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# Narrative: The Non-Initiator of a Gray Divorce Expatriate

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Narrative: The Non-Initiator of a Gray Divorce Expatriate

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

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## **Abstract**

Ethan was the main participant in this narrative inquiry to gain insight into a single story of how spiritual appraisal and search for significance influenced an individual through divorce adjustment. The study used a narrative inquiry methodology, collecting data via interviews of five individuals, Ethan's journal, observation field notes, and a reflexive journal kept by the researcher to corroborate Ethan's story for trustworthiness. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, member checked, and coded verbatim. The emergent themes that evolved were hidden sin, despair, confession and repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and responding the altruistic pull factor. The six themes followed the chronological timeline in Ethan's story and resolved the two questions posed in the narrative inquiry research: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment? How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment? Although the study was informative and revealing, it was limited by participant size, ethnicity, denominational scope, and geographical location. Research would benefit from the collection of more narratives expanding on the limitations.

*Keywords:* spiritual appraisal, search for significance, altruistic pull factor, pornography

## **Dedication**

This doctoral journey was a gift from God who compelled me to start the trek, guided my path, and pointed me to the final destination. “I will praise the Lord who counsels me” Psalm 16:7.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my three sons for their encouragement throughout the entire journey. Never once did they have any doubt that I would complete the feat. I am grateful that God has blessed me with two remarkable daughters-in-law and an amazing granddaughter.

I would also like to thank Dr. N. Markette who accommodated his time to the China time zone in order to meet with me. I appreciated his gift of words that formulated the questions that started the process of discovery. I would like to thank Dr. J. Skelton for her knowledge of the narrative and her guidance. I would like to thank Dr. J. D'Aguanno for his time in reading the dissertation and the suggestions that enhanced the study.

Lastly, I would especially like to thank Ethan for his truthfulness. He made this narrative inquiry possible because he never lost sight of God's guidance in the most difficult time of his life. Ethan continues to follow the call of God to many parts of the globe.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

The passage below is taken from the New Testament time when Jesus was engaged in one of many conversations with the Jewish Pharisees. This specific conversation deals with the issue of divorce.

Haven't you read, . . . that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female . . . For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Matt. 19:4-6 New International Version [NIV])

The Gospel of Matthew was written around A.D. 60-65 (Barton, Beers, Galvin, Neff, Taylor, & Veerman, 1991, p. 1636). The Pharisees intended to manipulate the words of Jesus to indict him of blasphemy. They reminded Jesus that under the teaching of Moses, divorce was permissible. Jesus replied to the Pharisees that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts.

This qualitative research study utilized a narrative design to shed light on the effects of divorce adjustment for the person not wanting a divorce. Divorce is a watershed that sets tremendous stresses and compels intense adjustment (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004). On average, an individual undergoing a divorce experiences an increase in health problems, unhappiness, and economic strain and may deem this a major traumatic life event (Amato, 2010; Sedlezky, 2004). Village, Williams, and Francis (2002) noted that the divorce rate is a barometer for the whole of society. The promise to remain married is broken at an unprecedented rate (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012; Harris, Crabtree, Bell, Allen, & Roberts, 2017; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Steiner, Durand, Groves, & Rozzell, 2015; Tuttle & Davis, 2015).

Recent statistics in the U.S. highlight the actual reports of divorce: 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages, and 74% of third marriages end in divorce (Banschick, 2012; Wevorce, 2017). Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) reported that over the past 20 years, divorce momentum has dramatically increased in the marriages of those 50 years old or older, a phenomenon known as *gray divorce*.

Couples who are terminating relationships place an intense burden on the structure of the family (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004). Divorce forces a family to function differently and adapt to alternative arrangements of living. Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) stated, “The divorced family is a new kind of family and not a truncated version of the . . . intact family” (p. 354). This crisis of divorce, according to Amato and Previti (2003), is caused by the one seeking the divorce, the one abandoned, the breakdown of the partnership, or something independent of the marriage; all these reasons have some effect on the outcome of divorce.

