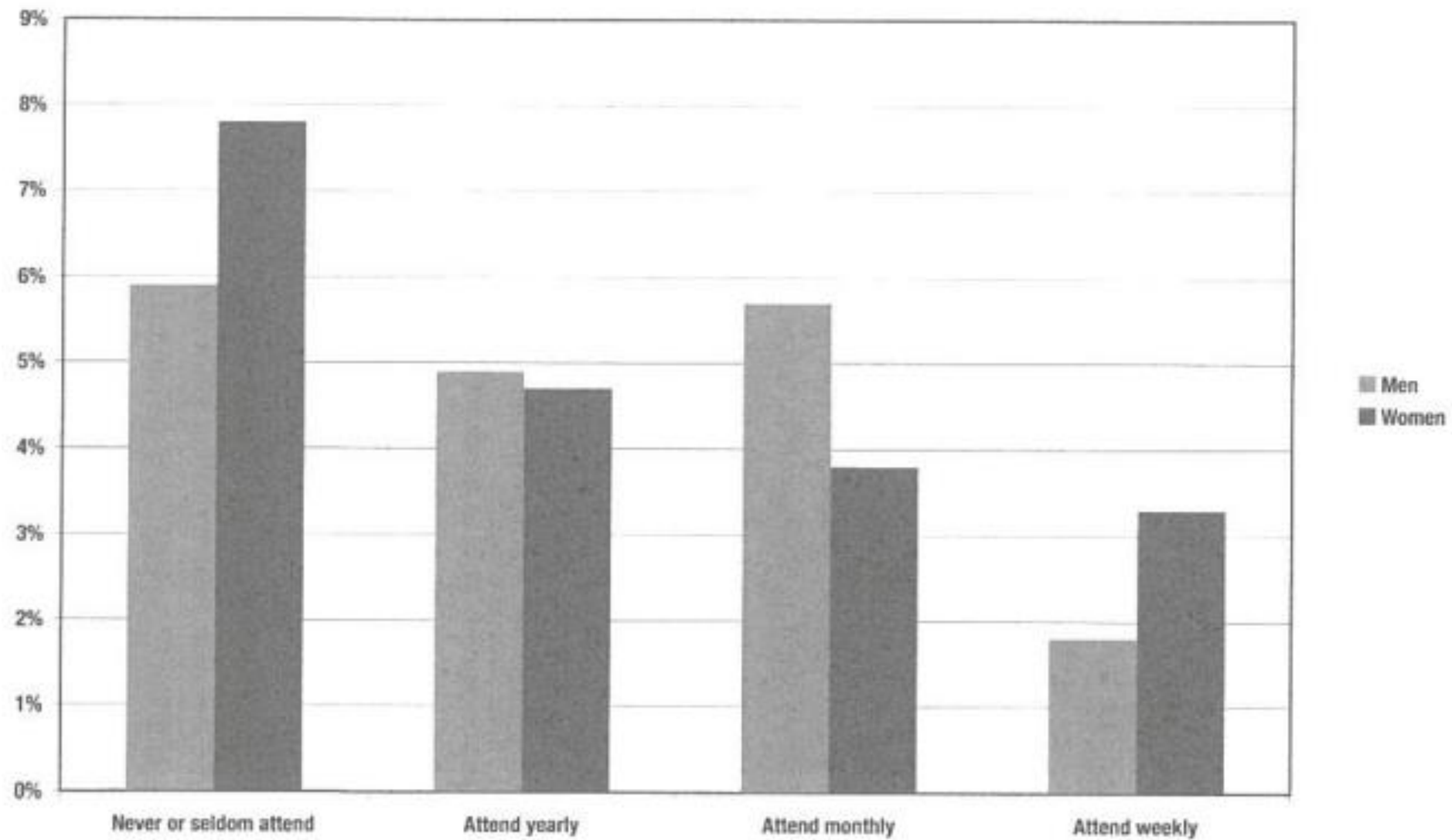
Bradley R.E. Wright, PhD

A Sociologist Shatters Myths  
From the Secular and Christian Media

**Christians Are  
Hate-Filled Hypocrites  
...and Other Lies  
You’ve Been Told**

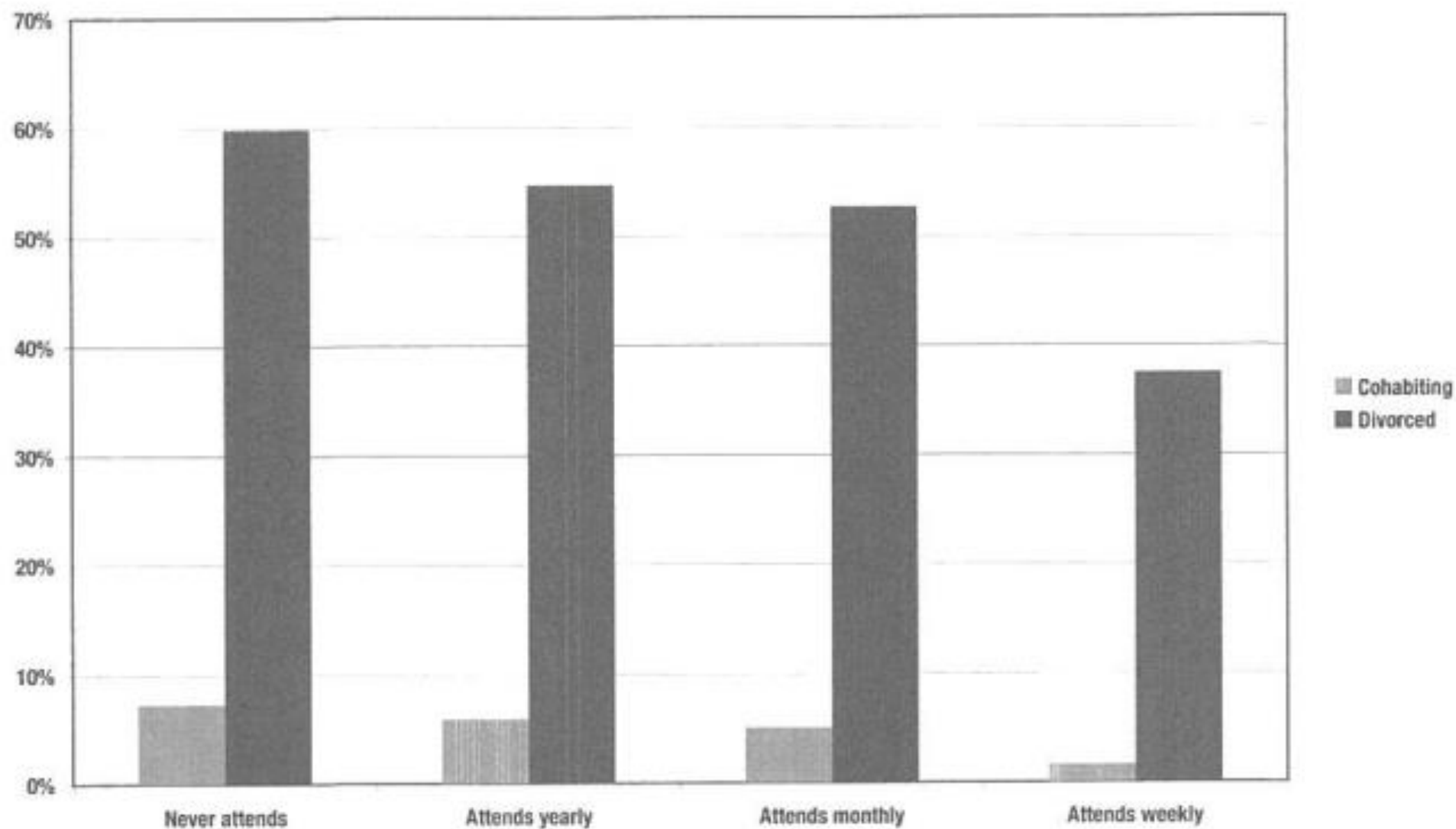


Figure 6.2: Have You Hit, Shoved, or Thrown Things at Your Partner in the Past Year (by Religious Attendance)



National Survey of Families & Households, 1987 (Ellison, et al., 1999)

Figure 6.1: Are You Currently Living with a Romantic Partner?  
Have You Ever Been Divorced or Are You Currently Separated? (Evangelical Respondents)



