

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN WHO DID NOT  
INITIATE A DIVORCE**

Doctoral Dissertation Research

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Argosy University, Phoenix Campus  
College of Psychology and Behavioral Science

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Pastoral Community Counseling

By

Jerry L. Robinson

June 2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

The process of divorce can be destructive or constructive to those involved based on its circumstances. The present study was designed to investigate the spiritual dimensions of African-American men who underwent, but did not initiate, divorce. The study examined their coping skills and their use of spirituality during the divorce process. The study involved eliciting the stories and experiences of 14 African-American men between the ages of 25-65 who did not initiate a divorce. This qualitative study explored the spiritual journey of each participant as they shared their experiences of divorce. The results indicated that during the process of divorce, many participants displayed spiritual coping skills, such as reading the Bible, support groups, and church participation. Overall, many participants experienced emotional discomfort during divorce. However, with strong spiritual support, their lives became much more positive. Further studies are recommended using qualitative and quantitative designs. The findings of the present research will be valuable to pastors and clergy, to mental health counselors, to family members, and to researchers.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The proposed research was developed to describe the challenges of divorce, as it impacts the spiritual dynamics of a person journeying through divorce, but did not initiate the divorce. Divorce is a daunting experience in American society that has influenced the social and spiritual dynamics of American families, especially African-American men who did not initiate divorce. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the following: problem background, purpose of the study, research questions, limitations and delimitations, definitions and importance of the study. These segments should provide a descriptive vision for the proposed research topic, which involves: An exploration of the spiritual dimensions of African-American men who did not initiate divorce.

### **Problem Background**

In the context of the problem background, the task of the proposed research described the background, including overview of divorce, effects of divorce, and assessment of divorce on African-American men. These components provided an overview of the problem background that explicated divorce in general terms and focused on a specific group that encountered divorce from their spouses.

### **Overview of Divorce in the United States**

To understand the general dynamics of divorce, a succinct overview includes an ancient institution, divorce rates (secular and religious), and the ways individuals cope with divorce. According to Dombeck (2013), the institution of divorce is as old as that of marriage. Throughout time and across cultures, the ease of attaining a divorce, the stigma societies attach to divorce, and the political and religious controls over this institution have varied significantly. On one hand, some accounts suggest, during certain

times, a man was allowed under Islamic law to divorce his wife by saying "I divorce you three times" (Dombeck, 2013, p. 1). At the same time, other accounts suggest the Anglican Church was created in the sixteenth century by English King Henry VIII so he could obtain a divorce from his wife, which the Catholic Church prohibited (Dombeck, 2013).

According to Dombeck (2013), in the early 1960s, the only way divorce could be obtained in the United States, in most cases, was on a fault basis. This required one of the partners to prove to the State the other partner was exhibiting unacceptable behavior to a degree extreme enough to warrant release from the marriage. Behavior considered reasonable grounds for divorce in most states included adultery, abandonment, and abuse (Dombeck, 2013). The difficulties in substantiating the grounds for divorce coupled with the high social stigma attached to divorce, kept divorce rates low. However, since the 1960s, the divorce rate has risen. This rise has been attributed partially to the implementation of no fault divorce laws in most states, which allow couples to divorce without having to prove fault of one or both partners. Other reasons for the rise in divorce rates include the reduced social stigma attached to divorce, and other cultural changes (Dombeck, 2013). Supplementary, Dombeck (2013) described divorce as a chaotic process involving massive life changes that provoke feelings of grief, pain, anger and sadness, similar to the feelings experienced after the death of a family member (Dombeck, 2013).

### **Secular Divorce Rates**

A comparison of the divorce rate of the United States with a sampling of other countries provides additional insight into understanding divorce. The areas include

percentage of marriages ending in divorce, and secular and religious demographics.

Nation Master (2013) ranks the United States first among the countries sampled at 4.95%; meaning, nearly 50 out of 1000 marriages end in divorce. The United Kingdom ranks fourth on this list, with 3.08% or 30 marriages per 1000 ending in divorce. Other countries include Russia in third place, with 3.36% of marriages ending in divorce, and Mexico in place 33, with 0.33% or 3 marriages per 1000 ending in divorce. Thus, the United States has 61% more divorces than the United Kingdom, with 100% as many divorces as Mexico, and 47% more divorces than Russia. The intent of this data was to demonstrate that divorce, regardless of geography, may impact the social and spiritual structure of the family.

At the same time, Doherty (2013) provided data on marriages ending in divorce and demographic groupings in the United States. In the United States, researchers have estimated that “40%–50% of all first marriages will end in divorce or permanent separation. The risk of divorce is even higher for second marriages, about 60 %” (Doherty, 2013, pp. 41-42). This estimation is inclusive of gender, age, and ethnic and racial grouping. Doherty emphasized there are some factors that increase risk of divorce. These include a young age at marriage, low levels of income and education, premarital cohabitation, not belonging to any religious community, having divorced parents, and emotional insecurity. The most common reasons given by people for their divorce are: "lack of commitment, too much arguing, infidelity, marrying too young, unrealistic expectations, lack of equality in the relationship, lack of preparation for marriage, and abuse (Doherty, 2013, pp. 41-42).

Jones (2013) and Redmond (2013) identified Nevada as the state with the highest number of divorces within the United States. This state has had the reputation as a place to get a "quickie" divorce for years. A residence of six weeks within the state is required for getting a divorce in Nevada, after which the person/people seeking the divorce can proceed with filing the legal paperwork to end the marriage. Other states that have relatively rapid procedures for obtaining a divorce include Arkansas, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Tennessee (Jones, 2013; Redmond, 2013). Aside from the aforementioned five states that have artificially high rates of divorce, the overall divorce rate in the United States, according to Jaffe (2013), is postulated to be approximately 50% of currently occurring marriages, which has slowly increased since the 1970s. The 50% estimated figure has been debated as to its accuracy, with Jaffe (2013) and others contending the overall rate of divorce has, and probably never will, reach the 50% mark. One of the reasons for the uncertainty about the current divorce rate is that there has been no new data on divorce from the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics since 1996. Most statistics on divorce since 1996 have been based on inconsistent data collection systems that vary between states, such as surveys. Compounding the inconsistency, some states leave the collection of divorce data to the governments of each county within the state, rather than collecting them at the state level (Jaffe, 2013).

In research on racial disparities in divorce rates, Moore (2013) found a divorce rate of 32% among African-American couples, 22% among Hispanic couples, and 21% among White couples. While African-American couples have a higher likelihood of divorce, this group also has a lower likelihood of marriage. These are characteristics that have been noted by experts who have studied divorce rates around the United States.

Age, poverty, and education levels are the strongest indicators of marriage outcome (Moore, 2013).

Consequently, Jaffe (2013) suggested a role for higher education, noting lower rates of divorce among people with a college education compared to those without. A 35% divorce rate within the first 10 years of marriage has persisted since 1980 for those who have never graduated college, compared to a 15% divorce rate during the first 10 years of marriage for college graduates who were married between 1990 and 1994. It is a common belief among experts in this field that, although the estimate of a 50% divorce rate is currently only a projection, it is likely that, if trends continue in a similar direction, it will be accurate by the end of the current decade (Jaffe, 2013). A decrease in marriages of 30% has been observed since 1970, whereas a concurrent increase of 40% has been seen for divorce during the same time. Women initiate divorce proceedings in 62% of the cases. Approximately 20% of first marriages are dissolved in divorce within the first five years of marriage, and 40% or more of first marriages are terminated within 13 years. There is a 75% remarriage rate among divorced people, of which there is a failure rate of 65% (Jaffe, 2013).

According to Demographic Trends (2011), African-American couples have a higher divorce rate, although the divorce rates in other racial/ethnic groups are increasing. Lawson and Sharpe (2000) agreed with the Demographic Trends data, yet present a more focused perspective on the African-American family. Tremaine (2011) found there has been a decline in marriage within the African-American community, while the rates of divorce and separation have increased. Both of these factors have led to a reduction in



the number of Black families with children that are headed by two parents (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000; Tremaine, 2011).

Tremaine (2011) noted a gap exists in the research in terms of the problematic issues for African-American men, while Lawson and Sharpe (2000) further specified men who were the initiators of divorce experienced equally difficult adjustment periods post-divorce as did those who did not initiate their divorce (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000; Tremaine, 2011). Tremaine (2011) and Lawson and Sharpe (2000) summarized the patterns of research from a number of authors, concluding that there is a lack of information on African-American men, while demonstrating an increase in divorce rates for other races/ethnicities.

### **Divorce Rates in Religious Groups**

Redmond (2013) and Jones (2013) presented data relating religious membership group, divorce rates, and the top five states for divorce. According to Redmond (2013), the Barna Research Group found differences in divorce rates by religious affiliation - see Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Religious Faith and Percentage of Membership Divorced*

Religious Faith	Percentage of Membership Divorces
Non-denominational	34
Baptist	29
Episcopal	28
Pentecostal	28
Methodist	26
Presbyterian	23
Catholic	21
Lutheran	21
Atheist/Agnostic	21

For the purposes of this study, the non-denominational category is defined as including Christian ministries that are unaffiliated with any formally recognized denomination, which also includes many members of certain fundamentalist groups (Redmond, 2013). Also, Fagan and Rector (2013) stated the practice of religious worship, which is associated with health benefits, longer duration of marriage, and improved quality of family life, is reduced following the parents' divorce.

### **Divorce Rates for Conservative Faiths**

The results of Redmond (2013) and Jones (2013) reached the same conclusion as depicted in the earlier studies, indicating that members of conservative protestant faiths have higher divorce rates than members of other religious groups. Church membership is not, in and of itself, a protective mechanism against the issues that affect couples and that can ultimately lead to divorce. At the same time, Redmond (2013) and Jones (2013) examined the regional variation of divorce statistics, observing that a higher risk of divorce exists for people living in the Bible Belt southern states, compared to people living in other regions of the United States. Factors correlated with divorce that are more pronounced in states with higher divorce rates include a younger age at marriage, lower average household income, and lower levels of educational attainment (Redmond, 2013). Accordingly, the findings from the Barna Research Group survey indicated lower divorce rates for self-described Atheists or Agnostics (Redmond, 2013). These results imply couples are not shielded from the stresses that occur during marriage that can ultimately lead to divorce solely by belonging to a religious group or faith (Jones, 2013; Redmond, 2013).

## **Coping with Divorce**

Meyer (2013) and Lawson and Thompson (1999) provided various strategies for coping with divorce. Meyer's research emphasizes the general population and Lawson and Thompson has examined the "coping strategies practiced by the divorced African-American men" (p. 128). Researchers find the physical, emotional, and mental balance of individuals is challenged by coping with divorce alone. Meyer recognized that the range of emotions associated with divorce includes feelings of anger, remorse, regret, depression, guilt, and loss, which may lead to a state in which a person starts to feel overwhelmed. Meyer (2013) recommended a person going through a divorce should seek professional support beginning in the initial stage of the process, which may take the form of support groups and counseling, as well as utilize the individual's own coping mechanisms. Meyer suggests specific methods for coping with the various feelings that often accompany divorce. For example, Meyer suggested a method to cope with and release anger that entails physical activity, such as deep breathing, jogging, and aerobics; reassessing and adjusting expectations, such as those pertaining to the durability of marriage and/or the spousal relationship; focusing on living in the present; and generating empathy to replace the anger. Additionally, the person experiencing divorce should become educated about the crisis of divorce and psychological disturbances that may occur. This could include, for example, understanding and being aware of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Meyer (2013) focused on methods proposed by the American Psychological Association to help cope with the consequences of divorce to reestablish emotional well-being. These steps include: allowing oneself the time necessary to heal and turning to

friends, family, and other care relations for support. In addition, Myer also recommended keeping some form of open communication about the experience, such as by utilizing a journal; finding support groups led by qualified professionals for the specific situation, such as for survivors of domestic violence; and engaging in healthy behaviors that promote the capacity to cope with high levels of stress. It is recommended by many researchers to establish and keep to familiar and/or healthy routines, such as regular meal times and exercise schedules, and avoiding decisions or changes that would add extra stress, such as changing career paths during the process of a divorce (Meyer, 2013).

Lawson and Thompson (1999) performed a qualitative study utilizing a sample of 50 Black male participants who had been divorced for three years. The researchers found participants were able to access a wide array of coping strategies that included an extensive reliance on the social network, including family and friends, church, and other social groups, as well as relying on an optimistic cognitive approach. For example, Lawson and Thompson (1999) observed that although most participants in the study received support from family and friends, the Black mothers of the participants provided the majority of the support, which often included both emotional and economic support. At the same time, the researchers discovered the men had a sense of shared meaning and solidarity with friends who had also gone through a divorce. The church was also found to be an important outlet for the men regardless of other results, indicating that a common source of stress in the former marriages had been inter-spousal religious conflict. Critical sources of support included church-related activities and support received from pastors and other church members.

## **Effects of Divorce**

Fagan and Rector (2013), through the Heritage Foundation, focused on the emotional, mental, and economic and relationship effects that divorce has on children and families in America. The authors explained the toll divorce takes on American children, with over 1 million children each year living through their parents' divorce. Half of the children born during a given year to married parents are predicted to see their parents' divorce by the time the child reaches 18 years old. The authors relay the increasing evidence that the physical, emotional, and financial effects of divorce on children last beyond childhood, into adulthood, and have the potential to affect subsequent generations (Fagan & Rector, 2013). Fagan and Rector (2013) suggested some of these broad and damaging effects that are discussed in the following paragraphs and explored by additional researchers as well.

### **Children and Family**

Demo and Supple (2013) discussed the multitude of negative effects on children whose parents divorce. The authors contend there is a higher prevalence of behavioral, emotional, and health problems, drug abuse, and suicide rates among children whose parents have divorced. Children of parents who have divorced are also more likely to be victims of abuse. Educational problems, such as grade repetition and school truancy, are more common among children of divorced parents, as are lower rates of college graduation. Demo and Supple (2013), using substantial research evidence from Amato (2000) and Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001), show that compared to children living in first-marriage families, children who have experienced their parents' divorce exhibit lower scores on measures of emotional well-being, social development, self-concept,

educational attainment, physical health, and academic attainment (Demo & Supple, 2013).

Fagan and Rector (2013) emphasized the economic effects of divorce on families, noting that it is common for families with children to experience a decrease in their income of as much as 50% subsequent to a divorce, resulting in a post-divorce poverty level among these families of nearly 50% (Fagan & Rector, 2013). Demo and Supple (2013), in conjunction with Amato (2002), found most studies to date have mainly found divorce to have negative outcomes. The few studies that have investigated potential positive outcomes of divorce have shown that women, in particular, may experience divorce positively. This is more likely to occur if the marriage was highly conflictive, so that ending the marriage results in a reduction in stress for all members of the family. In addition, increased self-confidence and efficacy are associated with the individual sensing that they have survived a divorce successfully. This is especially the case for women (Demo & Supple, 2013). Demo and Supple's (2013) research with other studies explained the challenge of adult adjustment, which included the economic, mental, emotional, and relationship aspects.

### **Economic**

Demo and Supple (2013) discussed the economic effects of divorce on adults in other countries besides the United States. Because of the social community dynamics and policy implications of the economic situation associated with divorce, much attention has focused on its economic impact. The authors document a decline in the economic situation for women after divorce, which is observed for most countries, whereas men typically either experience a smaller economic decline, compared to women, or an

improvement in their economic status. The researchers assert the importance of noting that there is a debate surrounding both the magnitude of the economic changes and the gender disparity observed between the post-divorce economic outcomes for women and men (Demo & Supple, 2013). However, the collaboration with other researchers demonstrates a superior outcome for German men following divorce compared to U.S. men, and an inferior outcome for German women following a divorce, relative to U.S. women, according to Burkhauser, Duncan, Hauser, and Bernsten (1991), as described by Demo and Supple (2013). Similarly, Indian men experience minimal or no post-divorce economic disruption, while Indian women face a worse economic outcome after a divorce, relative to U.S. women (Amato, 1994). Therefore, the authors note that, while “the magnitudes may differ the same post-divorce economic pattern appears to occur cross-culturally” (Demo & Supple, 2013, p. 1).

### **Mental and Emotional**

Demo and Supple (2013) described most of the critical mental and emotional issues confronted by adults as they move through the divorce process. Their studies demonstrate poorer self-concepts and higher levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress symptoms among divorcees relative to married people (Demo & Supple, 2013). Demo and Supple found significant data from Kurdek (1991) to indicate a cumulative effect of stress from divorce, evidenced by significantly more depression reported by people who have been through two or more divorces, compared to people with no or only one divorce (Demo & Supple, 2013). Other findings by Amato (1994) indicate similar patterns occur in other countries. For example, Amato found severe emotional problems occur in approximately two-thirds of divorced women in India.

Further, Cotten (1999) noted it is likely the true prevalence of depression among divorced people is underestimated, due to the common practice of combining divorced and widowed people into a single category. Divorcees tend to experience higher levels of psychological distress and depression than widows do. Post-divorce depression appears to follow the crisis model of divorce adjustment in that the symptoms of depression usually peak soon after a divorce, and subsequently decline over time (Demo & Supple, 2013).

### **Relationships**

Demo and Supple (2013), Bryant (1992), Yuko (1998), and Amato (1994) provided a general assessment of the effects of divorce on relationships. Demo and Supple consolidated results from the aforementioned researchers on these effects. They described the effect of divorce as affecting social networks and relationships in a variety of ways. They emphasized the isolation effect of divorce on individuals, as there is typically greater social isolation and smaller social networks observed among divorcees, compared to married individuals (Demo & Supple, 2013).

Demo and Supple (2013) explained a frequent result of divorce is friendships previously held in common are divided between members of the divorced couple, because friends often choose sides. Social isolation reaches its most extreme in cultures with high social stigma attached to divorce, in which case there can be ramifications on employment and future marital possibilities, as has been observed with divorced women in Japan (Demo & Supple, 2013). In this case, the divorce is perceived to introduce impurity into a family, the effects of which affect the children as well. A similar occurrence has been observed for women in India, who become isolated after divorce due



to the presumption of fault that is usually placed with the wife. This attribution of blame stems from the principle of pativradya that requires complete devotion of a married woman to her husband's needs, even in lieu of her own. Thus, when a marriage dissolves, it is assumed the wife is to blame (Demo & Supple, 2013).

Demo and Supple (2013) added the patriarchal family structure in India is often manifested in households consisting of a male and his wife, the sons of the male head of household, and the sons' wives and children. When Indian couples divorce, the woman typically must leave the household and is ostracized from the entire extended family, while the man usually keeps the household as well as the extended families' support. Women experience additional social isolation due to the rarity of re-marriage in Indian society (Demo & Supple, 2013).

### **Experience of Divorce in African-American Men**

The problem to be addressed in the study was the lack of understanding of the experiences of divorced African-American men who did not initiate divorce proceedings. According to Lawson and Sharpe (2000), this problem connects findings from a 3 year research period involving divorced African-American men in three different states with public health, social, emotional, and/or family problems. The researchers observed divorce is manifested by physical, emotional, and social problems for African-American men. One aspect of their experience in the spiritual dimensions (prayer, pastoral support, and counseling) was seeking meditation and moral support from the church as expressed in the Black church context, but in the Lawson and Sharpe research, the prayer method was not defined with the other identified manifestations such as stress and depression. Further, according to Burke and Miranti (1995), "spiritual dimension means a level of

spirituality that focuses on meaning, divinity, relationship, mystery, play, and experience. Spiritual dimensions maybe understood as the plight in human life and in the relative experiences” (Burke & Miranti, 1995, pp. 9-11).

Sperry (2001) described spiritual dimension in the context of a 7 stage model that emphasizes “psychosocial, moral, faith, self-development, spiritual development, spiritual growth, and spiritual journey” (p. 54). For this research, the intent focused on the spiritual journey stage. Additionally, Mansen (1993) defined spiritual dimension as “a unifying force within individuals, responsible for integrating and transcending all other dimensions” (p.140). Whereas this approach emphasizes, “God-consciousness, related to a deity or supreme values,” the values of this approach deal with “the meaning of life, individual perceptions of faith, and an individual’s relationship to the Ultimate Being” (Mansen, 1993, pp. 140-147).

On the other hand, Lawson and Sharpe (2000), posited divorce among African-American men leads to a decline in their emotional, physical, and social well-being. The Black church was “a place for worship, fellowship, and prayer/meditation that provided emotional and moral support in a spiritual/religious environment” (p. 1). Their study did not seek to delineate the spiritual dimension of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. Sperry (2001) described a different model incorporating seven stages that addressed the spiritual dimension, emphasizing the stages of the spiritual journey that an individual may encounter during the divorce experience. Sperry (2001) described the spiritual journey as “self-discovery, an encounter with God, as well as an encounter with one’s true self” (p. 69). The core of this realization is that the person integrates their personal experience in their spiritual journey. Within “the six stages of spiritual

journey,” Sperry (2001) identified these stages as “initial contemplation, dark night of the senses, intermediate contemplation, dark night of the spirit, transforming union and unity” (Sperry, 2001, p. 69).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the spiritual dimension of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. Within the course of this study, the goal was to identify potential spiritual dimensions that may be used to improve their spiritual well-being through the divorce process and beyond. Fetzer (2003) selected six domains or areas that could be used for assessment of psychiatric inpatients. These domains could serve as potential spiritual dimensions and include “daily spiritual experience, meaning, forgiveness, private religious practices, religious/spiritual coping and religious support” (Fetzer, 2003, p. 35). Sperry (2001), similarly to Fetzer (2003), described the spiritual dimension as the stages of spiritual journey. From the integrated approach of Fetzer, Sperry, and other researchers, research questions and interview questions were developed from the concepts of their research to understand the stories of African-American men who did not initiate divorce

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions provide a research sequence to assist in developing the problem background and purpose of the study. With this in focus, the stated research questions are as follows:

1. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator’s spiritual journey *influence life choices* during the divorce process?

2. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of *attachment to God*?
3. What *spiritual practices* do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce?

### **Nature of the Study**

In the field of qualitative traditions, phenomenological research was the selected methodology for this study. Phenomenology is “the first method of knowledge and it involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis and portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Divorce is a personal experience; through the phenomenological method, the researcher attempted to connect to each journey and find similarities in the experiences of different divorces that relate to the spiritual components in coping with stress, pain, or depression.

Creswell (2007) suggested this approach emphasizes the experiences shared among individuals related to a phenomenon, such as divorce, that results in stressors. Apart from the philosophical approaches described by Creswell, the goal is to describe each subject’s experience textually and use a similar format for analysis of the data collected. The anticipated sampling size was 15 participants. Colorado State University (2011) suggested qualitative studies do not require a set sample size. However, a typical sample size for a qualitative study is between 6-8 people or events. The sample size is kept small because qualitative studies generate large amounts of data that require complex analytical methods. In general, a researcher might use data from more than ten

people only for validation of findings obtained from the initial 8-10 participants (Colorado State University, 2011).

Within this qualitative research approach, the goal was to explore stories of divorced African-American men through short personal data survey, individual-recorded interviews, and available research literature. These Black men were recruited individually in San Antonio, Texas, from various social, religious, and spiritual organizations, with no direct association, but indirect association, with the aforementioned organizations. From this data collection and inquiry, an attempt was made to formulate a well-defined perspective regarding the issues of African-American men experience from divorce. These experiences may identify spiritual components used “to cope with divorce” that may incur with this phenomenon. The goal was to elaborate on spiritual components, and the ways these may inform the approach of private, public, and spiritual/religious institutions in addressing short and long-term problems faced by African-American men who did not initiate a divorce.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

#### **Limitations**

The design of this study was subject to a number of limitations that must be acknowledged. As a phenomenological study with a small number of respondents, the data focused on the unique experiences of the selected sample. Given this, the ability to generalize the results of this study may be limited. In addition, the highly emotional process of divorce make the lived experiences of the respondents changeable over time. The protean nature of the lived experience over the protracted process of divorce and beyond means that the perceptions of a respondent at a given point in time are likely to differ, and this study captured only a single moment in time.

## **Delimitations**

According to Simon (2011), delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study. Simon described these factors as “the choice of objectives, the research questions, variables of interest, theoretical perspectives, the population, and the choice of the problem” (p. 25). In this research, other possible choices were available, but the choice was made to focus on divorce and spirituality, plus the spiritual journey of African-American, divorced men who did not initiate a divorce. Other locations were possible for the research but San Antonio, Texas, was the most available and populated area to select 15 African-American men from various social, religious, spiritual, and community athletics support areas.

## **Definitions**

There are three critical terms for understanding this research to avoid any misunderstanding of their meaning, which are spiritual dimension, spirituality, and spiritual journey. These definitions provided a theoretical foundation for this research. This resulted in a better understanding of the plight of each divorced person being interviewed.

**Spiritual dimension.** Leonard and Carlson (2013) described spiritual dimension, in this case, as “a component of spirituality which encompasses all aspects of being human and is a means of experiencing life” (p. 3). In this case, spirituality is an “integral dimension of health and well-being of every individual” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013). The researcher found caring for clients in a way that acknowledges the mind-body-spirit connection allows the health care provider to acknowledge the whole person (Leonard & Carlson, 2013).

Spiritual care and religious care may be considered one and the same. However, it is suggested that spirituality may include “traditional religious beliefs and practices,” and “spirituality is a much broader concept that also includes nonreligious beliefs and expressions” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013, p. 3). Due to the multicultural nature of today’s society where many different secular and religious beliefs are encompassed, it is necessary for spiritual care to be respectful of the integrity of the diverse faith communities and of individuals who do not belong to any established faith group (Leonard & Carlson, 2013).

Enblen et al. (1992) found six words to be most frequent in descriptions of spirituality and religion, including (a) system, (b) beliefs, (c) organized, (d) person, (e) worship, and (f) practices. For spirituality, the terms (a) personal, (b) life, (c) principle, (d) animator, (e) being, (f) God/god, (g) quality, (h) relationship, and (i) transcendent were the most frequent. In the same sphere of spirituality, the holistic perspective of health care perceives mind, body, and spirit to be dynamically interconnected, thus forming the whole person, and efforts to separate these dimensions are artificial.

However, it can be helpful to health care providers to distinguish the dimensions when assessing and treating patients. Therefore, Leonard and Carlson (2013) delineated three categories of spiritual dimension observed from their research: physical, psychological, and spiritual. According to Leonard and Carlson (2013), “The physical dimension (body) is world-conscious and each individual undergoing taste, feel, see, hear, smell, and gain experience” (p. 3). According to Leonard and Carlson (2013), “the psychological dimension (mind) involves self-consciousness and self-identity” (p. 3). This is the human aspect that processes interactions and associated emotions, such as

grief, loss, and guilt. “The spiritual dimension (spirit) appears to be the unifying force within individuals, integrating and transcending all the other dimensions” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013). With this in mind, this dimension is described as a God-consciousness, having to do with a higher power or values, and focused on themes relating to the meaning of life, faith as perceived by the individual, and a personal connection to God or the “Ultimate Being” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013).

**Spirituality.** Leonard and Carlson (2013), from the Touro Institute, combined the points of view of various researchers from different academic fields to deliver an in-depth analysis of spirituality. Accordingly, Leonard and Carlson provided a standard definition of spirituality as “a highly subjective, personal, and individualistic concept” (p. 10). Additionally, spirituality is seen as the life essence that makes thoughts and actions possible (Leonard & Carlson, 2013). At the same time, some define spirituality as a “belief and a power operating in the universe,” while still others conceive of it as a “sense of interconnectedness with all the living creatures, and awareness to the purpose and meaning of life” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013, p. 10).

With further expansion of this definition, Leonard and Carlson (2013) posited all people are spiritual beings. Leonard and Carlson contend there is a spiritual dimension to every person, and this dimension affects every aspect of his or her daily life. Spirituality is conceived of as a fundamental human quality that transcends categories, such as race, national origin, color, and gender. Correspondingly, the experience and conceptualization of spirituality is very personal, with many intangible aspects, and its meaning varies between people. The differences in the way that people conceive of spirituality often defy description. Many individuals cannot describe their spiritual



experiences despite being convinced of having experienced something spiritual (Leonard & Carlson, 2013).

Leonard and Carlson (2013) understand the term *spirituality* to be derived from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means breath, and to be related to the word *pneuma* from Greek, which translates as breath, in reference to the soul or vital spirit. According to Dossey et al. (2000), “spirituality is the essence of who we are and how we exist in this world and breathing is essential for human existence” (p. 10). Miller (1995) elaborated, “if one believes that spirituality permeates all human experiences rather than being additional to them, one must accept it as integral to health or a sense of wholeness or well-being”(Miller, 1995, p. 258).

At the same time, Leonard and Carlson (2013), in agreement with various other researchers, stated “spirituality is reflected in everyday life as well as in disciplines ranging from philosophy and popular literature to psychotherapy, health psychology, medicine, nursing, sociology, and science” (p. 11). In reflection on such a universal view of spirituality, Leonard and Carlson (2013) suggested that although a universal definition of spirituality has been elusive, there is an agreement between researchers and theorists that spirituality is a phenomenon involving multiple dimensions, and that has been prolifically described throughout the literature. Leonard and Carlson explained the theories discussed in their work utilize concepts stemming from multiple fields, including theology, sociology, medicine, nursing, and psychology, and represent a sample of some of the current theories.

Leonard and Carlson (2013) examined spirituality from a broader perspective, providing a clearer approach for this research, reflecting on Meraviglia’s (1999) overall

assessment of these disciplines relating to spirituality. Accordingly, in theology, spirituality is described as “one’s belief in God, which is expressed through religious beliefs and practices” (Leonard & Carlson, 2013, p. 10). The discipline of psychology conceptualizes spirituality as a journey whereby the individual expresses internal desires and motives in search of meaning, guidance, and purpose, while concentrated on the self rather than God. In sociology, spirituality is examined through the study of different groups of people, who mutually influence each other and are influenced by the social groups in which they live. In this disciplinary perspective, spirituality is conceived of as the practices and rituals of a spiritual nature that are practiced by human groups, including interpersonal mores of social morality (Meraviglia, 1999). From this standpoint, the definition of spirituality illuminates an expansive definition or gateway toward a spiritual journey.

**Spiritual journey.** Spiritual journey, according to Nemeck and Coombs (1987), implies “a type of expansive concept that studies the thresholds and the stages of adult interior development” (p. 13). As a result, Nemeck and Coombs viewed this concept as “a presentation of a descriptive or inductive approach, which presents that the human person is created by God and is destined to become god by participation” (p. 13). As such, Sperry (2001) suggested that a spiritual journey “is basically a journey of self-discovery since the encounter with God is also an encounter with one’s true self” (p. 67).

### **Importance of the Study**

The importance of this research addressed the spiritual dimension of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. This research explored a potential deficit of spirituality in their coping mechanisms. Through this spiritual coping method, Sperry

(2001) described the stages of the spiritual journey as spiritual dimensions with the potential to help recount the various emotional, physical, and social problems of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. At the same time, the stages of spiritual journey identified by Sperry are similar to the emotional and spiritual lives of the men studied by Lawson and Thompson (1999). Sperry (2001) described his stages “as initial contemplation, dark night of the senses, an intermediate contemplation, dark night of the spirit, and transforming union and unity” (pp. 68-69). Lawson and Thompson (1995) explained divorced African-American men experienced reduced emotional, physical, and social well-being. From Sperry’s and Lawson and Thompson’s research, it may be surmised that these men might have experienced the stages of spiritual journey during the difficult times of divorce.

Sperry (2001) described the stages of the spiritual dimension and explored the stages of the spiritual journey of these divorced African-American men. Lawson and Thompson described similar observations from Sperry that significant professional care may have been lacking in the areas of health, social, and emotional concerns. Equally, although most of these men were reluctant to continue or seek pastoral care, participation in church-related group activities was common (Lawson & Thompson, 1999). In addition, the significance of this research problem addressed the spiritual dynamics, emphasizing physical, social, and emotional concerns, as suggested by Fetzer (2003). In addition, Sperry (2001) and Burke and Miranti (1995) emphasized significant ways to seek core stories of these men would come through the use of interviews that could examine the spiritual dimension of their experiences. This dimension includes the stages

of the spiritual journey that are experienced during and after the process of divorce (Burke & Miranti, 1995; Fetzner, 2003; Sperry, 2001).

A qualitative research approach was used to analyze the stories of the divorced African-American men, as were collected through interviews. Interviews provided a clearer perspective on the spiritual components of divorce as experienced by African-American men. This informed strategies for addressing the short and long-term problems experienced by African-American men who did not initiate divorce.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The daunting experience of divorce in American society has significantly influenced African-American families. This effect is especially pronounced when it is coupled with a lack of spirituality that may affect the physical, emotional, and social well-being of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. The relationships between spirituality and divorce for African-American men in this status are studied by exploring the spiritual dimension of their experiences. A deep understanding of both concepts – spirituality and divorce – can facilitate an understanding of the life journey through divorce in this demographic group. The concepts of spirituality and divorce relate to the spiritual experiences of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. The literature is examined as follows: the phenomena of spirituality in a changing world, dimensions of spirituality, the spiritual journey, the nature of divorce, the impact of divorce on the Black family, outcomes of divorce on African-American men, disadvantages of divorce, and summary of findings.

### **Phenomena of Spirituality in a Changing World**

According to Burkhardt (2002), a rapid increase in spirituality is occurring in today's era. The author says, in order to initiate spiritual changes in a person's life, there must be improved understanding of spirituality. An important part of this understanding is self-knowledge. According to Ford (2009), people need to engage in self-observation in order to understand the manner in which they think and feel. Richardson (2002) also contended that people need to find their inner soul in order to understand spirituality. The author mentions that an increase in spirituality may be observed throughout the world because people have been becoming more aware. Because of this, people are

initiating spiritual transformations (Richardson, 2002). These phenomena are based upon a variety of concepts that are elaborated. They are: the nature, foundation, and importance of spirituality; the influence of spiritual pluralism on the spiritual journey; and spirituality in relation to life choices.

### **Nature of Spirituality**

According to Burkhardt (2002), spirituality relates to the condition of a person who is spiritual in nature and this kind of person is not attached fully to material or worldly pleasures. As stated by Ford (2009), spiritual people have religious emotions and beliefs; their intentions, interactions, beliefs, and perceptions are related to spirituality. Ford also highlights that spirituality assists people to transform their lives and provides a genuine meaning for the purpose of their life. As discussed by Richardson (2002), spirituality includes religion, appeal to God, meditation, relations with people, and connection with God. According to Ford, spirituality also includes experiences of individuals when they encounter the supreme power.

### **Foundation of Spirituality**

Ford (2009) discussed the integration of the physiological and spiritual needs of a person. As mentioned by Richardson (2002), spiritual leaders guide people and show them reasonable ways to live. This approach may be centered on faith and inner feelings toward the supreme power. The core of spirituality also focuses on incorporating spiritual values into the way that people live (Richardson, 2002). Richardson and Ford integrated their research from personal and professional involvement with clients. They concluded that a foundation for spirituality is rooted in assessing why it may be difficult to focus spiritually as well as encouraging leaders to inquire in the nature of how clients

practice spirituality. Ford (2009) shared the personal stories of clients to consider spiritual laws that deals with healing: acceptance, responsibility, forgiveness, and choices. Her research captures the essence of dealing with divorce but through individual or group work to manage divorce spiritually through a guided process of articulating the pain; and understanding it as an event within life (Ford, 2009; Richardson, 2002).

### **Importance of Spirituality**

Equally, according to Richardson (2002), spirituality is important in assisting people to decide their purpose, and to maintain a good relationship with a supreme power (God), society, and the environment. This may bring internal peace and joy that are experienced as well-being. It can create conviction; it can help a person to become self-motivated, self-confident, and to remain centered in truth by doing and encouraging virtuous things (Richardson, 2002). As per the views of Burke and Miranti (1995), spirituality encourages people to steer their behavior and focus on their overall development. Through the influence of spirituality, a person comes to emphasize values such as expectation, happiness, honesty, wisdom, sympathy, imagination, and tolerance (Burke & Miranti, 1995). People learn to accept difficult situations in life and can often resolve problems by trusting in a supreme power (Burke & Miranti, 1995).

### **Spiritual Pluralism**

Spiritual pluralism refers to thoughts and guidelines concerning the variety of sacred faith systems that are observed in societies (Burkhardt, 2002). The author also stated that spiritual pluralism includes religious inclusivism, which is the concept of no single religion in the world that is supreme and other religions highlight important facts and true values (Burkhardt, 2002). As discussed by Burke and Miranti (1995),

spirituality explains the religious tolerance that defines situations of peace between supporters of different religions. Burke and Miranti also noted that spirituality emphasizes religious ecumenism, which focuses on fomenting harmony, coordination, and understanding among different religions. In addition to this, the authors also revealed that spirituality involves religious diversity, which is because there are different religions in different cultures (Burke & Miranti, 1995).

### **Influence of Spiritual Journey/Spirituality on Life Choices**

Sperry (2001) stated spirituality influences the choices people make in their daily lives, as spirituality generates a code of conduct and, thus, influences people's thinking. The author also places special emphasis on the spiritual journey that may help a person to differentiate between what is right and wrong (Sperry, 2001). As per the views of Burkhardt (2002), the choices of each individual may be advantageous to society as a whole. People make choices after focusing on inner peace, potential, calmness, relationships, and love and often establish guidelines for themselves, which they refer to in order to make decisions (Burkhardt, 2002).

### **Dimensions of Spirituality**

As acknowledged by Sperry (2001), there are a few spiritual dimensions that have to do with the scope and area of the overall emphasis of spirituality. Sperry says that these dimensions enable a person or a spiritual leader to know the outline of spirituality and the ways to apply spirituality. The dimensions of spirituality may be based on certain factors, such as spirit and soul; the importance of spirituality in a family; divinity, relationship and experience; and prayers along the spiritual journey (Sperry, 2001).



## **Spirit and Soul**

According to Burke and Miranti (1995), the spiritual dimension is a critical factor in understanding the emotional decline of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. The authors also reference that the spiritual dimension has been described in terms of seven dimensions of spirituality, which include meaning, conception of divinity, relationship, mastery, play, experience, and dimensional integration (Burke & Miranti, 1995). At the same time, Sperry (2001) described similar dimensions as domains, although the terms are relatively the same in the ways that they relate to the emotional decline of individuals.

Sperry (2001) explored spirituality in the context of clinical practice by incorporating the spiritual dimension in psychotherapy and counseling. These models may be relevant in understanding the emotional decline of African-American men who did not initiate divorce (Sperry, 2001). Walsh (2009) conceived of spirituality as a type of spiritual dimension, which expands beyond institutional religion, responding to a changing world. In this perspective, spirituality is defined as an inclusive approach that transcends beliefs and practices and that incorporates the mind, body, and spirit of a person (Walsh, 2009).

## **Importance of Spirituality**

Benner (2011) suggested that in today's world, immense changes are occurring in culture and technology. As discussed by Burkhardt (2002), families have to deal with difficult issues such as divorce, turmoil, egotism, and domestic violence. The author also emphasized that there is a lack of traditional education and customs; people tend to

ignore rituals and customs of society and focus on external happiness and the external world (Burkhardt, 2002). Masters (2010) underscored that families need to incorporate spirituality in their everyday lives so that they can easily secure their internal happiness and the true happiness of their family. Spirituality may remove false ideas and negative thoughts of a person. It helps to know and fulfill the dreams and goals of a family. It guides a family to work and stay together throughout both good and difficult times (Masters, 2010).

### **Divinity, Relationship, and Experience**

As per the views of Burkhardt (2002), the divine nature of a person increases faith, knowledge, patience, godliness, kindness, and a feeling of charity. People inculcate certain divine qualities, which they need to develop and consider from time to time as they move along the spiritual path (Burkhardt, 2002). As discussed by Masters (2010), divinity is a state, in which certain things may be sacred and holy, and people perceive that these things derive from a supernatural power or deity, like God. These things are considered godly gifts because of their divine origin and because they possess characteristics that are superior to those of the things of the world (Masters, 2010). As discussed by Burke and Miranti (1995) these factors may be focused on eternal peace and the qualities of a person, and be centered on truth. On the other hand, the existence of material things does not establish internal happiness (Burke & Miranti, 1995). According to Burkhardt (2002), the things considered divine are the spirit, vision, prediction, imagination, and soul. Other divine phenomena are rebirth, grace, immortality, and salvation (Burkhardt, 2002). According to Masters (2010), the points that are not considered as divine are loosely defined and are used by various faith systems.

### **Prayers in the Spiritual Journey**

Benner (2011), noted that various types of spiritual prayers and exercises are part of the journey of a spiritual person. These exercises combine meditation, appeal, and meditative practices given by many different spiritual leaders (Benner, 2011). According to Waaijman (2002), prayers and exercises assist a spiritual person to strengthen his or her relation with the supreme power, i.e., their God. Today, these prayers and exercises are given more importance because people are finding that they need peace and happiness in life, and these prayers help people to focus on internal peace and happiness (Waaijman, 2002).

Furthermore, Benner (2011) established that there are many spiritual programs organized in today's global era, so that people can become familiar with these programs and retain peace in their life for a long time. People need to incorporate these exercises and prayers in their everyday lives to make their family and social environment favorable (Benner, 2011). According to Waaijman (2002), people can even learn spiritual things by going through protracted programs that include meetings and prayers and these meetings and prayers are done under the guidance of a spiritual director. Modern-day people in their ordinary lives adopt these prayers and exercises in different ways so that they can fulfill their personal needs and wants, and become satisfied in their lifecycle (Waaijman, 2002).

### **Spiritual Journey**

Masters (2010) makes clear that, along the spiritual journey, spirituality is central in helping a person to connect with the supreme power (i.e., God) and causes a person to be inwardly content. A person may need to go through a spiritual journey to attain

spirituality, and the person may need to abandon all worldly pleasure in order to attain internal happiness (Masters, 2010). The various phases described are: initial contemplations, dark night of the senses; intermediate contemplation, dark night of the spirit; transforming union, unity and experiencing God daily.

### **Initial Contemplations**

According to Burke and Miranti (1995), people in the initial stage of the spiritual journey focus on high meditation, thoughts, employing the senses, and thinking about God. Additionally, they form different images of God, Jesus Christ, or other holy objects in their minds. These images formed in their minds may be directly transferred to their hearts and this facilitates creative spiritual feelings and ideas towards their God. The person starts off loving the God and becomes purely dedicated to the Almighty (Burke & Miranti, 1995).

In contrast, Masters (2010) conceived of these images to be only based on a person's inspiration and thinking; these are not the true pictures of the God. The images made in their minds can differ from person to person; and this may depend upon the experiences of a person and knowledge that the person has about their God. The person becomes dedicated and attentive towards their God and contributes proper time to meditation. People begin feeling the God in their heart and commence developing feelings and emotions towards God (Masters, 2010).