The primary focus of this qualitative-narrative study was on the person who wanted the marriage to continue and did not initiate the ending to the marriage, referred to as the *non-initiator* (Neumann, 2011; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommended that in the beginning of a narrative inquiry, the researcher listen to the voice of the participant, because the participants are “without voice in the research process and may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories” (p. 4). Pistole (2007) wrote in her dissertation of the agony that non-initiators experience going through an unwanted divorce. Steiner, Suarez, Sellis, and Wykes (2011) and Steiner et al. (2015) studied divorce adjustment among large groups of women and men. The authors suggested further research with a smaller group of participants focusing on “new concerns, correlations, and information” (Steiner et al., 2015, p.106). Accordingly, there is paucity in the literature and a need to explore the voice of a non-

initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describing the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on divorce adjustment. In this narrative study, the non-initiator told his story and individuals who had an intimate relationship with the narrator corroborated the episodes (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). Ochs and Capps (1997) stated that trustworthiness hangs in part upon the believability of a sequence of unbiased events and whether they can be corroborated.

### **Background, Context, and History**

The norm for resolving marriage problems was not always to resort to divorce. The cultural change in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had great impact on divorce (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Wilcox, 2009). The dramatic shift began once all 50 states transitioned from fault to no-fault divorce law (Nakonezny, Shull, & Rodgers, 1995).

The shift started in the 1960s when Governor Ronald Reagan signed the no-fault divorce law in the state of California (Wilcox, 2009). Later, Reagan admitted it was one of the biggest mistakes of his political career. During the next decade other states followed suit. The no-fault divorce law was one obvious detector of the rise of divorce in the 1960s to 1980s. Divorce went from “9.2 . . . to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women” (Wilcox, 2009, para. 2) during this period. The tolerance of divorce also skyrocketed (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Thornton, 1989).

No-fault divorce removed barriers, making it easier to dissolve marriages and re-partner several times, referred to as “serial marriage” (Amato, 2000, p. 1269). According to James and Shafer (2012), the serial marriage phenomenon resulted from the ideation of the “me generation” or the individual’s self expression and self-actualization, as well as seeking to reestablish self-identity. An inference can now be made that the soaring rate of gray divorce has become an accepted norm because a large part of society is actively engaging in divorce. However, with the

increase in divorce, there are higher numbers of people who did not initiate or want their divorces. This is one important reason for the need to hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce on how spiritual appraisal and search for significance influence divorce adjustment. This narrative design study responded to the need to explore this perspective.

Rapidly rising divorce rates in Northern European countries like Estonia have mirrored the three decades of rising American tolerance of divorce (Thornton, 1989). During the Russian occupation of Estonia in the 20th century, the divorce rate in Estonia was not discussed (Hansson & Laidmae, 2014). Soviet Russia practiced a culturally traditional family structure (Hansson & Laidmae, 2014). Estonians were not allowed to openly discuss divorce, and Estonian women's magazines did not talk about societal divorce problems. Their return to independence in the 1990s brought about a cultural shift, and western norms became evident in Estonian women's magazines (Hansson & Laidmae, 2014). Hansson and Laidmae (2014) selected the magazine *Eesti Naine* to research the narratives of women and found that "divorce had become commonplace and divorce rates were high" (p. 96).

Western ideations also affected divorce rates in China when the floodgates of investment opportunities opened (Q. Wang & Zhou, 2010). The elements that contribute to China's divorce rates are economic growth, education, and "increasing impacts of Western culture, with more emphasis on individualism and freedom" (Q. Wang & Zhou, 2010, p. 10). Furthermore, the changing of the divorce laws and the "me generation" that grew out of the one-child policy created an impulsive generation of adults (Weber, 2017). China exemplifies the economic modernization impact that parallels the increase in divorce rates (Amato & Previti, 2003; Vikström, Van Poppel, & Van de Putte, 2011).