# “The Real Home of Anti-Christian Attitudes” (Wright, p. 205)

- ◉ Survey of 1,200 faculty members in American colleges and universities by the Institute for Jewish and Community Research (2007). (Originally looking for anti-Semitism, but revealed a strong intolerance toward Evangelical Christians.)
- ◉ 53% of faculty reported negative feelings toward Evangelical Christians
  - ◉ Negative feelings toward: Muslims 22%, atheists 18%, Catholics 13%, non-Evangelical Christians 9%, Buddhists 4%, Jews 3%
  - ◉ (Wright, pp. 205-206)

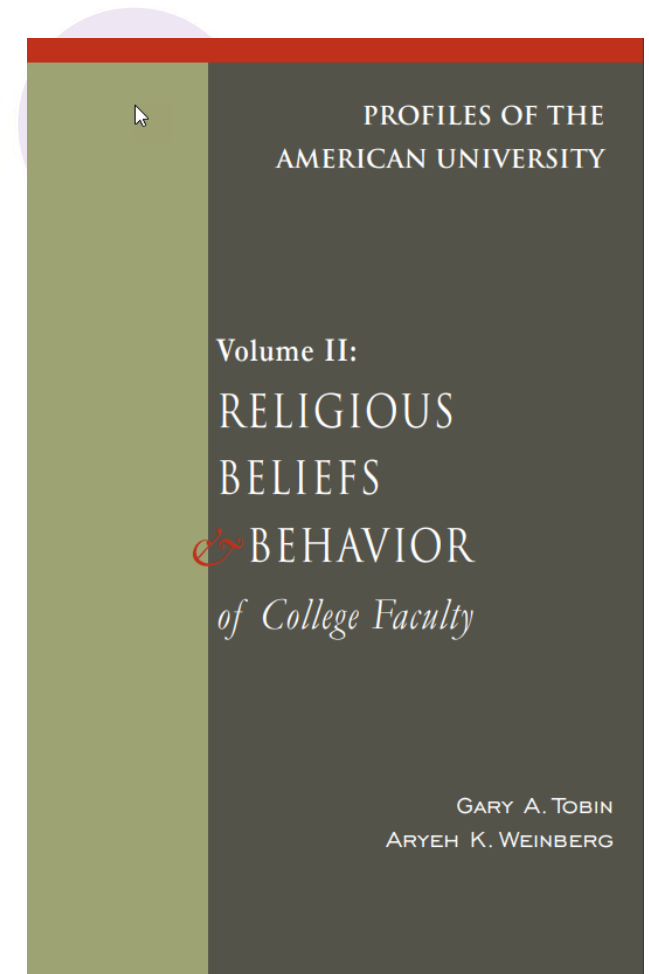
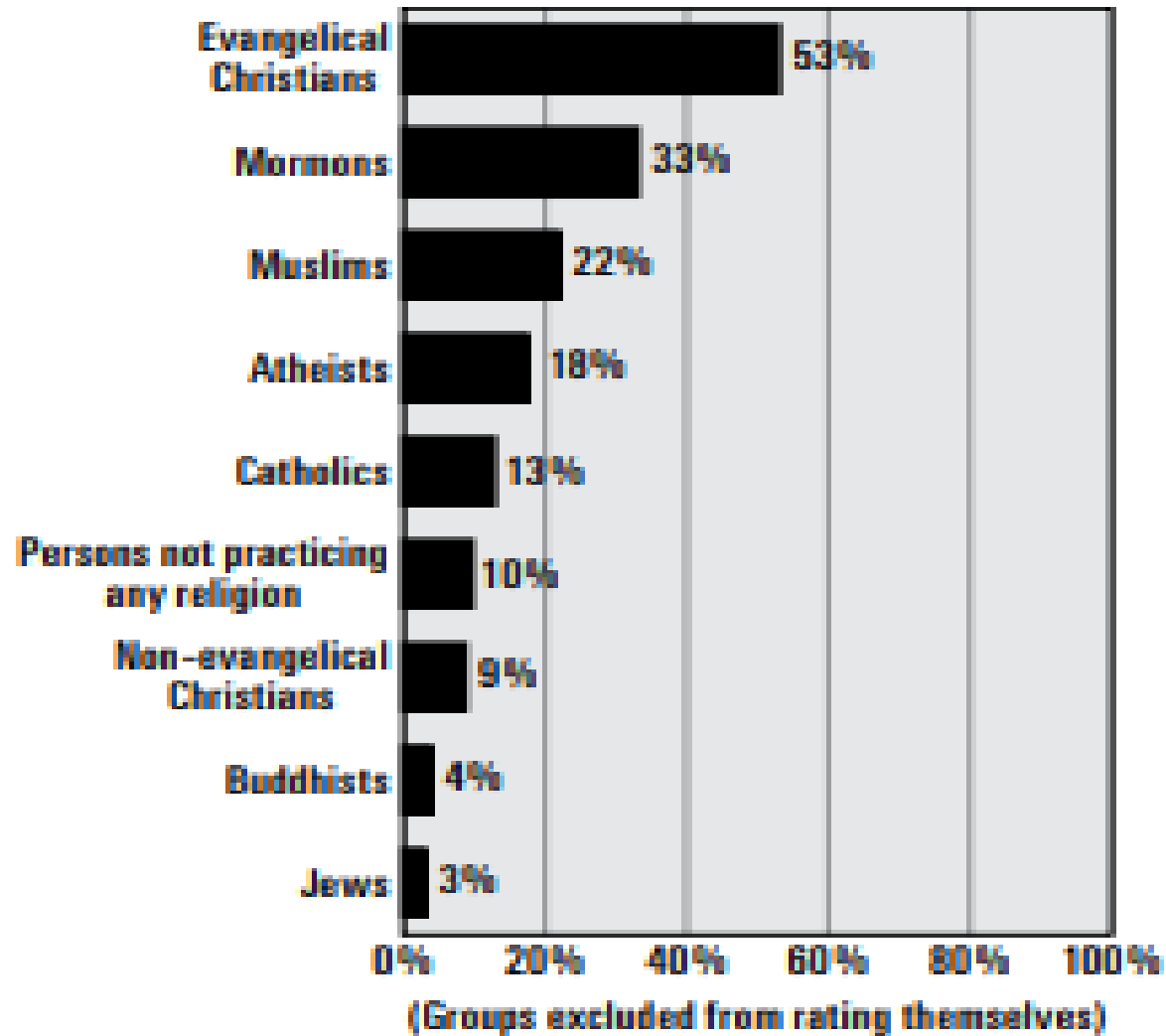
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**Figure 37: Unfavorable Views of Religious Groups (Faculty)**