### **Dark Night of the Senses**

As stated by Benner (2011), there are three stages in life of a spiritual person: beginners (purgative way), proficient (illuminative way), and perfect (unitive way). Dark night of the senses is based upon the proficient, i.e., illuminative way. There are

three different indications of the dark night of the senses. First, the soul of a person is unable to attain any kind of satisfaction in both the things related to God, as well as people on the earth (Benner, 2011). Second, the soul of a person gets hurt when it sees that it is going away from the supreme power, i.e., the God, and the soul of the person starts disliking the worldly things, as he/she feels deprived of God's blessings (Benner, 2011). Third, the soul of the person becomes incapable of doing meditation, prayers, and exercises, and this restricts creativity and thoughts of the person towards the God. As a result, the person may attempt to get back to the practices and exercises but fails every time (Benner, 2011).

### **Intermediate Contemplation**

Specifically, Benner (2011) stated that intermediate contemplation is when a person is able to have a vision of God or is able to see God. The person can try to stay with the God and can also hold the God or can have a direct link with the God a concept known as *theoria* (Benner, 2011). The person, when connected with the God, is then able to bring heart and mind together as one. There are ways in which the sin of an old person changes into a newborn baby, which is considered a gift of God (Benner, 2011). The person who is deeply connected with God can then easily identify the difference between inner peace and external peace. For this, the person needs to have a personal experience of connection with God. One cannot easily understand the nature of God based on theories and thoughts given by others (Benner, 2011).

### **Dark Night of the Spirit**

According to Masters (2010), dark night of the spirit describes the things in the life of a person that are unholy or unrighteous and the ways in which God desires its

followers to leave behind worldly things. The person must come to prefer God to anything else. Only then can the person achieve full attainment of God. According to religious literature, God does not want to take away all the worldly experiences from the person, but only wants to see that God is the person's priority (Masters, 2010).

God desires the followers to leave all the pleasant things in the world. If a person is ready to leave all the ambitions, hopes, successes, disappointments, and dreams behind in this world for God, the person can attain God (Masters, 2010). The person may need to be more attached to the presence of God and develop wholly the thoughts and feelings towards their God. A person may want to deepen their faith toward God based on the experiences of spirituality.

### **Transforming Union**

As Masters (2010) suggested, when a person wishes to experience a transforming union or wants to possess deep connections with God, it is a life changing experience for the person as the person. Not everyone can experience this life changing experience; only spiritual people can have the experience of connection with God. In transforming union, the person may be able to develop a spiritual lifestyle on earth and be able to inculcate fullness of the life within the heart of the person.

At this time, the person might be deeply occupied with love and attachment toward God. Not everyone can attain this high level in their life; only people who worship and adopt spiritual paths are capable of attaining spirituality (Masters, 2010). At the same time, Masters (2010) found that after the person reaches this level, he or she may attain maximum perfection, and is able to distinguish between positive and negative

issues in life. In a spiritual life, the person achieves the necessary changes from within and may motivate others to search for God as well.

### **Unity**

According to Waaijman (2002), society maybe viewed as a global village where countless cultures and traditions interface. The culture and tradition of one country is different from that of another, and these differences can create many problems (Waaijman, 2002). At times, this may lead to misunderstandings, dislike, and war between people of different cultures and traditions. To bring unity among people of different cultures and traditions, it is important to bring unity and faith among individual people (Waaijman, 2002). The varieties and differences among cultures and traditions may need to be united by common values that are straightforwardly shared by all the religions that are practiced in the world.

### **Experiencing God Daily**

As Waaijam (2002) stated, experiencing God depends on the way a person thinks and the perception that they have towards their God. To feel that they can identify with God, some people define God as a person who has a booming voice, who performs miracles, and who imparts the proper solutions to the problems occurring in one's life. Nevertheless, this is not true; one cannot easily experience God on daily basis. God affects people to realize the existence of God based on private and personal experiences. To experience the presence of God, one needs to give God the actual justified respect. God has a separate identity and people cannot compare God with a butler, a genie, or a customer service department (Waaijman, 2002).

In contrast, Waaijman (2002) stated that individuals should talk about God as the supreme power of all. A person may want to put effort into experiencing the presence of God, and if the person desires direct contact with God, then the person may need to adopt spirituality in all the functions of life. According to Waaijman (2002), people who inculcate spiritual practices and values in their lives become close to God and God may reward them with mechanisms that allow them to obtain things they deserve the most. God may offer them a life that is best suited to each follower. For example, individuals who believe in Christ experience the presence of Holy Spirit, which comes by the God. In this case, there are approaches by which a person can experience the spirit of God (Waaijman, 2002). God, as is explained in the Bible and other religious literature, may utilize people as an instrument. When individuals attach themselves to God, God then takes steps to encourage them and make them closer in spiritual values. God also motivates other people to bring them closer to God. Thus, for people going through a divorce, cultivation of spirituality can help them to obtain perspective, lift them up beyond the things of the world and human experience, and give them inner peace in connection with God, thereby alleviating their suffering (Waaijman, 2002).

### **Nature of Divorce**

According to Ackerman and Kane (2005), the nature of divorce centers upon a variety of factors and situations. Divorce can occur because of a lack of understanding and love, and refers to the end of a relationship of a married couple. Divorce leads to the termination of all the responsibilities and duties of the relationship (Ackerman & Kane, 2005). At the time of divorce, the dissolution of marriage declares the relationship void and thus the two people in the relationship become free from all the legal duties.



However, it is not a simple concept; the end of one marriage often creates suffering for the members of the two involved families. However, Lawson and Thompson (1999) also concluded positive outcomes where men reevaluated their life styles that had a powerful influence on life choices as well as improved heterosexual relationships.

In most cases, marriage's dissolution leads to stressful situations for the members of the dissolved marriage, as well as for their families. If children are involved, they are often adversely affected (Ackerman & Kane, 2005). There are different criteria, processes, and laws across the globe that must be navigated to legally end a marriage. A number of legal processes are involved to ensure appropriate decisions regarding sensitive issues such as child custody, child support, and distribution of property, debts division, and alimony. To understand the nature of divorce, the following ideas are expanded upon in the following sections: diversity of issues in divorce, increase in divorce, detachment from God, brokenness of divorce, difficulties in divorce, divorce on Blacks families, and outcomes of divorce on the Black man.

### **Diversity of Issues in Divorce**

Lawson and Sharpe (2000), Stone (2001), Bulanda and Brown (2004), Randall and McKenry (2006), Pistole (2007), Merrill and Hamilton (2010) and Tremaine (2011) explored the diversity of issues in divorce and their research findings have influenced a broader understanding of marital relationships. In light of this broad view, divorce is inclusive of all racial, ethnic, and gender-related characteristics. Divorce is a major conflict for any person to experience in a lifetime. The experience of divorce creates a deficiency at some interval in all families, and, specifically, in the African-American family (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000). In this case, African-American men's reactions to

divorce are similar to other men who experience divorce. However, there is a limited scope of information addressing the spiritual dynamic that is related to African-American men who did not initiate a divorce (Bulanda & Brown, 2004; Lawson & Sharpe 2000; Merrill & Hamilton, 2010; Pistole, 2007; Randall & McKenry, 2006; Stone 2001; Tremaine, 2011).

### **Increase in Divorce**

There is a major increase in the number of divorces throughout America and, specifically, an increase of divorce among African-American families. Ackerman and Kane (2005) stated that there is a somewhat higher rate of divorce among African-American couples, although the authors recognized an increase in other racial/ethnic groups as well. At the same time, researchers agree that the demographic trends call for a more focused perspective on the phenomenon of divorce in African-American families specifically.

Ackerman and Kane (2005) noted that an increase in the divorce rate for Black families has been a contributing factor in the decrease in the number of Black 2-parent families. Marriage occurrence in the Black community has declined, and, at the same time, there has been a major increase in divorce and separation. Lawson and Thompson (1999) noted a gap in research trends that did not highlight problematic issues for African-American men, while two other researchers found that adjustment to post-divorce was equally as difficult for men who initiated divorce as for those who did not initiate divorce (Ackerman & Kane, 2005).

The patterns found by a number of authors indicate an increase in divorce in other racial and ethnic groups (Ackerman & Kane, 2005). At the same time, Reich (2011)

emphasized research findings from The U. S. Census Bureau's 5-Year American Community Survey, in which 3 million households were polled between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2009, to determine statistical portraits of smaller communities within the United States--including racial and ethnic groups--based on a variety of factors, including divorce. These numbers are not rates, but indicate what percentage of each population reported being divorced over a fixed period in time, not including those that were divorced and have since remarried. Here is the breakdown, as defined by the American Community Survey: American Indian and Alaska Native: 12.6%, Black or African-American: 11.5%, White: 10.8%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: 8%, Hispanic or Latino origin: 7.8% and Asian: 4.9%. Additionally, Assisted Divorce (2011) combined research findings from the U. S. National Center for Health Statistics and the Americans for Divorce Reform. They also included the U.S. Census Bureau and the Gallup Report in 1997 that outlined general divorce statistics for the top 4 racial groups that provided rates of divorced or those had been divorced: Whites 27%, African-Americans 22%, Hispanics 20%, and Asians 08% (Assist Divorce, 2011).

Lawson and Thompson (1999) described internal and external reasons for the increase in divorce in the African-American community. The internal factor is substance abuse that brings instability to the family. The African-American man for example, may encounter alcohol-related illnesses, the prevalence of illicit drugs and incompatibility issues. At the same time, external factors relate to lower socioeconomic classes, lack of financial resources; occupational stress, cultural values, and the impact of the criminal justice system on the lower income Black community (Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

**Brokenness of Divorce**

Kuehn (2001) established that there are many side effects of divorce in the lives of people. Individuals typically take certain measures to make their married life beautiful and avoid conflicts in their marital relationship. In today's era, it can be observed that husbands and wives are often easily separated and do not take the initiative to solve conflicts that occur between them (Kuehn, 2001). They should try to take steps and strive to save their married life. In some cases, young people are able to gain proper knowledge and ultimately achieve understanding of the value and meaning of marriage (Kuehn, 2001). Youth may understand the responsibilities of marriage in relationship to spirituality. People should also try to preserve and understand God's plan behind marriages. Marriage is a sacred relationship in many cultures. Divorce can create a damaging impact in the minds of people and can make them dissatisfied towards marriages.

**Difficulties in Divorce**

There are many challenges and difficulties faced by married couples at the time of divorce. Married couples today have a high probability of losing interest in their marriage in the future, and can easily attain a divorce (Kuehn, 2001). Children suffer when they experience the end of their parents' marriage, which is harmful to their mental state. Divorce may be considered one of the worst experiences in the lives of married couples and often it takes a long time to accept the reality of divorce. Children who experience their parents' divorce often develop the wrong perception of marriage and start forming a negative or deficient image of marriage in their hearts (Kuehn, 2001). Married people who are getting divorced often have mixed emotions towards their

divorce, and frequently are not sure whether they want to dissolve the marriage (Kuehn, 2001).

Nevertheless, in some cases divorce may be viewed as the proper choice. It is beneficial to end certain marriages where the relationships are full of conflicts, abusive language, and emptiness (Kuehn, 2001). It is right to end the relationship when there is no love and understanding left between married couples. In these cases, divorce is the best option that married couples can choose.

### **Impact of Divorce on Black Families**

Lawson and Thompson (1999) discussed the effect of divorce on the Black family as an event that may have positive as well as negative implications, which can be true for any other family that is encountering problems. Various researchers have indicated that, where there is physical and emotional abuse, the chances of divorce are high (Lawson & Thompson, 1999). Physical and emotional abuse corrupts the core structure of family. This core structure potentially produces harmony within each individual in the family and harmony may be the optimal goal that may sustain family. The following areas are significant themes for the Black family: social and religious factors, the mother and father, children, male children, and the invasion of pride in spiritual life.

#### **Social and Religious**

According to Lawson and Thompson (1999), divorces affect relationships within the social and religious environment. Various researchers suggest that social relationships within the family, when fractured, take time to mend. It also takes time to re-establish other social relationships after divorce. Lawson and Thompson placed an emphasis on the African-American family as a social system with subsystems that

provide support during difficult circumstances, such as divorce. Equally, according to these authors, external subsystems such as the economy, politics, education, health welfare, law, culture, religion, and media are also important. The stronger the external social systems, the better it is for the community during difficult times. For example, many Black families within a medium to high socio-economic category may be able to sustain their standard of living during and after a divorce. However, in some under developed communities, individuals may not be able to afford the services available in the surrounding social systems, and their standard of living may suffer due to a divorce (Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

At the same time, Hampton (2002), noted that most African-American families are very religious and thus, they start their day by offering prayers. In addition, the author discussed their thinking, which is very positive and affirmative. Black families are very cooperative and portray a caring nature. They usually try to celebrate different auspicious occasions with their families only (Hampton, 2002). Within these religious and social networks, divorce places a strain on each individual, whereas stable structures like church, social organizations, committed friends, and family members may support each individual through the divorce ordeal (Hampton, 2002).

### **Mother and Father**

Research by Feinberg and Knox (1990), Edmiston (2014), and Downey (1998) has indicated that, in a high percentage of relationships, couples become fathers and mothers before marriage. This research has indicated the upward mobility of both single mothers and fathers but all agree based on lack/advance in economic, social, and educational status. As a result, they agree that the responsibility of being a mother and

father imposes a pre-defined circumstance related to communication and commitment into a marriage or family structure. For example, a lack of communication and commitment is further complicated when a pregnancy occurs. An unplanned pregnancy can alternately force a marriage or push the couple away from marriage. When members of a couple are pushed away from each other due to an unplanned pregnancy, it results in a single-parent family structure that often affects the mother psychologically, as well as socially and economically, as the mother often becomes a single head of household (Feinberg & Knox, 1990). At the same time, a major strain is on the father; as he attempts to be a single parent he confronts the challenge of providing financial support for his child. In this case, divorce is not the issue but if the couple becomes married, the strain of economic and social pressures may lead to divorce. If a divorce occurs within certain social and economic situations, both mother and father may be negatively affected (Downey, 1998; Edmiston, 2014; Feinberg & Knox, 1990). Hampton (2002) stated that, in these circumstances, it often becomes very difficult for the parents to fulfill the necessities of their children and provide them adequate sustenance and education. Hampton indicated that the rate of family violence within African-American families has been increasing at a constant rate. Moreover, the population of African-American families is increasing day by day, which may ultimately affect their socio-economic environment for low-income families (Hampton, 2002).

Therefore, the roles taken on by the mother and father in a healthy marriage when they are rearing children together bring about positive effects for both male and female children. Neenan (2000) noted a slogan in the African-American community “Black mothers raise their daughters and love their sons; it's the father who holds that boy

accountable. He has that boy toe the line; he holds the rules and responsibilities” (p. 1).

In some cases, this may be true, but in others, it is not. Neenan (2002) indicated that African-American boys living in fatherless families may suffer damage to their self-esteem because of the lack of a present father. Her research suggests this does not happen with young girls growing up in fatherless households. The implications of these findings can range from experiencing problems in school to participating in gangs as part of their search for male role models (Neenan, 2002).

Divorce can result in health and mental disorders for mothers and fathers, which can be very difficult for them to overcome. In addition, the author suggests that divorce among parents can jeopardize entire futures of their children over the long run (Jewell, 2003; Lawson & Thompson, 1999). Moreover, Lawson and Thompson (1999) indicated that divorce, if not managed properly, increases the risk of addiction to drugs and alcohol, which can destroy their physical and mental health. Due to high levels of frustration and depression, children are at a higher risk for engaging in illegal activities, which increases the crime rate within their communities (Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

### **Children**

Because of divorce, it becomes difficult for parents to fulfill the needs of their children and provide proper sustenance and education. Because of the breakdown of the family in the low-income community, some have suggested that children in these circumstances may become more aggressive and brutal relative to White American society (Lawson & Sharpe, 1999; Lawson & Thompson, 2000).

Multiple authors have also stated that the male members of African-American families may be more violent compared to the female members of the same families



(Hampton, 2002) In these cases, violence creates family dysfunction and may be manifested by harsh treatment of their children. This can affect the children emotionally and mentally (Hampton, 2002). Such treatment reinforces a type of child aggressiveness, which can be a symptom of the lack of love and care experienced by children within that family. This hostility may be acted out in school as well as within a dysfunctional community social system that does not have the resources to help children shape their emotions and improve communication with their parents. On occasion, it becomes so difficult for the child to handle the depression that the child commits suicide; alternatively, the child becomes so hostile that he or she turns to violence and commission of petty or serious crimes (Jewell, 2003).

According to Jewell (2003), the main cause of divorce among African-American families is the presence of misunderstandings and arguments between the members of the couple. Sometimes, non-fulfillment of responsibilities by one or both members of the couple is the major reason of divorce (Jewell, 2003). Jewell found that low educational attainment is a contributing factor to the cause of divorce within African-American families. He suggested that the women of such families prefer to be alone rather than live within the dysfunction (violence and aggression) that the male may impose on his family. In the views of Hattery and Smith (2012) and Lawson and Thompson (1999), divorce among the parents particularly affects the emotional and mental condition of the children in African-American families. It can become very difficult for single parents to give the proper upbringing to their children, which ultimately may lead to financial instability for the children (Hattery & Smith, 2012). According to Hattery and Smith, when the full responsibility for the children falls on the shoulders of a single parent, it can become too

difficult for the parent to respond adequately and fulfill all the needs. At the same time, Lawson and Thompson (1999) suggested that African-American fathers in lower-income areas do strive to remain in effective relationships with their children. As a result, both parents have to put forth major efforts to fulfill the needs and desires of their children (Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

Hattery and Smith (2012) found that it can become difficult for divorced parents to bring up their children under normal conditions. Moreover, parents see the drastic changes in the behavior of their children. This may cause them to stop attending social events or public meetings and withdraw from the social and religious systems that could provide the support that they need. Children may find it difficult to move on from the stage of depression and stress that arises from the experience of the divorce of their parents (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Jewell (2003) stated that the incidence of divorce has vastly increased in recent times, making it necessary for large numbers of children to live within single-parent households.

Crouch, Page, Stevens, and Rockwell (2005) stated that divorce and marriage play much greater economic roles for Black children than White children in the United States. According to a new study by two UC Davis economists, Marianne Page and Ann Huff Stevens, in the first two years following a divorce, family income among White children falls about 30%, while it falls by 53% among African-Americans children. This difference increases dramatically in the long run according to the authors. Three or more years after the divorce, about a third of the loss in Whites' household income is recouped, but the income of African-Americans families barely improves.

In fact, according to Crouch et al. (2005), three or more years after the divorce, the average income for African-Americans family's remains 47% lower than if the parents had remained together. Marriage appears to have even greater benefits for African-Americans children whose single mothers marry than for their White counterparts, according to the study. Crouch et al. (2005) estimated that while the family income of White children increases by 45% when their single parent marries, the family income of African-Americans children increases by 81% with marriage. One reason for this difference in improvement is that married Black mothers are more likely to work than the White mothers who are married. On the other hand, when divorce occurs, the probability of African-Americans mothers working does not change, while recently divorced White women have an 18% greater probability of working than African-Americans mothers (Crouch et al., 2005).

Erwin (2006) suggested that there are long-term effects of divorce on children, and on boys in particular. Some experts suggest that divorce and life in a single parent home permanently damages children, while others claim that children with divorced or separated parents suffer no negative long-term effects (Erwin, 2006). The truth is undoubtedly somewhere in between. At the same time, Erwin stated that, in an ideal world, a boy lives with his mother and his father, experiences a sense of belonging and significance, and learns to be capable and competent as he grows up. Obviously, this is only an ideal, as many boys with married parents do not experience this situation. When parents no longer live together, life for a boy becomes more complicated, but it need not be impossible (Erwin, 2006).

A University of Michigan research study of more than 6,000 adults found that 43% of the adult children of divorced parents were happily married—about the same percentage as those who grew up in two-parent homes. There are indeed risks associated with having divorced or separated parents according to this author. As per Erwin (2006) and Lawson and Thompson (1999), identified boys are more likely to react to their parents' divorce with anger, academic problems, truancy, or aggressive behavior than are girls, who may try to please adults by suppressing feelings. Boys are more likely to suffer from depression when the father leaves the home, especially when a boy is not able to spend time with him consistently. Boys may also lose connection with a mother because she must work longer hours to provide for the family and keep a home operational. Boys may assume blame for the break-up of a family (Erwin, 2006; Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

Haskins and Offner (2006) stated that many significant historical and current societal factors have contributed to lower levels of well-being among African-American boys in particular. These factors maybe sometimes overlooked within a family structure. A summary of the research strongly indicates that African-American boys do best when they live with two parents – especially their own two married parents (Haskins & Offner, 2006). Together, the research supports the argument that government policies intended to help low-income couples and fragile families must include serious proposals to support marriage. Two-parent families are good for children, and that poverty is reduced if marriages remain stable (Haskins & Offner, 2006).

### **The Invasion of Pride in Spiritual Life**

According to Call (2010), divorced parents are less likely than married parents to actively participate in activities of their children's school. Call also noted that divorce in African-American families occurs in part because of a shortage of job opportunities for Black men compared to White men. Because of fewer job opportunities, some Black men do not adequately meet the financial needs of the family, which ultimately contributes to divorce.

### **Outcomes of Divorce on the Black Man**

Divorce affects lives of different people in different ways (Conyers, 2002). There are various outcomes of divorce on the lives of Black men, which are described as: significant stressors, parallels in physical, and emotional issues.

### **Significant Stressors**

According to Hattery and Smith (2012), people face stressors in their lives for many reasons. Some of the issues that cause stress are based on uncertainties while some are based on known factors (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Negative stress creates a harmful impact on the immune system of a person. Stress can increase susceptibility to illness, and decreases the work productivity and ability of a person. Some of the major stressful situations that people face in their lives are the death of a spouse, divorce, marital separation, change in the health of a family member, sexual difficulties, imprisonment, death of a close family member, personal injury or illness, marriage, dismissal from work, retirement, pregnancy, business readjustment, and a change in financial state. The other stressors are related to changes in the frequency of arguments, major mortgages,

mortgage problems, foreclosures of mortgage loans, and changes in responsibilities at work.