Even though there are inconsistencies in America's research on divorce, Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) found a significant rise in divorce amongst older adults. The "Baby Boom generation" (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014, p. 595), which falls into the 50-plus age bracket for gray divorce, experienced the highest statistics of divorce because this cohort divorced earlier and remarried (Brown & Lin, 2012). As part of the serial marriage phenomenon, according to Sweeney (2010), subsequent marriages exhibited less stability than first marriages, and within a 10-year period close to half would end up either separated or divorced. The literature also suggested that people are living longer, which increases the numbers heading to divorce court (Schwartzhoff, 2013).

The no-fault laws, the economic independence of women, anticipating greater happiness in marriage than experienced, serial marriages, and the "me generation" are all contributing factors to the rate of divorce in America. Therefore, an assumption can be made that because divorce is so common in the United States, it has become an accepted solution to a struggling marriage. Subsequently, this study was an effort to understand how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his divorce adjustment.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework focused on the lived episodes of an individual spiritually coping with an unwanted divorce, his journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and his search for significance by leaning on God in China. What is not known and remains as a gap in the literature is the degree of influence the expatriate experience had on the divorce adjustment of the non-initiator, who remained single, carrying out the altruistic pull while living in China. This narrative inquiry was based on the work of Krumrei, Mahoney, and

Pargament (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010), who researched the unrecognized importance of religion in managing stress. This foundation set the theme and provided the language that threaded through the participant's gray divorce story.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommended that in the beginning of a narrative inquiry, the researcher listen to the voice of the participant, because the participants are “without voice in the research process and may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories” (p. 4). According to Maple and Edwards (2010), listening to the “voices” (p. 34) of the individuals telling life episodes is an optimum way to understand the matters that engulf the narrative story. There is paucity in the literature showing a need to hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on divorce adjustment. Based on the work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010), a non-initiator of a gray divorce is qualified to describe the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his divorce adjustment.

The narrative in this research built a chronological foundation by applying the spiritual appraisal of sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping connected to divorce and the positive and negative attributes associated with divorce adjustment (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). The narrative shifted when the single individual moved to China and embraced what Pargament (2010) identified as the search for significance pathway.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative-narrative study was to explore the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China and the influence of spiritual appraisal

and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment. To hear the voice of this participant, a multi-method approach was used, including “open-ended conversations, [direct structured] observation and field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator; semistructured analyses; narrator always give(s) feedback” (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 150). According to Morse (2015), it is vital to spend an extended period of time with the participant in order to develop trust. Developing trust then provides authentic data. Morse acknowledged the benefits that an intimate relationship between narrator and researcher will have when engaging in conversational semistructured interviews. Morse also suggested that coding be used in the semistructured interviews, because the researcher is more acquainted with the topic and the interview develops more of a format. The coding analysis then augments validity.

Ochs and Capps (1997) stated that credibility hangs in part upon the believability of a sequence of unbiased events and whether they can be corroborated. This narrative also incorporated verification of the story episodes by three people from among the narrator’s friends, family, and colleagues. The fourth verification participant was the narrator’s accountability partner from Christian Step Program.

The Sacred Loss and Desecration and the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE) surveys were referenced to familiarize the participant with the language of spiritual appraisal and create a “cognitive tool” (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 749) to chronologically arrange occurrences that happened over prolonged intervals of time (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Both documents contributed to creating open-ended questions for semistructured interviews that generated a discussion on the different spiritual appraisals the participant experienced in the divorce adjustment period.

## **Research Questions**

There is paucity in the literature showing a need to hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describing the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on divorce adjustment. The research questions guided the non-initiator's story. The foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010) provided the footing and attributes to explore spiritual appraisal, divorce adjustment, and the search for significance for the expatriate, single non-initiator. The divorce adjustment construct of the Christian non-initiator single expatriate after divorce narrative inquiry gave an "empowered voice" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) to the participant in answering the following two questions.

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

## **Definition of Terms**

The terms defined in this qualitative narrative research project augmented the exploration of the participant's voice.

*Expatriate*: An individual who moves to a foreign country to live (Oberholster, Clarke, Bendixen, & Dastoor, 2013).

*Non-initiator*: The person who did not want the divorce (Neumann, 2011; H. Wang & Amato, 2000).