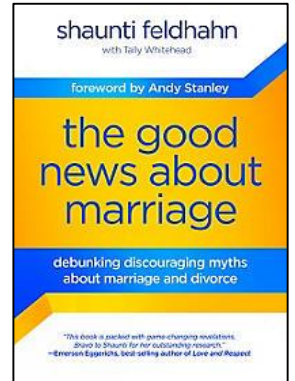


- Tobin, Gary A., & Wienberg, Aryeh K. (2007). *Religious beliefs and behavior of college faculty*. Vol. 2. In *Profiles of the American University*. Institute for Jewish & Community Research, p. 81.

# “The Real Home of Anti-Christian Attitudes” (Wright, p. 205)

- Conclusion: “if not outright prejudice, faculty sentiment about the largest religious group [*i.e.*, *Evangelical Christians*] in the American public borders dangerously close” (Wright, p. 206)

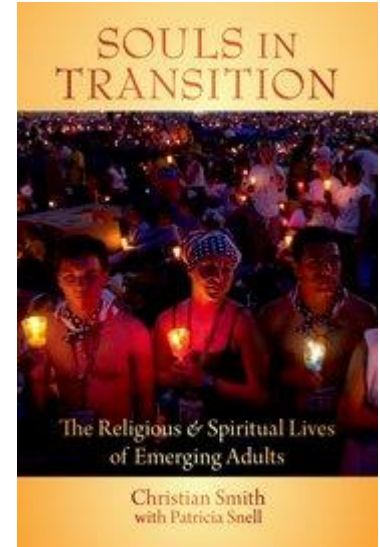
# Christian Marriages & Families: Myth and Research