At the same time, Hattery and Smith (2012) found that a child leaving home, trouble with in-laws, the spouse stopping work, school ending, and changes in living conditions also cause stress. Experience of these stressors often results in personal changes, such as the revision of personal habits, trouble with superiors, and changes in working hours or conditions. This also includes changes in residence, changes in school, changes in recreation, changes in church activities, changes in social activities, taking on a minor mortgage or loan, changes in sleeping habits, changes in the number of family reunions, changes in eating habits, changes in vacation, and even minor law violations (Hattery & Smith, 2012). With these major stressors identified, and being a member of the lower-income bracket and surrounded by dysfunctional community, social, political, religious, and educational subsystems the possibility of divorce increases.

### **Parallels in Physical and Emotional Issues**

Observing divorce from a distance may present a distorted view, but divorce has a devastating impact on the physical and emotional structure of family. Within the structure of the African-American family, divorced African-American men who did not initiate a divorce suffered physical and emotional problems more so than the African-American women and children (Lawson & Thompson, 1999). According to Lawson and Sharpe (2000) and Bulanda and Brown, (2004) major physical and emotional problems occurred to African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. Consequently, Scott (2000) agreed with Lawson and Sharpe on the emotional problems, but could not substantiate acute physical problems. A continuous theme from Lawson and Sharpe

(2000) suggested both physical and emotional problems in their findings while Lawson and Thompson (1995) revealed an increase in emotional problems of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce and less with physical problems. Lawson and Thompson found those who initiated a divorce did have minimum problems, but made the adjustment substantially faster than those who did not initiate a divorce. In this case, their regiment of activities in the social, spiritual and religious environment did not change significantly.

At the same time, the research patterns on the physical and emotional problems by Pistole (2007) in African-American men did not focus on these problems directly, but generally, men who did not initiate a divorce described a wide range of conflicting and confusing emotions including depression, anxiety, anger, contempt, regret, affection, and panic. Pistole (2007) did identify that women were normally the initiator of divorce rather than the man.

Hattery and Smith (2012) determined that the experience of divorce has a devastating impact on the physical and emotional structure of families, especially for African-American men. Hattery and Smith stated that divorce leads to a greater increase in emotional problems than it does in physical problems among African-American men, and that major physical and emotional problems occur for African-American men who are divorced (Hattery & Smith, 2012).

### **Disadvantages of Divorce**

There are certain disadvantages of divorce associated with non-initiators of divorce. These include: custodial and non-custodial fathers, distinctions in physical and emotional problems, and peacefulness during conflicts.

### **Custodial and Non-custodial Fathers**

According to Hattery and Smith (2012), there are several causes for the continuous increase in cases of divorce observed in recent years. Change in society, thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes of people are the major reasons for the increase in divorce. In addition, the liberty allowed by laws and rules regarding divorce supports the high incidence of divorce (Hattery & Smith, 2012).

There are several disadvantages of divorce that hurt not only the individuals involved, but also their friends and family. Hattery and Smith (2012) revealed a major disadvantage of divorce is loneliness. An individual feels alone and isolated after divorce, as there is no one to take care of that individual. Sometimes family and society do not provide adequate support to divorced people. This creates frustration and depression for the individual. Divorce also contributes to both physical and mental challenges to an individual, because of which, a person has to combat stress and depression (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Sometimes divorce results in a painful and stressful ending of a relationship, which may physically and emotionally damage the individual.

Woodhouse (2010) noted that divorce can also result in the financial downfall of the individual, which ultimately thwarts the lifestyle and standard of living that that person had attained. Moreover, divorce creates extra costs, such as those necessary to pay courts and lawyers. Divorce destroys the relationship between two families and generates situations of stress and disturbance between both the families (Woodhouse, 2010). In addition, the spouse loses their partner forever after making the decision to divorce. This not only disturbs the emotional balance of the individual but also disrupts their physical and mental equilibriums. Correspondingly, the divorce negatively affects



the concentration power of the individual, which fetters the work life of the person (Woodhouse, 2010). Woodhouse has suggested that divorce leads to mental instability among the children of divorced parents. This not only creates the situation of stress in the mind of children but also disturbs their ongoing development.

According to Woodhouse (2010), divorce rarely causes the death of the children. If the custody of children goes in the hands of an unemployed mother, it disturbs the financial condition of the family, which interferes with the proper upbringing of the children. In the words of Kuehn (2001), divorce is the process that legally ends the relationship of two individuals. There is a particular legal procedure that is followed at the time of divorce (Kuehn, 2001). One of the spouses can easily file for divorce from the other, although, in some cases, divorce takes a long time to follow the necessary legal procedure to the end. Both of the divorced individuals are no longer responsible for each other and become free from the bond of marriage (Kuehn, 2001). According to the Kuehn, since it is very difficult to cope with divorce, it is always wise to resolve the disputable matters between spouses.

After parental separation, the custody of children must be decided. Sometimes the custody is given to the mother, and sometimes to the divorced father (Kuehn, 2001). Kuehn (2001) found that divorce creates feelings of embarrassment and shame for teenagers and children. Such children often prefer to remain secluded and to avoid interaction with people their age. This results in reduced self-confidence and low self-esteem. In addition, the parents begin avoiding the children because of their mental and emotional imbalance. Sometimes teenagers and children feel guilty because of the divorce among their parents. They may start to blame themselves for their parents'

divorce which, in its extreme form, may result in attempts to hurt themselves and others by various means (Kuehn, 2001). Rarely, the custody of the father decreases the power of tolerance. According to Kuehn, it is really a difficult situation for the children to accept the separation of their parents and to live without their mother.

Moreover, the children may start concealing their feeling and emotions from their friends, family members, and both mother and father. Additionally, the experience of parental divorce can encumber the meditation power and decision-making abilities of children (Kuehn, 2001). Due to mental disturbance, they may encounter significant problems in their studies. Another way that children may begin hurting themselves is by altering their eating habits (Kuehn, 2001).

### **Distinctions in Physical and Emotional Problems**

It is extremely difficult for the individual to overcome the stress of divorce. This is so not only for the members of the couple, but also for their children. For example, African-American men who initiate divorce have been found to suffer from physical problems and African-American men who did not initiate divorce have been found to suffer more from emotional problems (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000). Additionally, it becomes very necessary for the parents to give proper time to their child and to show extra love and affection (Kuehn, 2001). This extra care can assist children to overcome feelings of stress and depression. Problematically, divorced people may be inclined to focus more on their own personal interests, as opposed to those of others, to minimize their stress and frustration.

According to Woodhouse (2010), reduced concentration power is one of the effects of divorce. As a result, job loss increases; this causes the additional problem of

financial instability. A manifestation of the stress and other emotional effects of divorce is that the individual may start to react strangely in various situations. According to Woodhouse, divorce hampers the decision-making capabilities of an individual, making them unable to make proper and appropriate decisions. Individuals may start to hurt themselves, or become more hostile and aggressive as they experience increased depression and frustration (Woodhouse, 2010). Children may start to withdraw physically and emotionally, manifested by seeking to be alone and becoming less talkative in order to avoid sharing their emotions and feelings.

Divorce among parents affects the education of their children. Sometimes it also disturbs the health of the children and they become physically ill. Children face emotional pain and are often unable to express their feelings (Woodhouse, 2010). In addition, the children often become more impatient and irritated. As divorce results in the drop of family income, this can ultimately hinder the diet and fulfillment of nutritional needs for the children (Stewart & Brentano, 2007). According to Stewart and Brentano (2007), financial weakness can create embarrassment for the children among their circle of friends, such that they might discontinue socializing with their friends and relatives. According to the authors, sometimes the children of divorced parents even drop out of school because of such embarrassments, which inhibits their education and career. In addition, the emotional imbalance they experience can lead them to become disrespectful to their parents and other members of the family.

Custody disputes may occur, imposing more stress and instability. Schepard (2004) stated that the child custody decision is one of the major decisions taken by the court and the future of the child depends on that decision. According to Schepard,

custody may be given to the parent who can better fulfill the children's needs and who can provide them with proper facilities related to education, shelter, food, and health care. In addition, the court should ensure the accountability and responsibility of the parents in order to provide legal protection to the child or children (Schepard, 2004).

### **Peacefulness during Conflicts**

According to Jewell (2003), a person can try to remain peaceful during the conflict by avoiding interaction with the other person, by keeping calm, relaxing for a few minutes at a time, listening to music, and distracting the mind away from the topic of the conflict. The person can discuss the reasons for the conflict with close friends or relatives and take steps to avoid conflict. It is good to keep quiet at the time of an argument or conflict. People can become aware of and develop problem-solving skills in order to be better able to solve problems.

### **Summary**

The literature review highlights various causes and effects of divorce. People can help to improve their lives by focusing on spirituality to attain internal happiness and to be attached to God. People also can take certain spiritual steps to be connected to the supreme power, i.e., God. They may leave behind the worldly things in want of being attached to God. People maintain spirituality to make this world a happy place and remove all the immoral things from the world.

Spiritual people think about others before themselves; they often try to maintain world peace and harmony. Only people who have true and pure hearts can adopt spirituality. People need to focus on welfare of society and the world to inculcate spirituality in their hearts. On the other hand, divorce breaks a family and divides it into

two parts. Divorce may be avoided, and steps can be taken to resolve conflicts between married couples. In many situations, married couples go for divorce when they think that it is beneficial for them. The themes discussed are elaborated upon below.

### **Various Spiritual Dimensions**

The spiritual dimension is an aspect of spirituality that extends beyond institutionalized religion, incorporating the body, mind, and spirit of a person (Walsh, 2009). The spiritual dimensions include the importance of spirituality in a family; divinity, relationship and experience; and prayers along the spiritual journey. These constructs have been implemented in psychotherapy and counseling, and conceived of in terms of a 7-stage model (Sperry, 2001). The creation and use of models representing the spiritual dimension can assist in understanding the emotional effects of divorce on African-American men who did not initiate divorce.

### **Spirituality in a Changing World**

One of the major transformations occurring in today's world is an increased value placed upon spirituality (Sperry, 2001). This is occurring due to increased self-awareness as well as an increased appreciation of the importance of spirituality. These changes have to do with a variety of concepts, including the nature of spirituality, the foundation of spirituality, the importance of spirituality, spiritual pluralism, and the influence of the spiritual journey/spirituality on life choices (Sperry, 2001). Increased interaction between different cultures of the world has placed an increased awareness on harmony, coordination, and understanding between different religions. These elements are understood to improve societies as well as to help individuals confront difficult situations in life.

## **Journey of Spirituality**

The Journey of Spirituality is the process by which a person attains spirituality and achieves complete unity with the Supreme Power, i.e., God. This process involves stages, which are described as: initial contemplations, dark night of the senses; intermediate contemplation, dark night of the spirit; transforming union, unity, and experiencing God daily. This process involves a variety of prayers, spiritual exercises, and meditative practices that the person may apply in his or her daily life. This may allow the person to deepen the personal connection with God. Through this transformative process, an individual transitions from being focused and attached to worldly pleasures to being connected to God, thus attaining inner peace, fulfillment, and happiness.

## **Life of a Spiritual Person**

There are three stages in the life of a spiritual person: beginners (purgative way), proficient (illuminative way), and perfect (unitive way). The life of a spiritual person is guided by spiritual values that are incorporated into the daily choices that they make. Spiritual people may rely on spiritual leaders who show them ways to live that will lead them to internal peace and joy. The life of the spiritual person is motivated by values such as expectation, happiness, honesty, wisdom, sympathy, imagination, and tolerance (Burke & Miranti, 1995).

## **Nature of Spirituality**

The nature of spirituality is the condition of a person who is not fully attached to worldly things or pleasures, but is instead focused on God and spiritual things (Burkhardt, 2002). This allows a person to transform his or her life, whereby the

individual finds genuine meaning for their life in connection with God. Spiritual people are motivated by religious emotions and beliefs (Ford, 2009). Spirituality includes religion, appealing to God, meditation, relations with people, and connection with God (Richardson, 2002), and includes experiences of individuals when they encounter the supreme power (Ford, 2009).

### **Characteristics of Divorce**

Legally, divorce refers to the end of a relationship of a married couple, which leads to the termination of all the responsibilities and duties of the relationship (Ackerman & Kane, 2005). However, the emotional effects of divorce extend beyond the couple, affecting children, extended family members, and friends. The process of divorce involves legal issues including child custody, child support, distribution of property, debt, division, and alimony, as well as emotional issues such as depression. There has been an increase in divorce in recent years, which has especially affected Black families, resulting in an increase of children growing up in single-parent homes. Detachment from God is one spiritual effect of divorce. However, spirituality can help individuals recover from the crisis of divorce.

### **Divorce – A Major Negative for African-American Boys**

Black boys living in fatherless families may suffer damage to their self-esteem as a result of the lack of a present father (Neenan , 2000) For young boys, growing up without a father brings about declines in education and self-esteem, which does not appear to happen to the same degree for young girls growing up in fatherless households. Thus, divorce has serious consequences for boys, which can range from experiencing problems in school to participating in gangs as part of their search for male role models.

When divorce is predicated upon experience with violence within the household, it is common for this to increase child aggressiveness and depression, which may result in illegal activities, addiction to drugs and alcohol and, rarely, suicide (Hampton, 2002; Jewell, 2003).

### **Causes of Divorce**

Many potential causes of divorce extend from issues in society to issues occurring within individual families and relationships. Changes in society, thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes of people coupled with lenient laws and rules regarding divorce are partially responsible for the increasing incidence of divorce (Hattery & Smith, 2012). At the microcosmic level, the main cause of divorce among African-American families is the presence of misunderstandings and arguments between the members of the couple. Sometimes, non-fulfillment of responsibilities by one or both members of the couple is the major reason of divorce (Jewell, 2003). Divorce also often stems from intra-familial violence (Hampton, 2002), low literacy rates, and lack of job skills, which increase economic pressure on couples (Dabel, 2008), pressures placed on couples due to premarital parenthood (Hampton, 2002), and lack of conflict-solving skills.

### **Ways of Avoiding Conflicts**

People can be more successful in avoiding or resolving their conflicts by implementing a variety of practices. Avoiding interaction with the other partner during a conflict, relaxing for a few minutes at a time, listening to music, and distracting the mind away from the topic of the conflict can help married couples to avoid conflicts (Jewell, 2003). Engaging in discussions for the reasons for the conflict with close friends or relatives can help individuals to take steps to avoid conflict. People can become aware of



and develop problem-solving skills to be better able to constructively solve problems. Additionally, people should also try to preserve and understand God's plan behind marriages, which is considered a sacred relationship in many cultures (Kuehn, 2001). This may help motivate them to take steps to try to make their married life beautiful.

### **Areas of Divorce**

The areas of divorce that represent major themes are social and religious factors, the mother and father, children, male children, and the invasion of pride in spiritual life. The Black family has been conceived of as a social system with subsystems that provide assistance during difficult times (Lawrence & Thompson, 1999), and is typically very religious. The family subsystems and religious structures can provide support during divorce. Premarital status as mother and father is one area that impacts the likelihood of divorce. Children also suffer greatly when their parents divorce. This effect is particularly seen for male children. Call (2010) stated that divorced parents are less likely than married parents to participate in their children's school life, and that lack of job opportunities and the resulting economic problems are contributors to divorce.

### **Impact on Children of Divorce**

Divorce affects children in various ways, including mentally, emotionally, economically, socially, and religiously. When the divorce is an outcome of violence experienced within the family, children may react by acting out violently and aggressively at school, by becoming involved in illegal activities, or using drugs or alcohol (Hattery & Smith, 2012; Jewel, 2002). It can be difficult for divorced parents to give a proper upbringing to their children. In addition, divorce brings about an average decrease in family income by 53% for African-American families. Children may become

embarrassed by their situation and withdraw from friends and social activities. Though children of divorced parents ultimately are able to attain healthy marriages at about the same rate as children of parents who stayed together, some children may take a long time to recover from their feelings of depression, guilt, and anger regarding the divorce.

### **Impact of Divorce on the Physical and Emotional**

Divorce results in significant stressors, which have parallels in both the physical and emotional states (Hattery & Smith, 2012). The experience of divorce can have a devastating impact on families, and especially on Black men. Divorced Black men have been found to suffer from physical and emotional problems more so than Black women and children (Lawson & Thompson, 1999), and the effect may be greater on their emotional health than on their physical health (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Men who did not initiate divorce have been found to suffer more from emotional problems compared to men who initiated divorce (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000). Broken relationships with family and friends take time to mend, and may be difficult to reestablish. A father may suffer from estrangement from his children if he becomes a non-custodial father, and may encounter some economic and emotional hardship if he is unable to support his children economically.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter describes the methodological approach taken in the current study to explore the experience of divorce and the spiritual journey of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. The strategy used was a combination of phenomenological and narrative approaches. Using the qualitative approach, the goal of this study was to explore stories of divorced African-American men through a short personal information sheet, recorded individual interviews with open-ended questions, and incorporation of the available research literature.

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used to explore the phenomena of divorce and spirituality as they relate to African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. Whereas quantitative methods are concerned with generating conclusions based on statistical probabilities, qualitative methods are concerned with exploring the meaning that people give to their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Thus, as the current study attempts to explore the meaning and understanding that participants ascribe to their experiences of divorce and the spiritual journey, the qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate.

#### **Qualitative Methodology**

Creswell (2009) suggested qualitative research methods might assist the researcher to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem. In this case, the problem to be explored is the act of divorce, and its relationship to the spiritual journey of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. Creswell further contended the qualitative approach allows for inductive

reasoning, in which observations are made about specific cases, from which patterns emerge, and from which generalizations are established and theories formulated. This approach can be contrasted with deductive studies, in which a general hypothesis is stated at the beginning and then narrowed via a process in which observations are collected to test the hypothesis, rendering a judgment about whether the hypothesis is supported or not.

### **Phenomenological and Narrative Strategies**

A combination of phenomenological and narrative strategies were used in the current study to explore the theme of divorce as it relates to the spiritual journey of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. The overlapping of these two expansive strategies gave breadth and depth to the research. According to Creswell (2009), the researcher has the flexibility to identify the essence of human experiences regarding a phenomenon being described by the participants. Additionally, inductive development of knowledge using qualitative methods, such as content analysis, allows unexpected or unforeseen information to be brought to light (Smith, 2000). This allows ideas and themes to be suggested by the participant that had not been previously conceived of or given importance by the researcher (Smith, 2000). This type of participant-directed inquiry can yield critical insights, as the realm of possible thematic connections is no longer constrained to the researcher's point of view.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator's spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process?

2. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God?
3. What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce?

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

#### **Sampling Frame**

Potential participants were African-American men between the ages of 25 and 65 years who have been divorced, but did not initiate divorce. The sampling frame consisted of African-American men who fit this criterion and who attended many of the organizations that have consented to being the focus of participant recruitment. Through this process, these organizations were community based. With this focus, the researcher was able to gain a broad population that ensured enough participants to complete the recruitment process (Appendix D).

#### **Sample Size**

The sampling size was 15 participants. Colorado State University (2011) suggested qualitative studies do not require a set sample size. However, a typical sample size for a qualitative study is between 6-8 people or events. The sample size is kept small because qualitative studies generate large amounts of data that require complex analytical methods. In general, a researcher might use data from more than 10 people only for validation of findings obtained from the initial 8-10 participants (Colorado State University, 2011). For this study, the researcher gained a commitment for 15 interviews and only interviewed 14. In addition, the researcher tested only three subjects to

determine if any adjustments were needed in interview content or equipment. In this case, no adjustments were needed.

### **Recruitment Location and Procedures**

Participants were recruited in the area of San Antonio, TX, and surrounding cities in the Bexar county region of South Central Texas. Study participants were recruited individually from social and service fraternities (undergraduate and graduate), men's groups in local churches, Masonic lodges, etc. Participants were selected from consenting organizations (Appendix D) using purposive sampling methods. Also, snowball sampling was used, whereby individuals who were identified to participate were asked if they could refer others known to fit the selection criteria.

### **Instrumentation**

Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2009) suggested in-depth interviews include both individual interviews (e.g., one-on-one) as well as group interviews (including focus groups). For the current study, only individual interviews were conducted. Data were collected through a personal data survey (Appendix B) to capture key demographic and personal data as well as individual, tape-recorded interviews using open-ended questions (Appendix C).

### **Procedures**

The research procedures delineated by Creswell (2009), Trochim (2009), and Diether (2014) guided the methods used in the preparation for the interviews. Prior to the interview, a Letter of Permission to recruit (Appendix D) was obtained from organizations, and signed consent forms (Appendix A) were obtained from each subject. The procedures for this research were organized into the following categories:

preliminary documents, preparation for interviews, knowledge base for interviewer, interviewee's package, the interview, and opening remarks, asking the questions, recording the interview, and concluding the interview.

### **Preliminary Documents**

Preliminary documents set forth institutional requirements to adhere to federal, university, and individual subject protection mandates. According to Argosy University (2014), the Institutional Review Board is the authority that approves the research. The following appendices are described: Appendix A (Letter of Consent), Appendix B (Personal Data Survey), Appendix C (Interview Questions), and Appendix D (List of Organizations).

### **Preparation for the Interview**

In this section, the terms researcher and interviewer will be used interchangeably. According to Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2009), the interviewer's role is complex and multifaceted. It includes the following tasks: location of respondents, motivation of respondents, clarification of concerns, observation of the quality of responses, and the ability to conduct a quality interview. Once the Institutional Review Board approved the research, the goal was to identify from the approved organization each identified subject to the researcher. The researcher established communication with each subject and set-up an informal meeting to discuss time and the location for the interview. At the same time, this was an opportunity for the researcher to have each subject sign the letters of consent, and be prepared to answer any questions and concerns relating to the interview.