*Gray divorce:* Later in life divorce of those 50 or more years old (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham, Mahmood, Stott, Sixsmith, & O'Rourke, 2014; Gold, 2016; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Makidon, 2013).

*Spiritual appraisals:* The religious mechanisms that influence the divorce adjustment period. Krumrei et al. (2009) identified three spiritual appraisals possibly affecting divorce adjustment: “sacred loss/desecration . . . adaptive spiritual coping . . . spiritual struggles” (p. 373).

*Sacred loss/desecration:* Sacred loss is described by Hawley and Mahoney (2013) as losing something considered a testimony to God, and desecration as a violation of something blessed by God, such as a marriage vow.

*Adaptive spiritual coping:* Described by Krumrei et al. (2009) as the seeking of comfort and support from a church body, pastors, and other relationships.

*Spiritual struggle:* The attempt to make sense of a divorce and the negative perceptions one may perceive from others, self, and God (Krumrei et al., 2009).

*Search for significance:* A phrase used to define religion and the leading to religious pathways, “such as the path of knowing . . . acting . . . relating to others . . . and the path of experiencing” (Pargament, 1997, 2010). Along with these significant pathways is regular church attendance that provides support from pastoral counseling (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999).

*Pull factor:* The desire to go abroad, according to Muir, Wallace, and McMurray (2014).

*Call of God:* The appeal by God to a Christian individual that may result in an altruistic response to global opportunities (Oberholster et al., 2013).

All of these terms guided the epistemology of the need to hear how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on divorce adjustment.

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The parameter or limitation in this narrative was that it examined a non-initiator of a gray divorce who remained single and moved to China due to a call of God. The gray divorce population, according to Livingston (2014), statistically increased their rate of remarriage in 2013, whereas it decreased for the lower age brackets. Livingston also stated that the majority of gray-divorced individuals opt for serial marriages, trying for the charm of the third time, and that the longer life span of the gray divorce population generates this phenomenon. Consequently, the gray divorce population is divorcing more often and remarrying more often. This constructs a large population of non-initiators who are coping through the divorce adjustment stage of life and needing spiritual appraisal and guidance to a new life that encompasses significance (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010).

Pargament (2010) identified the “search for significance” (p. 270) as one of the key components for the Christian non-initiator to embrace. To seek significance incorporates a quest to find meaning and purpose while growing deeper into a transformational relationship with God. Pargament (2010) described different courses of action to preserve and protect the acquired significance, “such as the path of knowing (e.g. Bible study, scriptural interpretation) . . . acting (e.g., ritual, spiritual practice) . . . relating to others (e.g. doing good deeds, proselytizing) . . . and experiencing (e.g., prayer, meditation)” (pp. 271-272). Along with the significant pathways is regular church attendance that provides support from pastoral counseling

(Ellison et al., 1999). These are measures that reinforce significance during uphill struggles such as divorce (Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Tsang & McCullough, 2003).

Pargament, Magyar, Benore, and Mahoney (2005) acknowledged the existence of a gap in the literature regarding the spiritual appraisal of a life-shattering event. That is why Krumrei et al. (2009) presented three spiritual appraisal constructs: “sacred loss/desecration . . . spiritual struggles . . . and adaptive spiritual coping” (p. 373). These spiritual appraisals guided the non-initiator to a better understanding of coping with a shattered life. The experiences of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China and adjusting to the divorce through spiritual appraisals and a search for significance had not been voiced previous to this study.

The significance of this study is that it provided a greater understanding of the narrator’s story. The results may be useful to pastors, counselors, and other non-initiators of divorce who seek to understand what occurs when an individual experiences a gray divorce and then moves to China to serve God as a single individual in the aftermath.

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

McMullen and Braithwaite (2013) drew attention to three assumptions in a narrative inquiry. The first assumption was that a narrator’s story stands as truth rather than viewing the story through the “social and cultural context” (p. 102) of the episodes. The second was the prospect of locating a participant willing to divulge life episodes in a comprehensible study rather than as a statistical number. The third was maintaining the balance between the process of proving a theory and forfeiting the lucid quality of the narrator’s story.