- ◉ Study of couples: “Eventually it was clear that there was one common denominator among marriages that survived versus those that failed: hope” (p. 3).
  - ◉ Feldhahn, Shaunti (with Tally Whitehead) (2014). *The Good News about Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books.
- ◉ Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).
- ◉ “In the New Testament, hope is not wishful thinking, it is a confident expectation in the fulfillment of God’s promises. Present troubles are manageable when living in hope of future redemption.” (A Christian Worldview)
  - ◉ *Faithlife Study Bible* (Rom. 8:24, 25)

# Faith Formation in Children

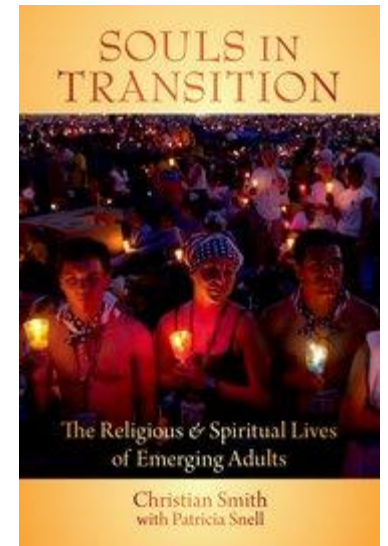
- ◉ Smith and Snell (2009) found that the best empirical evidence shows that when it comes to faith formation in the lives of 18-23-year-olds, parents are in fact, highly important.
  - ◉ Smith, C., & Snell, P. (2009). *Souls in transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*. Oxford: University Press, cited in Voss, p. 33.





# Faith Formation in Children

- “Of the many teenage-era factors that our study investigated as possible influences on emerging adult religious outcomes, one of the most powerful factors was the religious lives of their parents—how often they attended religious services, how important religious faith was in their lives, and so on.”  
(Smith & Snell, p. 285)

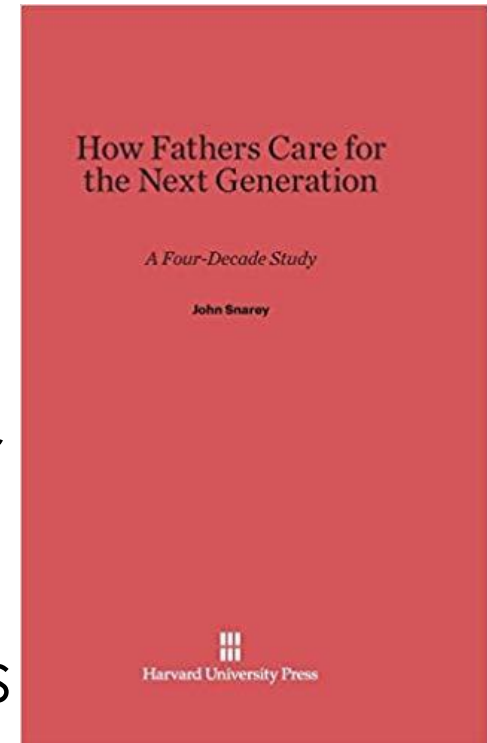


# Role of the Father: Peripheral or Central Value?

- ◉ In striking contrast to research that considers fathers to be obscure or peripheral figures, John Snarey reveals their position as central caregivers and characterizes their most effective nurturing behaviors. He demonstrates that men's care for their families reaps immense and long-lasting benefits—for themselves, for their offspring, and for future generations.

He examines fathers' involvement in three vital realms of their children's development: social-emotional, intellectual-academic, and physical-athletic.

- ◉ Snarey, J. R. (1993). *How fathers care for the next generation: A four-decade study*. Cambridge, MA, US: Harvard University Press.