**Knowledge Base of the Interviewer**

Trochim (2006) stated that although the researcher felt well informed regarding the subject matter, it was necessary to rehearse the content of the interview to increase the balance and flexibility of the interviewer. This helps the interviewer to respond to any new information that may surface. Even in small studies involving only a single researcher/interviewer, it is important to organize in detail and rehearse the interviewing process before beginning the formal interview. In other words, the implication from Trochim (2006) is the knowledge base possessed by the researcher gives him command of the entire process. The researcher developed an interview script to ensure all aspects of the questions were well understood by the interviewer.

**The Interviewee**

Creswell (2007) suggested a productive rapport must be established between the interviewer and interviewee in order to gain quality responses to the questions. Further, Creswell encouraged the interviewer to provide a quality environment where the interviewee feels comfortable. This was accomplished by ensuring that the interviewee knew where the interview was to be held and was given additional communication tools, such as phone numbers and working emails or texting capability.

The researcher had a 20-minute prior meeting to introduce himself to the participant. At the same time, researcher explained the process such as: completing the personal information sheet, the type of audio recorder was used, location, and address. Also, the researcher informed the participants that a copy of the report or abstract of the study will be provided once the overall research is completed. The consent form was



explained, along with purpose of the study, the amount of time needed for the interview, and plans for using the results obtained (Creswell, 2007).

### **The Interview**

Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2007) both agreed certain components of the interview are critical for the success. The following are areas Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher provide: opening remarks, asking questions, obtaining adequate responses, recording the responses, and concluding the interview.

### **Opening**

In accordance with Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2009), the researcher ensured everything was in order for the interview and had a back-up plan if needed. The back-up plan was to set-up two potential dates and times for the interview. The introduction is critical, according to both Trochim and Creswell, during which the interviewer's attitude should be respectful and kind. At this point, the interviewer should move to introducing himself.

Both, Trochim (2009) and Creswell (2007) suggested the interviewer should have the introduction memorized so that it can be delivered and essential information presented in 20-30 seconds at most. The interviewer should state his name and the name of the organization being represented; and show identification and the letter of introduction. In this case, the introduction would have already taken place prior to the interview and no letter of introduction was required. The only official letters were the signing of the letter of consent by the subject and the researcher. Trochim (2009) suggested three rules for this introduction: (a) Keep it short, (b) Keep it short, and (c) Keep it short!

**Asking the questions.** Each interviewee's background information was obtained through the personal data survey (Appendix B); this information sheet assesses variables such as: education, length of marriage, income, number of biological children, family of origin, married with children, and children before marriage.

The interview questions (Appendix C) were formulated with the purpose of gaining as much information as possible for the researcher to address the research theme – the spiritual dimension of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce – and to answer close as possible the research questions from the interview questions. Trochim (2009) and Creswell (2007) have suggested interviewers follow the questionnaire format, ask questions as written, follow the order as given, ask each question, and refrain from finishing sentences. An adherence to these tenets will help to ensure consistency across interviews as well as the accurate recording of the authentic responses of respondents, thus helping to ensure the study's credibility.

Trochim (2009) suggested the results of the research project were based on the questions being asked, as well as attempting to gain the best result from the interviewee. The goal, according to both Trochim and Creswell (2007), is to trust the question and continue to establish a rapport with the subject. The interviewer should practice asking the questions ahead of time so that, during the interview, the focus may be on the interviewee and not on the questionnaire instrument. The researcher followed Trochim's advice that the interviewer memorize the first few questions and referred to the instrument only occasionally, using eye contact, and a confident manner to achieve the right tone for the interview and help the interviewee feel comfortable. Additionally, the researcher modeled Trochim's recommendations to ask the questions exactly as written. At the

same time, Trochim reminded the researcher to keep the interview standardized as much as possible across the interviewees, as deviation from the plan may detract from the intended goal of the study (Creswell, 2007; Trochim, 2009).

The researcher followed the order of the planned interview, maintained a level of certainty for the interviewer, and reduced the possibility of appearing to be unorganized. At the same time, the researcher, as suggested by Trochim (2009), asked each question as planned, because the elimination of any question might omit data that could be critical for observing linkages between narratives. The researcher should never assume that he already knows the answer to the question.

Additionally, Trochim (2009) and Creswell (2007) suggested that the interviewer not get ahead of the interviewee, but instead should allow the interviewee to answer the question at his or her own pace. In this case, to eliminate the possibility of the researcher getting ahead of the subject, the researcher practiced pacing or repeating the question if necessary. Equally, these authors suggest the interviewer not finish the sentences for the interviewee, as doing so may lead the interviewee to feel rushed, increasing the possibility of emotional and mental shutdown that may impede collection of critical data (Creswell, 2007; Trochim, 2009).

### **Recording the Response**

The researcher followed Trochim's (2009) balanced approach to recording the interviewees' responses by audio recording and taking notes. The researcher ensured that taking notes would not distract the subject from remaining focused on answering the question to the best of his ability. In this case, the researcher was aware the interviewee may feel uncomfortable. The goal of the interviewer was to ensure that the environment

was comfortable for the interviewee to obtain the highest quality of information possible in order to meet the research study objectives. At the same time, the researcher included Trochim and Creswell's (2007) approach that the researcher would record the responses immediately by taking quick notes and using coded phrases with identifiable meaning. The researcher reviewed notes and made any other comments and observation, making sure to distinguish between the interview and the observations from the interview.

### **Concluding the Interview**

The researcher adopted the techniques of Trochim (2009), making closure of the interview simple but focused on maintaining an atmosphere of respect and comfort for the interviewees. When the interview was almost completed, the interviewee may have wanted to know more about the study. The researcher followed Trochim's (2009) guidance that the interviewer will not be too hasty in attempting to finish the conversation, but instead should allow the conversation to slowly wrap up.

### **Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

The choices made in designing and conducting the present study have naturally shaped and defined the nature of the data obtained, as well as the type of conclusions that can be made based on the resulting data. The following discussion attempts to delineate the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of these choices.

#### **Methodological Assumptions**

Each individual experiences the phenomenon of divorce differently; thereby, leading to differences between the narratives of different individuals. As the purpose of the current study was to gain depth of understanding and meaning about these phenomena through the eyes of the participants, qualitative methods are appropriate for

this endeavor. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is “the first method of knowledge and it involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis and portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). At the same time, Creswell (2009) provided an analysis of phenomenology and narrative strategies, suggesting they provide an overview of the human condition, as well as the presentation of each individual story.

Further, Creswell (2009) proposed an approach for understanding divorce as a personal experience; through the phenomenology and narrative strategies, the researcher attempted to connect to each journey and find similarities and differences. In this case, the experiences of different divorcees that relate to the spiritual dimension in coping with stress, pain, or depression that may be by-products of the experience of divorce. Creswell suggested this approach emphasizes the experiences shared among individuals related to a phenomenon, such as divorce, that results in stressors. Apart from the philosophical approaches described by Creswell, the current goal was to attempt to describe each subject’s experience textually and utilize a similar format for analysis of the data collected.

### **Limitations**

Simon (2011) contends that limitations represent potential points of weakness in the study and are out of the control of the researcher. In the case of the current study, limitations are due to factors inherent in qualitative methods, as well as constraints placed on the scope of the research due to practical and logistic concerns. While qualitative methodologies have numerous strengths, particularly for exploring nuanced phenomena in depth and detail, they also present several important limitations. As discussed by

Anderson (2010), one important limitation affecting qualitative research is the issue of scientific rigor. The competence of the interviewer greatly affects the quality of data generated, and, though quantitative methods can employ certain controls for rigor, such as the use of validated measures, interviewer competence is a more difficult thing to control for. Thus, replications of the methods presented here may obtain different results due, in part, to differences in interviewer skill or characteristics.

The difficulty in demonstrating scientific rigor affects the credibility of the results. While mechanisms can be put in place to enhance credibility, such as comprehensive notes taken during and/or immediately after interviews documenting the interviewer's observations and self-assessment, these are often seen as subjective. Another limitation of the current study was that, due to the small sample size that is typical of qualitative studies using phenomenological and narrative methods, there was reduced generalizability to groups not represented by the subjects who participated in the study. While generalizability is not necessarily a major goal of qualitative research, it is important to consider the implications of the findings on society from a general perspective. This approach is designed to influence others to consider this type of research.

### **Delimitations**

According to Simon (2011), delimitations are “those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of this study” (p. 3). This author described these factors as “the choice of objectives, the research questions, variables of interest, theoretical perspectives, the population, and the choice of the problem” (p. 3). For the current study, the choice was made to focus on divorce and spirituality; thereby, centering on the

spiritual journey of divorced or remarried African-American men who were non-initiators of their divorce. Thus, the methods employed and material obtained from this research does not include direct procurement or analysis of data about other areas of divorce or the spiritual journey, although such information may appear tangentially.

The location of San Antonio, TX, and surrounding cities and counties was chosen as the area of recruitment for selection of the sample. While there were many potential areas that could have been chosen, practicality concerns, and objectives resulted in the narrowing of the recruitment area to this one region. Therefore, the study does not contain, or analyze data from participants living in other geographical areas.

The sampling frame of African-American men between the ages of 25 to 65 who have been divorced restricts the data obtained to exclude information from other demographic groups, such as divorced women or people who have never been divorced. In-depth interviews differ from direct observation primarily in the nature of the interaction. In interviews, it is assumed there is a questioner, and one or more interviewees. In the current study, the choice was made to employ individual interviews, rather than interviews with multiple people at once (focus group interviews). The rationale to interview individuals from the researcher point of view was to gain the individual story free from the influences of the group approach. Thus, the data collected does not include any processes due to interaction among participants such as might occur during a focus group, where individual statements and opinions are expanded, suppressed, shaped, and extrapolated upon or otherwise affected by the presence of and interaction with other members of the group.

Both Trochim (2006) and Creswell (2009) agreed there are a variety of acceptable ways to record data, including stenography, audio recording, and video recording or written notes. For the current study, audio recording of individual interviews and verbatim transcriptions were conducted. Thus, the scope of data available for analysis did not include visual representation of gestures, body language, facial expressions, or other visual material other than what was observed by the interviewer, and recorded in a summary posterior to each interview.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

#### **Data Collection**

In concordance with Creswell's (2007) suggestions, the method of data collection included surveys and in-depth interviews as instruments to collect the data for this study. In addition, the emphasis was on demographic variables, recruitment, and location. The survey of personal information was used to obtain critical information from each interviewee (Appendix D) prior to the digitally taped recorded interview. A digital recording system was used in conjunction with a written summary compiled by the interviewer at the conclusion of each interview. The digitally audio recordings of the in-depth interviews were expected to last approximately 60 minutes (Appendix C). Following the interviews, audio recordings were transcribed.

#### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2007) suggested data analysis for the phenomenon of spirituality and divorce is best approached using a combination of phenomenological and narrative methods to analyze the information collected. Creswell described similarities and differences in the data analysis methods for phenomenological and narrative approaches.



The scope of data analysis includes the following possible categories: data managing; reading, memorizing, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing, as described by Creswell (2007).

Data were analyzed through content analysis using SPSS Text Analyzer. SPSS Text Analyzer is a qualitative data analysis software program that can be used to organize and analyze interviews. For this study, the audio-recorded files were transcribed and imported into this software. The primary goal was to analyze interviews in light of existing themes, as well as newly identified ones. With the potential 15 subjects, this program was used to extract themes associated with each interview question.

Open coding was used to “open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). Raw data were reviewed thoroughly, then the researcher proceeded to group and label concepts identified in the data; that is, succinct verbal descriptions were applied to small portions of data (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The researcher began synthesizing codes into themes in terms of properties and dimensions. The aim was for the themes to integrate considerable sets of coding, an iterative process involving change and adjustment (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). These themes were sufficiently defined so the themes can be clearly communicated to others. Once themes have been refined, examples of themes and possible subthemes were extracted from the data for illustrative purposes. These themes and excerpts were synthesized into a qualitative narrative, with possible revisions to the analysis during write up.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the spiritual dimension of African-American men who did not initiate their divorce. Within the course of this study, the goal was to identify potential spiritual dimensions that may have been used to improve their spiritual well-being, through the divorce process and beyond. Fetzer (2003) selected six domains that could be used for assessment of psychiatric inpatients. These domains could serve as potential spiritual dimensions, and include “daily spiritual experience, meaning, forgiveness, private religious practices, and religious/spiritual coping, and religious support” (Fetzer, 2003, p. 35). Sperry (2001), similar to Fetzer (2003), described the spiritual dimension as the stages of spiritual journey. From the integrated approach of Fetzer and Sperry, three research questions, and ten interview questions were developed from the concepts of their research to understand the spiritual journey of African-American men who did not initiate divorce.

### **Research Questions**

Three qualitative research questions were developed to gain an understanding of the spiritual dimension and journey of African-American men, who are divorced, but did not initiate the divorce. The interview questions were developed specific to the three research questions under study. Table 2 displays the research questions, along with corresponding interview questions asked. The three research questions include:

1. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator’s spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process?

2. How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God?
3. What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce?

Table 2

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

Interview Question	Interview Question details	Corresponding research question
IQ1	Describe the circumstances around your divorce?	General information
IQ2	Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage?	RQ3
IQ3	During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God?	RQ3
IQ4	Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage.	RQ1
IQ5	Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce?	RQ2
IQ6	How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage?	RQ1
IQ7	How have you been feeling about your former wife?	RQ1
IQ8	Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both.	RQ1
IQ9	How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith?	RQ3
IQ10	How would you describe your life now?	General information

### **Review of the Data Collection Procedures**

The 14 participants were recruited through churches, as well as individual referrals. Each interview was conducted in person with the upmost privacy for each participant. Each interview was digitally recorded, and uploaded for transcriptions. The transcription process identified all words, sentences and excluded any silent and foreign sounds captured by the recording. All 14 interviews were transcribed to ensure the validity of participant message being captured by the researcher. In addition, the researcher captures general demographic data on each participant with a personal information data sheet. Table 3 displays the demographic information provided for each of the 14 participants.

Table 3

*Demographics*

Participant	Age	Years divorced	Age of divorce	Highest education level	Did children contribute to divorce?	Number of children	Custodial parent	Sought medical care during divorce	Additional help
P1	59	2	57	GED	No	0	No	Yes	Pastor, Bible
P2	54	1	53	Undergrad	Yes	1	No	Yes	Bible, New Age spiritual literature, Prayer groups
P3	60	26	34	Vocational	Yes	2	No	Yes	Bible
P4	53	13	40	Graduate	No	NA	No	Yes	Counselor, Bible
P5	50	5	48	Graduate	Yes	3	Yes	No	NA
P6	52	9	44	Graduate	Yes	2	No	Yes	Pastor, Psychiatrist, Bible, Prayer groups, Social groups
P7	60	10	42	Undergrad	Yes	3	No	Yes	Pastor, Bible, Prayer Group, Social Group
P8	52	10	42	Post-Grad	Yes	4	No	Yes	Pastor, Bible, Internet social network, Prayer group, Social Group
P9	59	5	29	Vocational	Yes	1	No	Yes	Bible, Prayer groups, Social groups
P10	46	<1	46	Vocational	No	NA	No	Yes	Pastor
P11	53	10	48	NA	No	NA	No	Yes	Bible, Social groups
P12	56	20	32	Vocational	Yes	3	No	Yes	Pastor, Counselor, Mental health counselor, Psychiatrist, Bible, Prayer groups
P13	44	3	41	Vocational	Yes	2	No	Yes	Counselor, Bible, New Age Spiritual Literature
P14	53	12	41	Vocational	Yes	1	No	Yes	Pastor, Counselor, Psychologist, Bible

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

Open coding was used to “open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). Raw data were reviewed thoroughly, then the researcher proceeded to group and label concepts identified in the data; that is, succinct verbal descriptions was applied to small portions of data (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The researcher then began synthesizing codes into themes in terms of properties and dimensions. The aim was for the themes to integrate considerable sets of coding, an iterative process involving change and adjustment (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). These themes were sufficiently defined so the themes can be clearly communicated to others. Once themes have been refined, examples of themes and possible subthemes were extracted from the data for illustrative purposes. These themes and excerpts were synthesized into a qualitative narrative, with possible revisions to the analysis during write up.

## **Qualitative Findings**

### **Research Question One**

Research question one asked: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator’s spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process? Interview questions four, six, seven, and eight were constructed to answer research question one.

**Interview question four.** Interview question four stated: Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage. The pattern that was developed was they sought a distraction outside of their marriage. Of the 14 who were interviewed, a greater frequency ( $n = 11$ ) stated they sought a distraction outside of the

marriage. The major distraction that individuals reported was becoming involved in illicit activity/excessive drinking ( $n = 6$ ). Some of the additional activities included (a) the Bible ( $n = 2$ ), (b) engaged in other relationships ( $n = 2$ ), (c) became very active in Post Chapel ( $n = 1$ ), and (d) sought comfort in family and friends ( $n = 2$ ). Additional themes that were reported included anger management ( $n = 1$ ), spent time alone ( $n = 1$ ), and infidelity (1). Specifically, participant five stated “I did some drugs. I did some drinking. I grew up real fast and it hurt. I just left it on God's doorstep and I left it like that. I left it and moved. Now I'm in Texas.” Participant twelve also stated “During that time, drugs and alcohol.” Also, participant fourteen reported, “Not the best ways. To be honest, it would be more of the same, more drugs, more alcohol, and a lot more infidelity, because I didn't have the bond of marriage at that time.” Participant one reported, “I read the Bible every day. That's my peace, reading the Bible every day.” Participant eight reported, “I continue to try to be the family we were, even without the wife being there. I tried to do what I needed to do with my children. I went on with life as it were without the wife.” Lastly, participant six reported, “Well, I spent a lot of time, again, a lot of time by myself. In the beginning I tried to avoid talking to people. I didn't want to talk about it. I spent a lot of time just resting I think. I think meditating on God.” Table 4 displays interview question four, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.

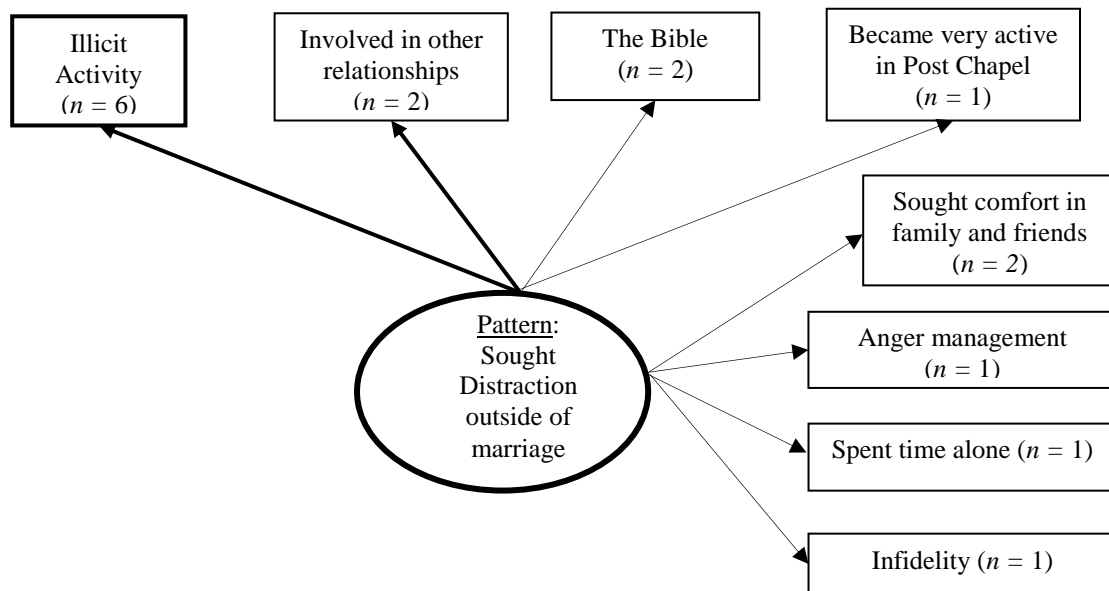
Table 4

*Thematic Response to Interview Question four*

Interview Question 4	Pattern and Themes	Frequency
Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage.	<u>Pattern:</u> Sought Distraction outside of Marriage	
	The Bible	2
	Illicit activity/excessive drinking	6
	Engaged in other relationships	2
	Became very active in Post Chapel	1
	Sought comfort in family & friends	2
	Anger management	1
	Spent time alone	1
	Infidelity	1

*Note.* Participant 3, 4, and 14 reported multiple themes.

Figure 1 displays the association between patterns, themes, and sub-themes derived from interview question four. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (illicit activity) associated with the pattern (sought distraction outside marriage) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships because two men reported this coping mechanism.