The limitation of a narrative inquiry is that the narrator describes life episodes to a researcher, and each filters the told story through the lenses of cultural instincts, background knowledge, and religious perceptions (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

This study's delimitations were that it was confined to the story episodes of a narrator who was a Christian non-initiator of a gray divorce responding to the altruistic pull factor to move to China while remaining single. The purposeful boundaries of a specific monotheistic religion, Christianity; a narrow focus on gray divorce; connecting the altruistic pull factor as the call of God; and remaining single sequestered a particular narrative. The limitations and delimitations kept this qualitative narrative inquiry bound to the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describing the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on divorce adjustment.

### **Chapter 1 Summary**

The statistics of divorce and the number of people aged 50 or older who have divorces they did not want are daunting. Turning or returning to Christian belief is a survival and support mechanism that genuinely manages the agony and outcome. If the individual believes in the truth of the Bible, he or she knows that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28 NIV). This working for good leads some individuals during divorce adjustment to a new pathway of life in a foreign country while remaining single to serve the call of God.

This narrative study delved into the research literature on the causes of divorce, the effects of divorce on individuals and society, the spiritual aspects of divorce, and efforts to live a new life after divorce. This study was the first to explore the story of an individual who experienced an unwanted gray divorce and then moved to China to serve God as a single

individual in the aftermath. The narrative was conceived through lengthy semistructured and conversational interviews, observation, and corroboration; it was written, reviewed, and rewritten until the story reflected the truth through the lens of the narrator and was corroborated through the lens of the narrator's intimate relationships.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction to the Problem

From the Christian perspective, a couple takes a sacred vow before God, the church, family, and friends to live with each other until death parts them. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24 English Standard Version). Tuttle and Davis (2015) specified that even if a long-term married couple experience unfaithfulness in the marriage, the couple is equipped to overcome the infidelity through commitment to God. Yet, in reality, marriages in America are not lasting until death (Amato, 2010; Copen et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2017; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Steiner et al., 2015; Tuttle & Davis, 2015). Instead, couples terminate relationships, causing calamity that creates intense burdens and forces the restructuring of a family for a number of reasons (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004). The dissolution of a marriage can be caused by the one seeking the divorce, the one abandoned, the breakdown of the partnership, or something independent of the marriage; all these reasons have some effect on the outcome of the divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003).

This dissertation study focused primarily on a non-initiator: a person who wanted his marriage to continue and did not initiate the divorce (Neumann, 2011; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). The participant also relied on his Christian faith after the divorce. According to Pargament (2010), research has observed that individuals who lean on their faith during times of trial cope better. The aim of this research was to explore spiritual appraisal, defined as the approach individuals construe as significant in maintaining resiliency during a catastrophic event and the eventual outcome, as it related to the coping structure of this non-initiator, who lived in China during the divorce adjustment phase (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004; Lazarus, 2006).

Pargament et al. (2005) acknowledged the existence of a gap in the literature regarding the spiritual appraisal of a life-shattering event. Krumrei et al. (2009) presented three spiritual appraisal constructs, “sacred loss/desecration . . . spiritual struggles . . . and adaptive spiritual coping” (p. 373). The language associated with a wedding vow links the marriage to a sacred act aligned with God (Pargament, 2010). Ellison, Henderson, Glenn, and Harkrider (2011) referred to the sacred as “religious sanctification” (p. 404). The first appraisal, sacred loss/desecration is viewed as a breach, violation, or desecration of a promise made by Christian believers to God such as a marriage, and therefore contributes to a negative divorce adjustment phase (Krumrei et al., 2009; Mahoney, Warner, & Krumrei, 2010; Pargament et al., 2005). The second appraisal, spiritual struggle, encompasses the negative characteristics of religion and variables associated with Satan’s role or demonization, which also perpetuates a negative divorce adjustment (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011b; Pargament, 2010). The third appraisal, adaptive spiritual coping, or an increase in positive divorce adjustment associated with an individual’s spiritual convictions (Krumrei et al., 2009). Greeff and Van Der Merwe (2004) emphasized that individuals experience a range of adjustments during the restructuring of a life after divorce. Consequently, the single non-initiator expatriate may have experienced a combination of appraisals during the divorce adjustment period (Krumrei et al., 2011b).