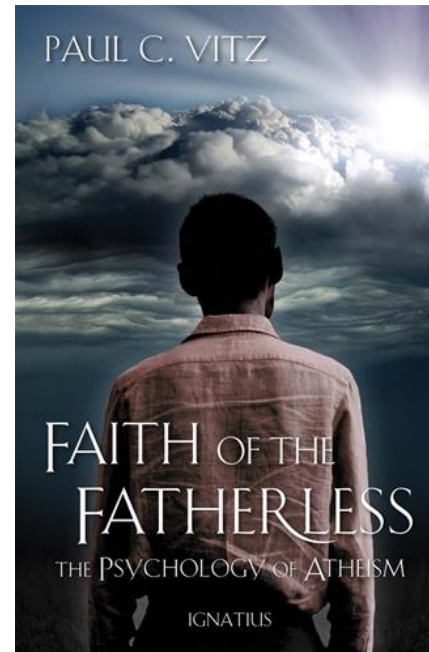
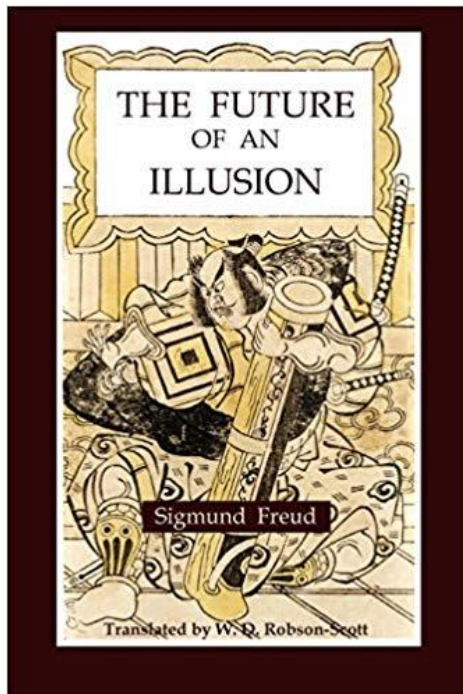


# Faith of Fathers



- ◉ Voss, Steven (2019). *A study of psychological and social factors affecting religious belief* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

- Freud: Religion is an obsessional neurosis and an illusion to protect against anxiety and insecurity (*The Future of an Illusion*). (Implication: Atheists are mentally healthier than theists and will probably have better relationships with their fathers, not needing to replace them with an illusionary all- powerful god.)
- Vitz: Let's examine this idea.



# Faith of the Fatherless

- ◉ Vitz (2013) suggested a theory of the defective father, stating that an absent or abusive father may be a factor in the development of atheism.
  - ◉ **An “atheist’s disappointment in and resentment of his own father unconsciously justifies his rejection of God” (p. 16).**
- ◉ Vitz (2013) published his findings using archival data and found that many influential philosophers, scientists, and intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries were without healthy father attachments and were more likely to be atheists.
  - ◉ Vitz, P. C. (2013). *Faith of the fatherless: The psychology of atheism* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.

# Faith of the Fathers



- ◉ Voss (2019) Research: Emerging adults who, as children, had secure attachments with their biological father were more likely to stay with the religion of their childhood. (Voss, 207)
- ◉ Fathers play an important, if not critical, role in the spiritual health of their children.

# Value & Importance of Christian Fathers

- This research revealed that fathers who model a relationship with God tend to have children who grow into adulthood with less likelihood of leaving the beliefs of their childhood. A relationship between fathers who model a relationship with God and children having a secure attachment was evident in the research for this dissertation. Both predispose a person to retain their faith. This finding says much about the exemplary father.
- Voss, 210



# Value & Importance of Christian Fathers

- ◉ The defective father is one who fosters an avoidant relationship. Attachment may be the psychological construct that paves the way for belief, but modeling a relationship with God is the content of the belief. The integration of modeling healthy relational behaviors and instruction about faith seem to foster a predisposition for belief. Healthy relational behavior fosters attachment but living out Christian ideals fosters healthy relational behavior. Voss, 210

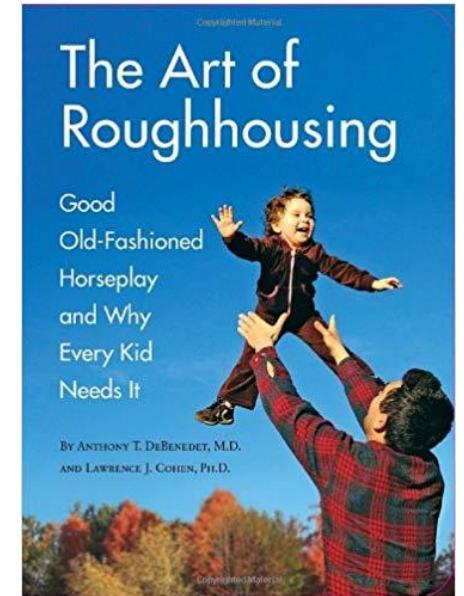


# Scientific data confirms ancient teaching

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, New International Version).