*Figure 1.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns, themes, and sub-themes derived from interview question four



**Interview question six.** Interview question six asked: How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage? The pattern that was developed was communication. Of the 14 who were interviewed, a greater frequency ( $n = 7$ ) stated they communicated with their ex-wife, and tried to maintain an amiable relationship. The theme extracted from the developed pattern was each displayed a mutual respect, and maturity with one another ( $n = 7$ ). Specifically, Participant three stated, “It was hard. I was more devastated and hurt, but I still tried to express it towards talking with my ex-wife and with my children. I tried to communicate with ex-in-laws, and I just really tried to seek forgiveness through her and through the kids, which were too young to really understand. There was nothing bitter on my behalf, because the things that I did I think caused the marriage to dissolve at that time.” Also, Participant four stated, “I still had to let my wife know that we could still be friends, because it wasn't a bad divorce or a bitter divorce. We hugged, and we parted friends. I still keep in touch with my ex-wife. It's always a two part thing. I realized it's not a one-sided thing on why we parted. I had to forgive myself for the things that I didn't do. I could have done better. I've forgiven her.” Participant five also reported, “First I talked to my wife and we talked about it. It was going to be hard for us to separate. We'd been together 23 some odd years and it was just a simple we couldn't get along anymore so I moved on.” Participant eight also stated, “I don't wish her any ill will. I'm going to do the right things I need to do with her, but my heart did change towards her. She became a different kind of person for me.” Additional themes that were extracted included, through the Bible and Scriptures ( $n = 1$ ), let go of anger ( $n = 1$ ), love ( $n = 1$ ), struggled with forgiveness ( $n = 1$ ), and trusted in God ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically,

participant seven stated, “That's a good question. But I guess she's my first born and our first love, and I loved her.” Participant nine also reported, “Well, the forgiveness part, I'm having a little problem with the forgiveness because I don't like the way she did me, the way she left you know?” In addition, two participants ( $n = 2$ ), reported there was no need to forgive their wives, as the reason for the divorce was not their fault. Specifically, participant twelve said, “Well I learned it was hard, but I learned it was my fault. I learned to forgive myself. I learned to forgive myself and also forgave her, but it was really my fault so I learned to forgive myself through my walk with God.” Participant thirteen also reported, “Like I said, earlier, I had to forgive her, because it wasn't her fault. It was a mental breakdown on her part. Because of that, I have to look at it and say it's nobody's fault but ... There's just nothing else you can do about it. These things happen to people.” Table 5 displays interview question six, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.

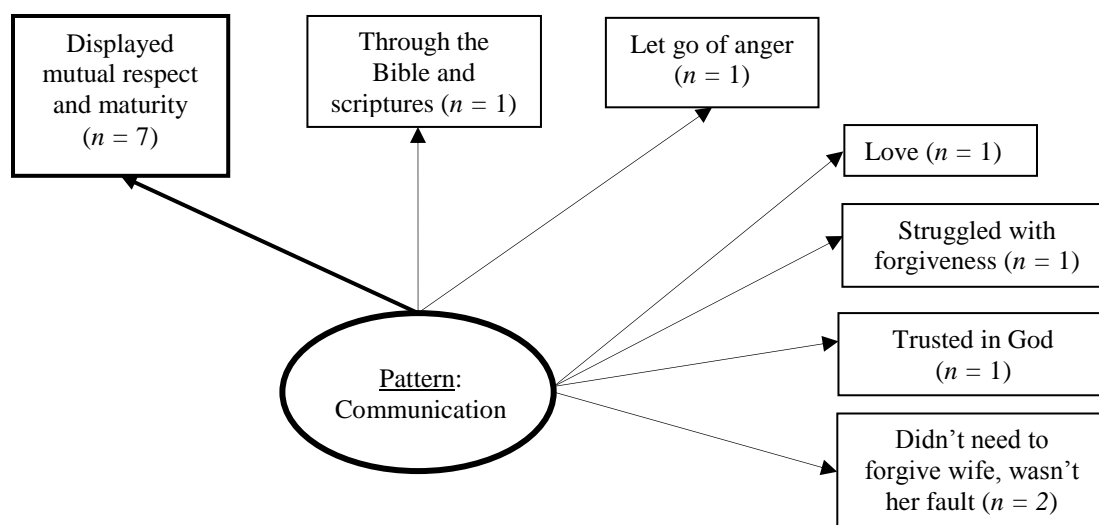
Table 5

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Six*

Interview Question 6	Pattern and Themes	Frequency
How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage?	<u>Pattern:</u> Communication	
	Displayed mutual respect/maturity	7
	Through the Bible and Scriptures	1
	Let go of anger	1
	Love	1
	Struggled with forgiveness	1
	Trusted in God	1
	Didn't need to forgive her, it wasn't her fault	2

Figure 2 displays the association between patterns, themes, and sub-themes derived from interview question six. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts

related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (displayed mutual respect/maturity) associated with the pattern (communication) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships.



*Figure 2.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns, themes, and sub-themes derived from interview question six

**Interview question seven.** Interview question seven asked: How have you been feeling about your former wife? Of the 14 who were interviewed, a greater frequency ( $n = 7$ ), expressed they maintain respect and forgiveness for their ex-wife. Specifically, Participant two stated, “I didn't have any disrespect for her, and she didn't have any disrespect for me, but because- I phrased the issues I was able to 100% completely interact with her without any pain.” Also, participant three expressed, “I still love her. As time goes on and we all change, I didn't really feel if I could fit into the picture in a sense, but I still ... Even now I dream about, I have dreams about getting back with my family, with my wife and my children. She's a strong Christian woman. She has a strong constitution, but I think that we've grown so far apart.” Participant four also reported, “Because we were so intimate for more than 20 years, I still consider her a relative. If

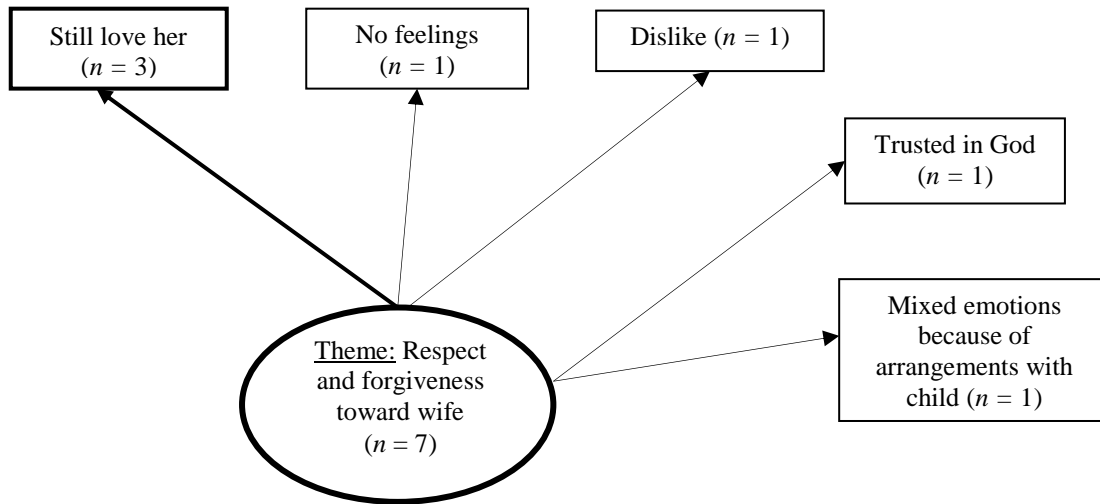
she really needed help, I would be there for her.” In addition, participant five expressed, “That’s hard. I’ve been missing her. I shouldn’t have divorced her. It’s cheaper to keep them. I shouldn’t have divorced them but I thought it would be the thing to do so they could go on and move on with their life. I don’t want to be holding them back and I moved on with my life.” Also, participant eight stated, “Basically, as I said, I love her just like I would love any other brother or sister or anybody else in the world. She’s a neighbor just like anyone else. I don’t have any hate or animosity toward her. I just want her to do what she’s supposed to do, and I’ll do what I’m supposed to do.” Additional themes reported included, love ( $n = 3$ ), no feelings ( $n = 1$ ), dislike ( $n = 1$ ), trusted in God ( $n = 1$ ), and mixed emotions because of arraignment with child ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, participant seven stated, “Good question. I still love her.” Participant thirteen also reported, “I still love her. I wish her the best. For me, I just want her to get well.” Participant ten put his trust in God, and stated, “I know that God can do everything and anything where, when and how. I asked him just do all He wants to do with this, with the marriage”, while participant eleven simply stated, “Oh, man, dislike.” Lastly, participant fourteen stated “Mixed emotions, because of the relationship with my son. I wanted to maintain the relationship with my son, where she more or less felt that the relationship wasn’t there with her, and the only way to hurt me would be by using my son. I love the fact that we shared the son, the time that we had together, but mixed emotions about her in terms of the arrangements with the child.” Table 6 displays interview question seven along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes.

Table 6

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Seven*

Interview Question 7	Themes	Frequency
How have you been feeling about your former wife?	Respect & forgiveness toward wife	7
	Still love her	3
	No feelings	1
	Dislike	1
	Trusted in God	1
	Mixed emotions because of arrangements with child	1

Figure 3 displays the themes with greater frequency, along with sub-themes derived from interview question seven. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the greater frequency counts (respect & forgiveness toward wife) displays a heavier line than some of the other reported themes.



*Figure 3.* Theoretical model depicting the association between theme, and sub-themes derived from interview question seven

**Interview question eight.** Interview question eight stated: Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both. Of the 14 who were interviewed, a greater frequency ( $n = 9$ ), expressed a feeling of mutual respect, or love, for their ex-wife. Specifically, Participant one stated, “Well, like I said, I’m kind of a little upset at the situation, but I wouldn’t really blame her. She did what she had to do. I’m more

happy for her than I am more upset about it.” Participant two reported, “when you're disappointed it becomes a tragedy, and everyone has to go to the grieving process you have to become angry, you have to get to the place of forgiveness, you have to get to the place where you can talk, and then you have to get to the place where you can love again.” Also, participant three stated, “It's a kind of touchy situation. I try to, and right today I still just recently talked with my daughter. I tried to repair the breach in the wall, but it takes more than just myself. It's going to take myself, my children, and my ex-spouse to sit down and talk about the divorce and things that led up to that.” Participant four expressed, “We don't have any living children between us. We had one child that died in the last trimester. My relationship with my former wife, we're still trying to be amicable. I was hurt when her mother died and when her father died. I tried to maintain a positive relationship with everybody associated with her family.” Participant five stated, “We still see each other on occasions, holidays. We still get along fine but we just don't communicate regularly. I mainly communicate with my daughter or my two boys. If they need anything they call me directly. If she needs anything she'll call me directly and I help them out as much as I can. Even though we are divorced I still do my best for them.” Participant seven also reported, “Another good question. Well, love.”

Additional themes reported included no relationship ( $n = 3$ ), good relationship with child, none with wife ( $n = 1$ ), and trusted in God ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, participant nine reported, “Well, me and my daughter we have a good relationship. We constantly talk to one another. But my wife, we don't talk at all.” Participant twelve reported, “We really don't have a relationship. They are married and gone their ways and I lost touch with them.” Lastly, participant fourteen also stated, “Both are nonexistent. I haven't seen or

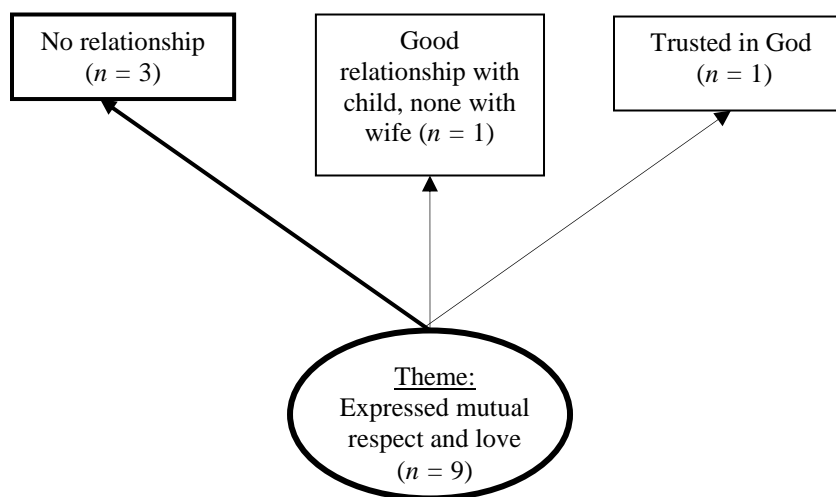
spoken to either in about ten years.” Table 7 displays interview question eight, along with the frequency of responses.

Table 7

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Eight*

Interview Question 8	Themes	Frequency
Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both.	Expressed mutual respect and love	9
	No relationship	3
	Good relationship with child, none with wife	1
	Trusted in God	1

Figure 4 displays the themes with greater frequency, along with sub-themes derived from interview question eight. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme with the greatest frequency counts (repect & forgiveness toward wife), displays a heavier line than some of the other reported themes.



*Figure 4.* Theoretical model depicting the association between theme, and sub-themes derived from interview question eight

### **Summary of Research Question 1**

In summary, how did the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator's spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process? The majority of participants reported they had a positive experience during their spiritual journey that assisted them through the difficult divorce process. Interview questions 4, 6, 7, and 8 produced major themes that described a productive conclusion to the marriage. At the same time, a majority regarding interview question 4 sought distraction outside of the marriage that resulted in illicit activity. A lesser amount did find other positive activities and relationships by reading the bible, church services, family members, and friends, enrolling in anger management, and spending time alone to gain balance in their lives. The other major themes from interview question 6 described the core of the research question with by displaying a positive communication along with mutual respect and maturity toward the former spouse. Also, within the sub-themes, various participants explained the core of their spiritual journey was letting go of anger, journeying through the Bible, and seeking scriptures to answer doubts and concerns about the divorce. Some individuals struggled with forgiveness, but discovered a way to forgive, expanded their trust in God, and accepting responsibility for the dissolution of the marriage, where necessary. In a similar way, responses to interview question 7 displayed respect and forgiveness, and equally recognized love still existed toward their spouse, while to others, no feeling remained, and even one expressed dislike toward his former spouse. In view of these themes, spiritual journey describes a personal trust in God, as well as dealing with mixed emotions regarding the arrangement with the children. Finally, interview question 8 captured the essence of an individual's spiritual journey relating to the pain



and growth from various negative life experiences. This experience of divorce did expose relationships with their wives, but strengthens some relationships with their children; through the spiritual journey, a greater frequency trusted God, and expressed mutual respect and love for their former wives, and themselves. In essence, their spiritual journeys did influence their life choices during the divorce process for a prevalent number of participants.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two asked: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God? Interview question five was constructed to answer research question two.

**Interview question five.** Interview question five stated: Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the developed pattern was they displayed a strong faith during their divorce. Specifically, four individuals displayed their faith through the bible ( $n = 4$ ), while an additional four stated they displayed their faith through trusting in God ( $n = 4$ ). Additionally, two stated they displayed their faith through praying ( $n = 2$ ), while another two stated they displayed their faith through church involvement ( $n = 2$ ). Specifically, Participant one stated, “That's another tough one. Like I said, my faith is what it is. Just spent a lot of time, when I get home, in the scriptures.” Also, Participant two stated, “My faith is strong. I didn't have any doubts of God, I didn't- I know God is real and I know he is who he is, and I know he created the heavens and the earth, and I didn't have any anger with God or doubt with God, to have any less power. No, my faith is strong.” Participant three also reported, “Once again, I tried to express it by just trying

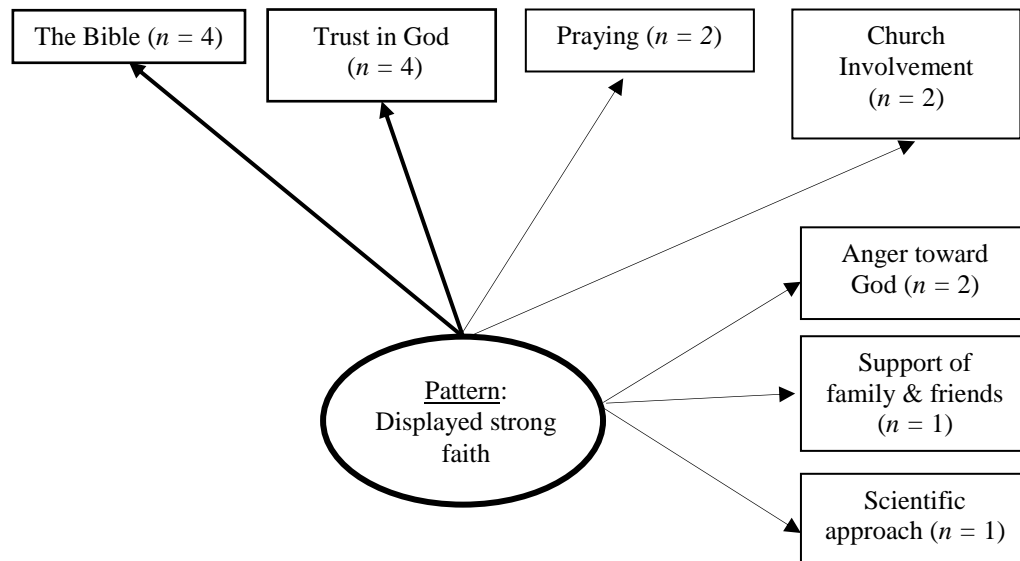
to read the Bible. I didn't have a good understanding of it. I didn't really ask the Holy Spirit to help me understand, and just by going to church, but I didn't have a church home. I just went from different churches, so I really didn't have a church home, a church family. Also, once again, just trying to read the Bible on my own, which I didn't, and I repeat, didn't have a good understanding of it.” Participant four also stated, “I looked for scripture to help me heal.” Lastly, participant five reported, “Wow. It's complicated. That one I can't really quite explain it but he was there. That was the only one who could get me through the tough times, and when I did have some real hard times I just would open-mindedly talk out loud to my savior. I asked him for some help, asked him to guide me, show me the right way.” Others expressed their faith during their divorce through the support of family and friends ( $n = 1$ ) and the scientific approach ( $n = 1$ ), while two expressed anger in God ( $n = 2$ ). Specifically, participant nine stated “Well, that I had a hard time with. Like I said I talked to my brother-in-law and he gave me certain scriptures to read and deal with like that and talk with friends.” Participant seven expressed, “I was mad at God,” while participant fourteen may have not been too involved in Christianity, but reported, “Again, as I mentioned in terms of my spirituality, like I said, my wife was more dead set on a specific religious sect, that being Baptist. I was more of a spiritual person, heavy into science. Yeah, more of a scientific slash spiritual approach to my faith.” Table 8 displays interview question five, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.

Table 8

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Five*

Interview Question 5	Pattern and Themes	Frequency
Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce?	<u>Pattern:</u> Displayed Strong Faith	
	The Bible	4
	Praying	2
	Trust in God	4
	Church Involvement	2
	Anger toward God	2
	Support of family & friends	1
	Scientific approach	1

Figure 5 displays the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question five. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (the Bible) or (trust in God) associated with the pattern (Displayed strong faith) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships because more men reported these when expressing the meaning of their faith during their divorce.



*Figure 5.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question five

### **Summary of Research Question 2**

In summary, how does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God? Interview question 5 provided a clear description that participants displayed strong faith while experiencing divorce. Divorce did not destroy a majority's sense of attachment to God. On the other hand, a lesser number of participants displayed anger toward God, as a result of how they were treated during the divorce process. Equally, the sub-themes described the core of the majority of the participant's ways of being attached to God. Their sense of attachment was displayed through reading the Bible, internally trusting God, and using prayer as a tool to deal with depression, hurt, and emotional detachment from their wives, as well as family. Family was extended through church involvement and direct support from family and friends. As a result, the sense of attachment to God through relationships with family and religious institutions provided a foundation for participants to experience God as the dissolution of their marriage, and detachment from family and friends dissolve.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three asked: What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce? Interview questions two, three, and nine were constructed to answer research question three.

**Interview question two.** Interview question two stated: Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was church support. A prevalent number of participants expressed some type of church support through praying and reading the Bible ( $n = 6$ ). Others expressed church support through family and friends at church ( $n = 2$ ),

Brotherhood at church ( $n = 1$ ), and spiritual counseling at church ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, participant one stated, “I did a lot of praying, and I went to Bible study.” Participant six reported, “I spent a lot of time in prayer. I spent a lot of time studying the word of God, and asking God to get me through this, because I couldn't believe it was happening.” Also, participant eight reported, “Well, of course prayer was involved. I've never stopped going to church and seeking the help of the saints. I would say that I went on with my, what I was doing at the church.” Participant three also stated, “My spiritual practice was I did go to church. I had support from family that we went to church together, but I didn't embrace it in all fullness.” Also, expressing prayer was participant twelve, who said, “Prayer. Prayer and seeking God for answers.” Participant five leaned on family and friends, and engaged in some spiritual counseling during his divorce, stating, “I went to a few churches, talked to a few friends, and tried to find some spiritual counseling, guidance. Mainly talked to my mother.” In addition, “I learned more on the brotherhood at church and drew closer to my pastor and those positive alliances as opposed to different outlets,” said participant five. Other themes that were expressed included anger ( $n = 3$ ), put forth best effort ( $n = 1$ ) and spiritual practice was nonexistent ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, participant thirteen reported, “Okay, before the incident, we were both in the church, and when we got back to the area we were going to our local church, and everything was okay. Towards the end and when I got out it seemed like to me that god had pretty much let me down. Because of that I was angry, and I was upset.” In addition, participant two stated, “The spiritual process of my spirit was anger, and I became angry.” Meanwhile, participant fourteen expressed, “My spiritual practice during the breakup of my marriage was nonexistent at that time.” Table 9 displays interview

question two, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.