# Myth: Roughhousing Teaches Violence

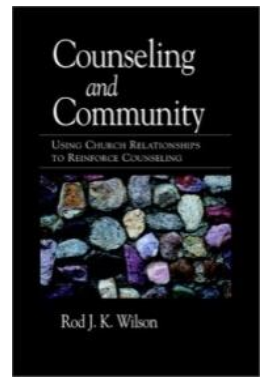
- ◉ Roughhousing “makes kids smart, emotionally intelligent, lovable and likable, ethical, physically fit, and joyful.”
- ◉ Boosts resilience, adapting quickly to unpredictable situations
- ◉ Develops intelligence—rewires the brain for learning
- ◉ Builds social intelligence: learn difference between play and real aggression, learn cooperation
- ◉ Teaches morality—learn boundaries, appropriate use of strength
- ◉ Increases physical activity
- ◉ Builds father-child bond



# Warnings against Hypocritical parenting

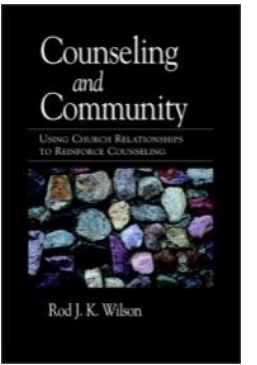
- ◉ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matthew 23:13, New International Version).
- ◉ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. (Eph. 6:4, NLT)

# Counseling and Community: Using Church Relationships to Reinforce Counseling



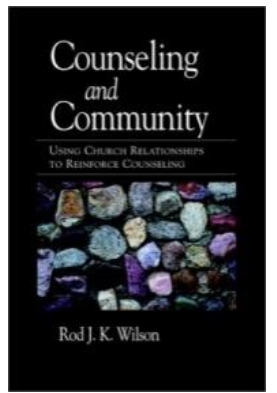
- ◉ Healing needs to be connected with a Christian community for it to be truly Christian (p.17)
- ◉ Why do evangelicals and Christian counselors only pay lip service to community?
  - ◉ Culture—a counselor training focus on the person and individualism, not on problem solving in a communal paradigm
  - ◉ Therapy—a therapy focus on the intrapsychic; an individualistic sanctioned retreat from community where pain is kept private
  - ◉ Scriptures—we fail to see the communal nature of the Bible, focusing on the individual aspects
    - ◉ Rod Wilson, *Counseling and Community: Using Church Relationships to Reinforce Counseling* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

# Counseling and Community: Using Church Relationships to Reinforce Counseling



- ◉ Wilson argues that Western psychology moves us from religion to psychotherapy, and reflects a move from community to the individual, becoming one more form of individualism.
- ◉ Differentiation is a tension between independence and dependence
  - ◉ Therapeutic views of differentiation that separate the person from the family may be reflecting a Western preoccupation with individualism and the intrapsychic, and the role of community may be negated (p.47).
  - ◉ An alternate anthropological view sees differentiation as humanity-in-community, and a balance of healthy sense of self with a balanced view of family.
    - ◉ Rod Wilson, *Counseling and Community: Using Church Relationships to Reinforce Counseling* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

# Counseling and Community: Using Church Relationships to Reinforce Counseling



- ◉ A Christian understanding of community is tied to a biblical anthropology (or humanity) through looking at Adam, who is created in community and in relationship with God from the very beginning as he was “made in the image of God” (p. 61).
  - ◉ Genesis 2 is often viewed as purely relating to marriage, but Wilson argues it also is a description of our essence: people in relationship to God and people in relationship to one another.
  - ◉ The historical sections of Genesis show how God works in community, showing his love and affection for his people (p. 64).
  - ◉ Communal milieu is central in our understanding of God and his work in the lives of His people.



# Summary

- ◉ Counselors must address the spiritual dimension in counseling
  - ◉ Ethical codes require it
  - ◉ Necessary for competent counseling
- ◉ Religion and spirituality are positive forces in Christian marriages and families
  - ◉ Research support for overall health
- ◉ False beliefs about Christian marriages
  - ◉ High divorce rates
  - ◉ Domestic abuse
  - ◉ Marital dissatisfaction