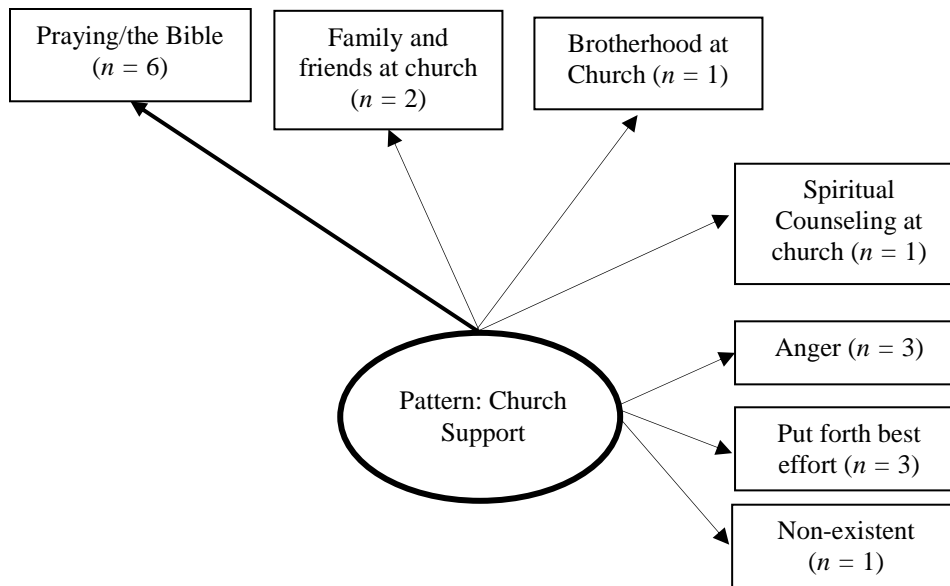
Table 9

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Two*

Interview Question 2	Pattern and Themes	Freq uency
Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage?	<u>Pattern: Church Support</u>	
	Praying/bible	6
	Family and friends at church	2
	Brotherhood at church	1
	Spiritual counseling at church	1
	Anger	3
	Put forth best effort	1
	Non-existent	1

*Note.* Participant 3 reported multiple themes.

Figure 6 displays the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question two. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (praying/Bible) associated with the pattern (Church Support) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships because the prevelant numbr of men reported this when expressing their spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage.



*Figure 6.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question two

**Interview question three.** Interview question three stated: During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was they sought spiritual guidance. A prevalent number of participants ( $n = 9$ ) expressed seeking spiritual guidance through the Bible. Others expressed they sought spiritual guidance through the seminary and Gospel music ( $n = 1$ ), through involvement in Benedictine Monasteries and the Post Chapel ( $n = 1$ ), through praying for Gods guidance ( $n = 4$ ), through loving God (2), and through family support ( $n = 2$ ). Lastly, a single participant ( $n = 1$ ), reported he could not commit spiritually. Specifically, participant one reported, “Well, it was the Bible. It was the Bible, because it kept me ... it calmed me down to let me know that it ain't ... it ain't really that bad.” Additionally, participant three also stated, “Well, actually it was my Bible that I had and my reading the scripture.” Participant six also expressed his commitment to the Bible, by stating, “Well, I used the word of God. I had a lot of Bible tapes that I used from I would say one Bible teacher,

like Charles Stanley. I used a lot of his tapes, because a lot of his teaching talks about how to deal with being depressed, and how many ... People in the word of God, when they was involved in different situations, how to handle that. I turned to that, and I studied that.” Also, in agreement, was participant ten, stating, “I read the Bible when it talked about marriage and divorce. I read the Bible.” Participant four stated, “I drew to more serene resources. I had a catholic deacon who lived on my floor who introduced me to a Benedictine monastery and places where I would just go. I became more by myself, going through that change, growth period. Those are the kind of resources that I leaned on. I became very active in the post chapel at that assignment also.” In addition, participant eight also leaned on others involved in church, and stated, “Well, I did seek help from my spiritual family, the church. They supported me in the situation. Prayer was involved. I had my immediate family, my mother, brothers and sisters. I did have friends.” Participant two expressed a more unique recourse, by stating, “I’m a musician, one of the resources was music. My music played a major role and keeping me calm.” Participant five expressed, “It was hard. It hurt for a while but I fell to my knees asking him to give me the guidance and understanding to get back on my feet to move on.” Lastly, participant fourteen reported that he struggled spiritually, specifically stating, “It was more or less like tug of war. I think my wife at the time had a desire to actually attend church more, where I at that time was ... I always felt more of a spiritual person, not wanting to "commit" to one specific religion.” Table 10 displays interview question two, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.



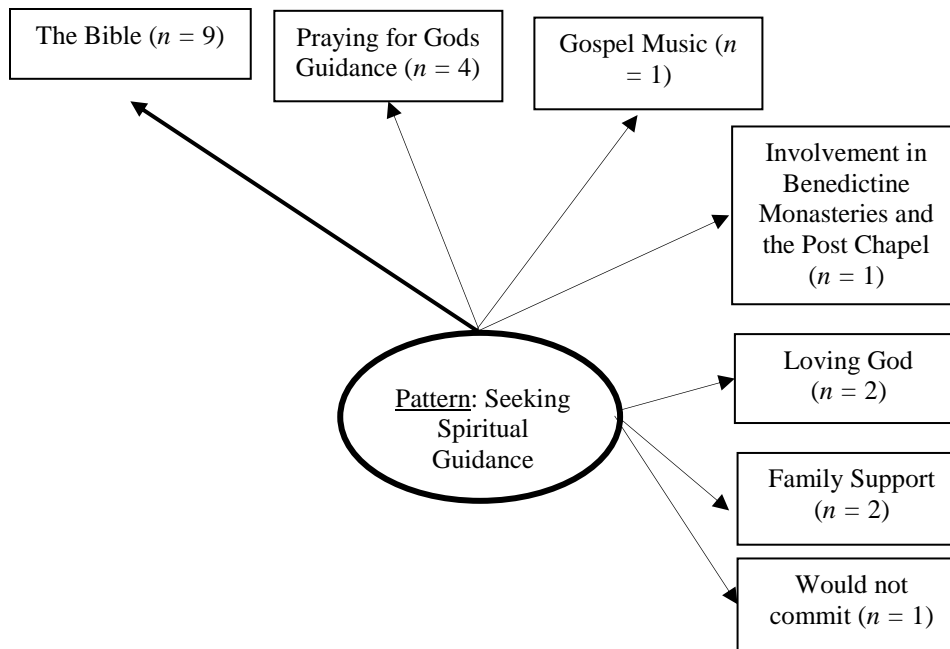
Table 10

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Three*

Interview Question 3	Pattern and Themes	Frequency
During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God?	<u>Pattern:</u> Sought Spiritual Guidance	
	Through the Bible	9
	Through the Seminary & Gospel Music	1
	Through involvement in Benedictine Monasteries & the post Chapel	1
	Through praying for Gods guidance	4
	Through Loving and trusting in God	2
	Through Family support	2
	Would not commit to spirituality	1

*Note.* Participants 5, 8 and 12 reported multiple themes.

Figure 7 displays the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question two. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (the Bible) associated with the pattern (sought spiritual guidance) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships because a prevelant number of men reported this when expressing the resource used to express their spiritual walk with God during their divorce.



*Figure 7.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question three

**Interview question nine.** Interview question nine stated: How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith? Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was faith in the word of God. A prevalent number of men ( $n = 7$ ) expressed they coped using the Bible. Others expressed they coped by trusting in God ( $n = 2$ ), prayer ( $n = 2$ ), and attending church ( $n = 2$ ). Specifically, participant one stated, “Well, when I was reading the Bible, I found out there was nothing new up under the sun. Then, I changed. When I changed, the Bible changed. I had a better understanding, so that's how I really deal with it.” Participant four also stated, “Oh man, I had to use it so I wouldn't become bitter. I had to study scripture so that I could forgive myself. I had to use scripture so that I could forgive my wife.” Participant nine also stated, “Well, I would read certain parts of the bible for self, but I would mostly look into or get spiritual

help for myself. I feel like I have to, like I can't help anybody else unless I get help myself first.” Participant thirteen also stated, “Yeah, I just read the bible. Once the relationship was over, like I said, earlier, I pretty much didn't do anything. I was just in the house, but I did read. That kept me occupied.” Others coped spiritually through spiritual education ( $n = 2$ ), while one participant expressed they gave up spiritually ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, participant two stated, “I remember the first class that really begin to impact the issues that we're talking about was the course on the spiritual disciplines.” Additionally, participant three stated, “During this time that I was attending the Christian rehab, I grew so much, and I used that as being a coping skill.” Lastly, participant seven expressed, “Good question. When the good lord told me my son was going away, and I fell on my knees, and I prayed for him to survive it and then he passed away. So answer your question, I gave up.” Table 11 displays interview question nine, along with the frequency of responses by extracted themes, and developed pattern.

Table 11

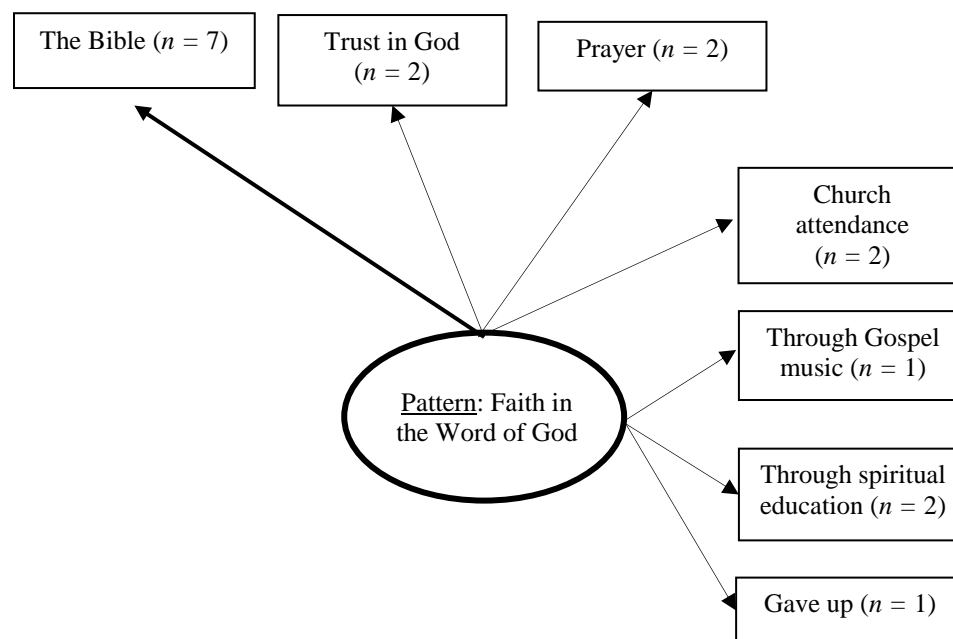
*Thematic Response to Interview Question Nine*

Interview Question 9	Themes	Frequency
How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith?	Pattern: Faith in the Word of God	
	Through the Bible	7
	Through Gospel Music	1
	Trust in God	2
	Prayer	2
	Church attendance	2
	Through Spiritual Education	2
	Gave up	1

*Note.* Participant 5 reported multiple themes.

Figure 8 displays the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question nine. Heavier lines represents greater frequency counts related to the theme or sub-themes. For example, the theme (the Bible) associated with the pattern

(Faith in the Word of God) displays a heavier line than some of the other relationships because a prevelant number of men reported this when expressing their coping skills during their divorce.



*Figure 8.* Theoretical model depicting the association between patterns and themes derived from interview question nine

### Summary of Research Question 3

In summary, what spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce? Interview questions 2, 3, and 9 provided a clear assessment of the spiritual practices each participant used during their divorce. The 14 participants described church support as a spiritual practice as a spiritual practices non-initiators of divorce used during the process of divorce. Some participants described no church relationship; equally, an additional number of participants did pray and read the bible as a practice during the process of divorce; reinforcing family and friends at church to bond through their divorce. Attending men's groups to share their pain and discomfort was

refreshing. Equally, others sought spiritual counseling from their pastor and counselor at the church. This practice helped a majority of participants understand the internal anger; and became confident in putting their best effort forth within their community. Church support for a majority of the participants was a spiritual practice that helped them deal with their divorce. At the same time, interview question 3 describes some spiritual resources that assisted them in their journey through their divorce. The overall theme for a majority of participants was seeking spiritual guidance. Participant found spiritual guidance in the Bible, prayer materials that expressed meaning through difficult circumstance such as divorce, gospel music, being part of a monastery that taught various types of prayers and meditation, internally expanding a relationship with God through loving self with, and the realization they would survive the divorce. Finally, interview question 9 captured the essence of a majority of participant's spiritual journey by using coping skills to overcome the pain of divorce. The major theme from the majority of participant was faith in the word of God. The sub-themes provided insight in each participant a reinforcement of the word of God through the bible, prayer, faith in God, church attendance, listening to gospel music, and spiritual education through learning and discussion within the classroom. Equally, one participant journey is marred with deep pain, and the journey is quite bleak for him.

In addition to the interview questions used to specifically address the three research questions, the researcher asked two questions to gather the circumstances surrounding their divorce, along with how their lives are now, after the divorce. The first general question asked: Describe the circumstances around your divorce? Of the 14 who were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 3$ ) reported becoming involved with illicit

activity/excessive drinking, while others reported having lost a child ( $n = 2$ ), personal issues ( $n = 2$ ), and also finances ( $n = 2$ ). Additional circumstances that were reported included step children ( $n = 1$ ), loneliness ( $n = 1$ ), grew apart ( $n = 1$ ), natural disaster ( $n = 1$ ), infidelity ( $n = 1$ ), and mental illness ( $n = 1$ ). Table 12 displays interview question one, along with the frequency of extracted responses.

Table 12

*Thematic Response to Interview Question One*

Interview Question 1	Themes	Frequency
Describe the circumstances around your divorce?	Step Children	1
	Loneliness	1
	Lost child	2
	Illicit activity	3
	Growing apart	1
	Personal issues	2
	Natural Disaster	1
	Finances	2
	Infidelity	1
	Mental illness	1

*Note.* Participants 1 and 14 reported multiple themes.

Additionally, interview question ten asked: How would you describe your life now? The majority ( $n=7$ ) reported an overall good life now, while others reported their life is still going through the grieving and healing process ( $n=5$ ). Also, one reported their life is spent in prayer ( $n = 1$ ), and one also reported he is homeless, and does not feel like he has a life right now ( $n = 1$ ). Table 13 displays interview question ten, along with the frequency of extracted responses.

Table 13

*Thematic Response to Interview Question Ten*

Interview Question 10	Themes	Frequency
How would you describe your life now?	Overall Good life	7
	Spent in prayer	1
	Continuing to heal	5
	Homeless/no life	1

**Summary of Findings**

The findings for Research Question 1: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator's spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process? Interview question four stated: Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage. The pattern that was developed was they sought a distraction outside of their marriage. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 11$ ) stated they sought a distraction outside of the marriage. The major distraction that individuals reported was becoming involved in illicit activity/excessive drinking ( $n = 6$ ). Some of the additional activities included (a) the Bible ( $n = 2$ ), (b) engaged in other relationships ( $n = 2$ ), (c) became very active in were reported included anger management ( $n = 1$ ), spent time alone ( $n = 1$ ), and infidelity ( $n = 1$ ).

Interview question six asked: How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage? The pattern that was developed was communication. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 7$ ) stated they communicated with their ex-wife, and tried to maintain an amiable relationship. The theme extracted from the developed pattern was each displayed a mutual respect, and maturity with one another ( $n = 7$ ). Interview question seven asked: How have you been feeling about your former wife? Of the 14 who

were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 7$ ), expressed they maintain respect and forgiveness for their ex-wife. Interview question eight stated: Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 9$ ), expressed a feeling of mutual respect, or love, for their ex-wife.

The finding for Research Question 2: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God? Interview question five stated: Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the developed pattern was they displayed a strong faith during their divorce. Specifically, four individuals displayed their faith through the bible ( $n = 4$ ), while an additional four stated they displayed their faith through trusting in God ( $n = 4$ ). Additionally, two stated they displayed their faith through praying ( $n = 2$ ), while another two stated they displayed their faith through church involvement ( $n = 2$ ).

Finding for Research Question 3: What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce? Interview question two stated: Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was church support. The majority expressed some type of church support through praying and reading the Bible ( $n = 6$ ). Others expressed church support through family and friends at church ( $n = 2$ ), Brotherhood at church ( $n = 1$ ), and spiritual counseling at church ( $n = 1$ ). Interview question three stated: During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God. Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was they sought spiritual guidance. The majority ( $n = 9$ ) expressed



seeking spiritual guidance through the Bible. Others expressed they sought spiritual guidance through the seminary and Gospel music ( $n = 1$ ), through involvement in Benedictine Monasteries and the Post Chapel ( $n = 1$ ), through praying for Gods guidance ( $n = 4$ ), through loving God ( $n = 2$ ), and through family support ( $n = 2$ ). Lastly, a single participant ( $n = 1$ ), reported he could not commit spiritually. Interview question nine stated: How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith? Of the 14 who were interviewed, the pattern that was developed was faith in the word of God. The majority ( $n = 7$ ) expressed they coped using the Bible. Others expressed they coped by trusting in God ( $n = 2$ ), prayer ( $n = 2$ ), and attending church ( $n = 2$ ).

Additionally, finding from general interview questions: The first general question asked: Describe the circumstances around your divorce? Of the 14 who were interviewed, the majority ( $n = 3$ ) reported becoming involved with illicit activity/excessive drinking, while others reported having lost a child ( $n = 2$ ), personal issues ( $n = 2$ ), and also finances ( $n = 2$ ). Additional circumstances that were reported included step children ( $n = 1$ ), loneliness ( $n = 1$ ), grew apart ( $n = 1$ ), natural disaster ( $n = 1$ ), infidelity ( $n = 1$ ), and mental illness ( $n = 1$ ). Also, interview question ten asked: How would you describe your life now? The majority ( $n = 7$ ) reported an overall good life now. While others reported their life is still going through the grieving and healing process ( $n = 5$ ). One reported their life is spent in prayer ( $n = 1$ ), and one also reported he is homeless, and does not feel like he has a life right now ( $n = 1$ ).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the spiritual dimensions of African-American men who did not initiate divorce. Within the course of this study, the goal was to identify potential spiritual dimensions that may be used to improve their spiritual well-being, through the divorce process and beyond. In the field of qualitative traditions, phenomenological research is the selected methodology for this study. Phenomenology is “the first method of knowledge and it involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis and portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Divorce is a personal experience; through the phenomenological method, the researcher connects to each journey and finds similarities in the experiences of different divorces that relate to the spiritual components in coping with stress, pain, or depression. From this juncture, the summary of finding described, conclusions and implications, recommendations for future research, recommendations for practice, limitations, and summary.

### **Summary of Findings**

For this study, data were collected from 14 individuals who were interviewed to answer the three research questions. The participants were recruited through churches, as well as individual referrals. Each interview was conducted in person with the upmost privacy for each participant. Each interview was digitally recorded, and uploaded for transcriptions analysis. The transcription process identified all words, sentences and excluded any silent and foreign sounds captured by the recording. All 14 interviews were

transcribed to ensure the validity of participant message being captured by the researcher. In addition, the researcher captured general demographic data on each participant with a personal information data sheet.

### **Research Questions**

Three qualitative research questions were developed to gain an understanding of the spiritual dimension and journey of African-American men, who are divorced, but did not initiate the divorce. The interview questions were developed specific to the three research questions under study. Results of the three research questions are summarized below. The research questions are:

*Research Question 1 (RQ1):* How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator's spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process?

*Research Question 2 (RQ2):* How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God?

*Research Question 3 (RQ3):* What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce?

### **Results of Research Question 1**

Research question one asked: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator's spiritual journey influence life choices during the divorce process? Interview questions four, six, seven, and eight were constructed to answer research question one. Interview questions four, six, seven, and eight asked:

IQ4: Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage.

IQ6: How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself, and other involvement in the termination of your marriage?

IQ7: How have you been feeling about your former spouse?

IQ8: Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both.

The majority of participants reported they had a positive experience during their spiritual journey that assisted them through the difficult divorce process. Interview questions 4, 6, 7, and 8 produced major themes that described a productive conclusion to the marriage. At the same time, a majority regarding interview question 4 sought distraction outside of the marriage that resulted in illicit activity. A lesser amount did find other positive activities and relationships by reading the bible, church services, family members, and friends, enrolling in anger management, and spending time alone to gain balance in their lives. The other major themes from interview question 6 described the core of the research question with by displaying a positive communication along with mutual respect and maturity toward the former spouse. In addition, within the sub-themes, various participants explained the core of their spiritual journey was letting go of anger, journeying through the Bible, and seeking scriptures to answer doubts and concerns about the divorce. Some individuals struggled with forgiveness, but discovered a way to forgive, expanded their trust in God, and accept responsibility for the dissolution of the marriage, where necessary. In a similar way, responses to interview question 7 displayed respect and forgiveness, and equally recognized love still existed toward their spouse, while to others, no feeling remained, and even one expressed dislike toward his former spouse. In view of these themes, spiritual journey describes a personal trust in God, as well as dealing with mixed emotions regarding the arrangement with the

children. Finally, interview question 8 captured the essence of an individual's spiritual journey relating to the pain and growth from various negative life experiences. This experience of divorce did expose relationships with their wives, but strengthened some relationships with their children; through the spiritual journey, a majority trusted God, and expressed mutual respect and love for their former wives, and themselves. In essence, their spiritual journeys did influence their life choices during the divorce process for a majority of participants.

## **Results of Research Question 2**

Research question two asked: How does the experience of divorce from the perspective of the non-initiator affect their sense of attachment to God? Interview question five was constructed to answer research question two. Interview question five asked:

IQ5: Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce.

Interview question 5 provided a clear description that participants displayed strong faith while experiencing divorce. Divorce did not destroy a majority's sense of attachment to God. On the other hand, a lesser number of participants displayed anger toward God, because of how they were treated during the divorce process. Equally, the sub-themes described the core of the majority of the participant's ways of being attached to God. Their sense of attachment was displayed through reading the Bible, internally trusting God, and using prayer as a tool to deal with depression, hurt, and emotional detachment from their wives as well, and family. Family was extended through church involvement and direct support from family and friends. As a result, the sense of attachment to God through relationships with family and religious institutions provided a

foundation for participants to experience God as the dissolution of their marriage, and detachment from family and friends dissolved.

### **Results of Research Question 3**

Research question three asked: What spiritual practices do non-initiators of divorce use during the process of divorce? Interview questions two, three, and nine were constructed to answer research question three. Interview questions two, three, and nine asked:

IQ2: Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage.

IQ3: During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God.

IQ9: How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith?

Interview questions 2, 3, and 9 provided a clear assessment of the spiritual practices each participant used during their divorce. The 14 participants described church support as a spiritual practice non-initiators of divorce used during the process of divorce. Some participants described no church relationship; equally, an additional number of participants did pray and read the Bible as a practice during the process of divorce; reinforcing family and friends at church to bond through their divorce. Attending men's groups to share their pain and discomfort was refreshing. Equally, others sought spiritual counseling from their pastor and counselor at the church. This practice helped a majority of participants understand the internal anger, and they became confident in putting their best effort forth within their community. Church support for a majority of the

participants was a spiritual practice that helped them deal with their divorce. At the same time, interview question 3 describes some spiritual resources that assisted them in their journey through their divorce. The overall theme for a majority of participants was seeking spiritual guidance. Participants found spiritual guidance in the Bible, prayer materials that expressed meaning through difficult circumstance such as divorce, gospel music, being part of a monastery that taught various types of prayers and meditation, internally expanding a relationship with God through loving self and the realization they would survive the divorce. Finally, interview question 9 captured the essence of a majority of participant's spiritual journeys by using coping skills to overcome the pain of divorce. The major theme from the majority of participant was faith in the word of God. The sub-themes provided insight in each participant a reinforcement of the word of God through the Bible, prayer, faith in God, church attendance, listening to gospel music, and spiritual education through learning and discussion within the classroom. Equally, one participant's journey was marred with deep pain, and the journey was quite bleak for him.

### **General Information**

In addition to the interview questions used to specifically address the three research questions, two questions were included to gather the circumstances surrounding their divorce, along with how their lives are now, after the divorce. The first general question asked: Describe the circumstances around your divorce? Of the 14 who were interviewed, the largest single group ( $n = 3$ ) reported becoming involved with illicit activity/excessive drinking, while others reported having lost a child ( $n = 2$ ), personal issues ( $n = 2$ ), and finances ( $n = 2$ ). Additional circumstances that were reported included stepchildren ( $n = 1$ ), loneliness ( $n = 1$ ), grew apart ( $n = 1$ ), natural disaster ( $n =$

1), infidelity ( $n = 1$ ), and mental illness ( $n = 1$ ). Additionally, interview question ten asked: How would you describe your life now? The largest single group ( $n = 7$ ) reported an overall good life now. While others reported their life is still going through the grieving and healing process ( $n = 5$ ). In addition, one reported their life is spent in prayer ( $n = 1$ ), and one reported he is homeless, and does not feel like he has a life right now ( $n = 1$ ).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Based on the results from the research questions, the overall interpretation for RQ 1 suggested their spiritual journey was positive through the difficult divorce process. It appears that at the core of their positive experience was spirituality. Learning to trust in God, as well as dealing with the meaning of forgiveness and respecting their former spouses. At the same time, a lesser frequency appeared to be less focused with spirituality, but compared with the majority, life was very difficult from the experience of divorce. The foundation for spirituality is rooted in assessing why it may be difficult to focus spiritually, as well as encouraging leaders to inquire into the nature of how clients practice spirituality. Ford (2009) shared the personal stories of clients to consider spiritual laws that deal with healing, including (a) acceptance, (b) responsibility, (c) forgiveness, and (d) choices. Research by Ford captured the essence of dealing with divorce, but through individual or group work to manage divorce spiritually through a guided process of articulating the pain and understanding it as an event within life (Ford, 2009; Richardson, 2002).

Additionally, based on results from the research questions, the overall interpretation of RQ2 that focused on their sense of attachment to God did provide positive results.



Divorce did not destroy a majority's sense of attachment to God. On the other hand, a lesser number displayed anger toward God, because of how they were treated during the divorce. Those who maintained their attachment to God maintained close involvement with the church, extended family, and other religious institutions. In addition, those who felt isolated from God did not participate in church, extended family, or other social groups. As stated by Ford (2009), spiritual people have religious emotions and beliefs; their intentions, interactions, beliefs, and perceptions are related to spirituality. Ford also highlights how spirituality assists people to transform their lives and provides a genuine meaning for the purpose of their lives. As discussed by Richardson (2002), spirituality includes religion, appeal to God, meditation, relations with people, and connection with God. According to Ford, spirituality also includes experiences of individuals when they encounter the supreme power.

Therefore, based on results from the research questions, the overall interpretation of RQ3 was focused on the spiritual practices of the non-initiator of divorce. A prevalent number of participants described church participation as a spiritual practice during divorce and a lesser frequency did not participate in church. From this point of view, the majority who participate in church activities did have a positive outlook on life, making decisions that provided a productive future. Those who did not participate in church as a spiritual practice viewed life as disappointing and frustrating. A majority prayed often, read the bible, and were reinforced by extended family and friends. The Black family has been conceived of as a social system with subsystems that provide assistance during difficult times (Lawson & Thompson, 1999), and is typically very religious. The family subsystems and religious structures can provide support during divorce. Additionally,

this study connects findings from a 3 year research period involving divorced African-American men in three different states with public health, social, emotional, and/or family problems (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000). The researchers observed that divorce is manifested by physical, emotional, and social problems for African-American men. One aspect of their experience in the spiritual dimensions (prayer, pastoral support, and counseling) was seeking meditation and moral support from the church as expressed in the Black church context. However, Lawson and Sharpe's research focused on an overview of Black men and divorce, the prayer method was not defined with the other identified manifestations such as stress and depression, and did not focus specifically on African-American men who did not initiate a divorce.

Finally, based on results from the research questions, the overall interpretation of two general information questions was as following beginning with this question: describe the circumstance around your divorce. The majority reported becoming involved with illicit activity/excessive drinking, while other encountered blended family, loneliness, natural disaster, infidelity, and mental illness. The second general information question was: how would you describe your life now? Based on a balanced spiritual life, a majority reported an overall good life (being divorced by their spouse does not negatively affect their lives), while others reported life is still difficult through grieving and moving through the healing process. Also, one reported as homeless, and does not feel like he has a life right now. The experience of divorce can have a devastating impact on families, and especially on Black men. Divorced Black men have been found to suffer from physical and emotional problems more than Black women and children (Lawson & Thompson, 1999), and the effect may be greater on their emotional health than on their

physical health (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Men who did not initiate divorce have been found to suffer more from emotional problems compared to men who initiated divorce (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000). Broken relationships with family and friends take time to mend, and may be difficult to reestablish.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

It is recommended that further research include conducting a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and expanding to a more in depth analysis from a quantitative point of view. Also, repeating the study under different circumstances (e.g., evaluate a broader and/or more specific sample of participants, or perhaps evaluate Caucasian men, instead of only African-American men) is recommended. At the same time, it may be useful to compare the spiritual dimensions Caucasian men, African-American men, and Hispanic men who did not initiate a divorce.

Additionally, what remains unanswered is perhaps the wives' point of views, and their spiritual journey. Also, future research should seek to further investigate the spiritual aspects of African-American girls and boys whose father did not initiate a divorce.

Finally, it is recommended that future researchers expand this research to focus on African-American men who did initiate a divorce, as well as assisting in the exploration of various dimensions of spirituality as one aspect that may improve the quality of spiritual materials in the research field.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

For this study, the recommended practicing professionals may use this research as a supplement to address the spiritual dimensions of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce.

**Pastor/Clergy Professionals.** All 14 research subjects were recommended through the local churches, as well as church members referred for this research. The pastor/clergy are on the front line of addressing the spiritual core of these individuals. The challenge is to identify, build rapport, and help them share their story. Through each story the pastor/clergy may be able to assist in the recovery through divorce by strengthen their spiritual dimensions. This practical study may be applied in the context of men groups to share the results, as well as the methodology to improve other men to understand the struggles of the type of research subjects.

**Mental Health Professionals.** There is a percentage of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce, and who may avoid the church because of guilt, shame, and thinking they are able to overcome this alone. Individuals similar to these research subjects may trust mental health professionals with their struggles rather than through the church. Being sensitive to the plight of these types of personal challenges can improve practice, as well as the quality service to of the community at large. This research study may be used as a training tool in diverse communities that provide services with the aim of understanding the practical journey of divorce with emphasis on spirituality.

**Families.** Unfortunately, divorce destroys families, especially African-American families. It is recommended that family members be made aware of professional counseling to address the pathology of the total family and seek help to navigate through the conflict of divorce.

### **Limitations**

Simon (2011) contends limitations represent potential points of weakness in the study, and are out of the control of the researcher. In the case of the current study,

limitations are due to factors inherent in qualitative methods, as well as constraints placed on the scope of the research due to practical and logistic concerns. While qualitative methodologies have numerous strengths, particularly for exploring nuanced phenomena in depth and detail, they also present several important limitations. As discussed by Anderson (2010), one important limitation affecting qualitative research and, thus, the current study, is the issue of scientific rigor. The competence of the interviewer greatly affects the quality of data generated, and, though quantitative methods can employ certain controls for rigor, such as the use of validated measures, interviewer competence is a more difficult thing to control. Thus, results of replications of the methods presented here may obtain different results due, in part, to differences in interviewer skill or characteristics. At the same time, a prevalent number of subjects adhered to the time schedule, whereas, a lesser frequency of subjects had to reschedule. The goal was to interview 15 subjects; however, one completely canceled with no communication.

Another limitation of the current study is due to the small sample size that is typical of qualitative studies using phenomenological and narrative methods, there is reduced generalizability to groups that are not represented by the subjects who participated in the study. While generalizability is not necessarily a major goal of qualitative research, it is important to consider the implications of the findings on society from a general perspective. This approach is designed to influence others to consider this type of research that captures the story of a persons' journey.

### **Summary**

“An exploration of the spiritual dimensions of African-American men who did not initiate a divorce” captured the spiritual journey of a group of men where minimal

research has focused, but in general terms the idea of non-initiator surface in part of the whole of research. Divorce is a daunting experience in American society that has influenced the social and spiritual dynamics of American families, especially African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. The background captured a clear overview of divorce and the effects of divorce and assessment of divorce on African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. Divorce continues to impact family systems in American society, as well as the effect on families within religious institutions.

Therefore, Fetzer (2003) selected six domains or areas that could be used for assessment of psychiatric inpatients. These domains could serve as potential spiritual dimensions and include “daily spiritual experience, meaning, forgiveness, private religious practices, religious/spiritual coping and religious support” (Fetzer, 2003, p. 35). Sperry (2001), similar to Fetzer (2003), described the spiritual dimension as the stages of one’s spiritual journey. From the integrated approach of Fetzer and Sperry, research questions and interview questions were developed from the concepts of their research to understand the stories of African-American men who did not initiate divorce.

The review of the literature indicated divorce results in significant stressors that have parallels in both the physical and emotional states (Hattery & Smith, 2012). The experience of divorce can have a devastating impact on families, and especially on Black men. Divorced Black men have been found to suffer from physical and emotional problems more than Black women and children (Lawson & Thompson, 1999), and the effect may be greater on their emotional health, than on their physical health (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Men who did not initiate divorce have been found to suffer more from emotional problems, compared to men who initiated divorce (Lawson & Sharpe, 2000).

Broken relationships with family and friends take time to mend, and may be difficult to reestablish. A father may suffer from estrangement from his children if he becomes a non-custodial father, and may encounter some economic and emotional hardship if he is unable to support his children economically.

Benner (2011) found there are three stages in life of a spiritual person: beginners (purgative way), proficient (illuminative way), and perfect (unitive way). The life of a spiritual person is guided by spiritual values incorporated into the daily choices they make. Spiritual people may rely on spiritual leaders who show them ways to live that will lead them to internal peace and joy. The life of the spiritual person is motivated by values such as (a) expectation, (b) happiness, (c) honesty, (d) wisdom, (e) sympathy, (f) imagination, and (g) tolerance (Burke & Miranti, 1995). In addition, previous research indicates Black boys living in fatherless families may suffer damage to their self-esteem, as a result of the lack of a present father (Neenan, 2000). For young boys, growing up without a father may bring about declines in education and self-esteem that do not appear to happen to the same degree for young girls growing up in fatherless households. Thus, divorce has serious consequences for boys, and can range from experiencing problems in school, to participating in gangs as part of their search for male role models. When divorce is predicated upon experience with violence within the household, it is common for this to increase child aggressiveness and depression, and may result in illegal activities, addiction to drugs and alcohol and, rarely, suicide (Hampton, 2002; Jewell, 2003).

Erwin (2006) cited a University of Michigan study of more than 6,000 adults that found 43% of the adult children of divorced parents were happily married—about the

same percentage as those who grew up in two-parent homes. There are indeed risks associated with having divorced or separated parents according to Erwin. As per Erwin, Lawson, and Thompson (1999), identified boys are more likely to react to their parents' divorce with anger, academic problems, truancy, or aggressive behavior than are girls, who may try to please adults by suppressing feelings. Boys are more likely to suffer from depression when the father leaves the home, especially when a boy is not able to spend time with him consistently. Boys may also lose connection with a mother because she must work longer hours to provide for the family and keep a home operational. Boys may assume blame for the break-up of a family (Erwin, 2006; Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

Crouch, Page, Stevens, and Rockwell (2005), stated divorce and marriage play much greater economic roles for Black children than White children in the United States. According to two UC Davis economists, Marianne Page and Ann Huff Stevens, in the first two years following a divorce, family income among White children falls about 30%, while it falls by 53% among African-Americans children. This difference increases dramatically in the long run according to the author. Three or more years after the divorce, about a third of the loss in Whites' household income is recouped, but the income of African-American families barely improves.

According to Lawson and Thompson (1999), their research described internal and external reasons for the increase in divorce in the African-American community. The internal factor is substance abuse that brings instability to the family. The African-American man for example, may encounter alcohol-related illnesses, the prevalence of illicit drugs and incompatibility issues. At the same time, external factors relate to lower



socioeconomic classes, lack of financial resources, occupational stress, cultural values and the impact of the criminal justice system on the lower income Black community (Lawson & Thompson, 1999).

The core of spirituality is inclusive of all religions and non-religious expressions toward a higher Being. Divorce affects African-American families more so than other families, especially low-income families. The problem of this study addresses in specific terms the lack of spiritual emphasis on African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. In this case, a majority did use church and extended family to overcome the pain of divorce. The description of this study was a combination of phenomenological and narrative approaches. Using the qualitative approach, the goal of this study explored experiences of divorced African-American men through a short personal information sheet, recorded individual interviews with open-ended questions, and incorporation of the available research literature.

The finding of the research determined that African-American men who did not initiate a divorce explored the church and extended family members to deal with divorce. The Bible and various gospel music helped others to cope with the stresses of divorce. At the same time, a majority become involved in illicit relationships and illegal drug usage. In addition, a lesser frequency experienced loneliness and deep frustration on not being able to continue a positive relationship with children. Interpreting the findings suggests spirituality is important and expressing a Higher Power was essential for their emotional well-being. At the same time, the lesser frequency who did not experience positive spirituality, did poorly in coping with divorce. These subjects were homeless, or close to being homeless because the social and spiritual support system was not utilized

or they did not feel comfortable to seek help from others. The recommendation is for pastors and clergymen to emphasize in their teaching and preaching the reality of divorce and reach-out to African-American men who did not initiate a divorce. Often times, these men experience shame and guilt, and may feel they will be judged by family and church. Religious institutions and mental health professionals may consider joining forces with churches and non-profit community based organizations to address this issue.

The pain, frustration, and disappointment as seen on the faces of these men suggest divorce, in some cases, probably was necessary; however, there may also have been cases where pastors and counselors may desire to work harder to keep these families together. Even though the majority of these African-American men survived divorce, the scars are apparent; you hear their stories and empathize with them. These experiences resonate in the soul and challenge for future research to press forward by expanding this research in spirituality through practical ways to help similar men, from all backgrounds, who have been through the humiliating experience of divorce.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Consent Form**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Consent Form**

This study is being done by Jerry L. Robinson, who is a doctoral student in the College of Behavioral Sciences at Argosy University, Online Programs. Mr. Robinson is working on a dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements of a Doctor of Education Degree. This study is a requirement to fulfill the researcher's degree, and it will not be used for decision-making by any organization.

The title of this study is: An Exploration of the Spiritual Dimensions of African American Men Who Did Not Initiate a Divorce.

- The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the spiritual dimensions of African American men who did not initiate divorce.
- I was asked to be in this study because I am a divorced man who did not initiate a divorce from his wife.
- A total of 15 people have been asked to participate in this study
- If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to complete a personal information sheet and participate in a 30-60 minute individual taped-recorded interview.
- The study will commence in November of 2014 and will conclude no later than November of 2015.
- The risks associated with this study are minimal. Participants could experience some emotional discomfort. If assistance is needed, the Alamo Mental Health Group is an available resource for individual referrals who wish to speak with a mental health professional. The contact information for the Alamo Mental Health Group is as follows: James R. Furlin at 210-614-8400:  
<http://alamomentalhealth.com/>
- The benefits of participation are that I may learn about the experiences of other men who did not initiate a divorce. Upon request, I will be provided with a summary of the results of the study within 90 days of the completion of the dissertation and its approval by Argosy University Online Programs. No other benefit is expected from this study.
- I will receive no benefits directly from the researcher for participating in this study.
- The information I provide will be treated confidentially, which means that nobody except the researcher, Jerry L. Robinson, will be able to tell who I am.

- The records pertaining to this study will be kept private. No information linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.
- The records will be stored securely and only the researcher, Jerry L. Robinson, will have access to the records.
- I have the right to get a summary of the results of this study if I would like to have them. I can get the summary by requesting it from Jerry L. Robinson.
- I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary. If I do not participate, it will not harm my relationship with Jerry L. Robinson or Argosy University. If I decide to participate, I can refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can quit at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected.
- I can contact the researcher, Jerry L. Robinson, with any questions about the study. If I wish, I may contact the dissertation chair, Dr. Robert Thompson, at 302-299-8358 with questions or concerns.

I understand that this study has been reviewed and certified by the Institutional Review Board of,

Argosy University Online Programs. For problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board at [cberkey@argosy.edu](mailto:cberkey@argosy.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Jerry L. Robinson, 210-324-9532, [jerryrobinson2070@yahoo.com](mailto:jerryrobinson2070@yahoo.com)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Personal Information**

## APPENDIX B

### Personal Information

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_.
2. How long have you been divorced? \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What age did you divorce? \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What is your educational level? (**circle answer below**)
  - a. High School/GED
  - b. Vocational Specialize school
  - c. Undergraduate
  - d. Graduate
  - e. Post Graduate
5. Was children part of the divorce? a (yes) b (no). How many? \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Are you the custodial parent? a (yes) b (no)
7. Did you seek medical care during your divorce? a (yes) b (no)
8. Did you seek help from any of the following individuals or resources)?
 

Pastor: a (yes) b (no); Counselor: a (yes) b (no); Mental Health Counselor: a (yes) b (no); Psychiatrist: a (yes) b (no); Psychologist: a (yes) b (no).

Bible/Torah/Koran: a (yes) b (no); New Age spiritual literature: a (yes) b (no)

Internet social network: a (yes) b (no); Prayer groups: a (yes) b (no); Social groups: a (yes) b (no)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Questions**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Questions**

The following are open-ended interview questions:

1. Describe the circumstances around your divorce?
2. Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage?
3. During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God?
4. Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage.
5. Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce?
6. How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage?
7. How have you been feeling about your former wife?
8. Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both.
9. How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith?
10. How would you describe your life now?



## **APPENDIX D**

### **Research Organizations**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Research Organizations**

Childress Memorial Church of God in Christ  
901 N Pine St,  
San Antonio, TX 78202  
(210) 223-5263  
Bishop Samuel E. Iglehart

Bethel AME Church  
225 N Swiss,  
San Antonio, TX 78202  
(210) 227-5474  
Rev. Dr. W. Raymond Bryant

Believers In Christ Ministries  
820 N. New Braunfels Ave  
San Antonio, Tx 78202  
210-862-0793  
Pastor Henry Mooney

Rene & Patricia Grant Ministries  
2501 Koepke St.  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78407  
361-815-4562  
Pastor Rene Grant

Victorious Life Ministries  
10807 Perrin-Beitel Rd. #120  
San Antonio, Texas, 78217  
210-291-8091  
Pastor Brandon Thomas

Greater Corinth Baptist Church  
500 South New Braunfels Avenue,  
San Antonio TX 78203

Triumphant Christian Center Church  
P.O. Box 761749  
San Antonio, Tx.78245  
Pastor Shawanda Robinson

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Aligned Research Questions with Interview Questions**

## APPENDIX E

### Aligned Research Questions with Interview Questions

Interview Question	Aligned RQ
1. Describe the circumstances around your divorce?	General Information
2. Describe your private spiritual practice during the break-up of your marriage?	RQ3
3. During the termination of your divorce, describe the resources in which you expressed your spiritual walk with God?	RQ3
4. Describe some of the ways in which you coped with the break-up of your marriage.	RQ1
5. Describe how you expressed the meaning of your faith during your divorce?	RQ2
6. How did you express the meaning of forgiveness towards your spouse, yourself and other involvement in the termination of your marriage?	RQ1
7. How have you been feeling about your former wife?	RQ1
8. Talk about your relationship with your children/former spouse or both.	RQ1
9. How did you use religious/spiritual coping skills during the termination of your marriage and personal expression of your faith?	RQ3
10. How would you describe your life now?	RQ1