To conceptualize the divorce adjustment process for this single non-initiator expatriate, it was beneficial to examine the perceived understanding of the justifications for ending a marriage, which may involve “infidelity, incompatibility, or lack of communication” (Amato & Previti, 2003, p. 611). Montenegro (2004) contended that “verbal, physical, or emotional abuse is the foremost reason for divorce” (p. 20) followed by dissimilar tenets and infidelity. DeMaris (2013) cited statistics taken from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey indicating that

almost 100% of married couples expected sexual faithfulness within the marriage. Unfortunately, the initiator of divorce due to infidelity did not think along those lines, but allowed feelings to take control.

An individual does not plan to engage in infidelity; rather, an encounter with a sexually attracted individual may occur (DeMaris, 2013). Sexual attraction perpetuates flirtation that if encouraged detonates lustful behavior (DeMaris, 2013). Infidelity may also transpire due to meeting someone who sympathizes with the individual's sexual frustration or an imbalanced compensation marriage dilemma (DeMaris, 2013; DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010). Over time, the sympathetic ear to marriage misery can turn into passion, and passion can initiate adultery, unsettling the marriage (DeMaris, 2013).

Researchers have theorized that the infidelity or adultery of the initiator potentially contributes to a higher positive level of divorce adjustment, claiming freedom, especially if the initiator has another relationship waiting in the wings (Montenegro, 2004). How does this affect the spiritual appraisal of divorce adjustment for the single non-initiator? Amato and Previti (2003) reported that knowing the "causal attributions for divorce" (p. 603) aids in understanding the adjustment of divorce for the non-initiator.

### **Background, Context, and History**

Divorce is the act of obliterating a bond designed by God, which creates much anxiety (Call, 2013; Montenegro, 2004). It is also one of the greatest life stressors. Pargament (1997, 2010) and Steiner et al. (2015) noted that researchers are attributing spirituality as a coping mechanism aiding in the divorce adjustment period because divorce is devastating, especially for the non-initiator.

Even though divorce is a life-altering event, in the 21st century, it is an accepted societal solution to marriage unhappiness (Quinney & Fouts, 2004). Recent statistics in the United States highlighted the acceptability: 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages, and 74% of third marriages end in divorce (Banschick, 2012; Wevorce, 2017). Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) reported that over the past 20 years, divorce momentum increased twofold, especially among those over 35; even more dramatic was the increase in divorce for those 50 and older (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Makidon, 2013).

Divorce as a solution to marriage problems was not always the norm. A shift occurred in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Wilcox, 2009). Not only did the divorce rate soar, but tolerance of divorce increased (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Thornton, 1989). Amato (2000) stated that factors contributing to the tolerance of divorce included no-fault laws, the economic independence of women, anticipating greater happiness in marriage, and the phenomenon of divorce and repartnering several times, referred to as “serial marriage” (p. 1269). James and Shafer (2012) asserted that the cultural shift to the ideation of the “me generation” or the individual’s self-expression and self-actualization, as well as seeking to reestablish self-identity, also contributes to serial marriage.

The shift in American tolerance reflected trends in the whole of Western ideology. Hansson and Laidmae (2014) wrote about the impact Soviet communism had on divorce among the women of Estonia during the 20th century. The authors described 1945 to 1990 as a period with low divorce rates because the Soviet occupation of Estonia controlled the traditional culture of the family structure. Divorce was not a topic openly discussed or researched. Once Estonia gained back its independence and ideations from Soviet rule in the 1990s, the adoption of

Western norms opened the door for a new set of emerging ideologies reflected in the media and especially in women's magazines (Hansson & Laidmae, 2014).

Vikström et al. (2011) reiterated what other empirical studies acknowledged: the impact of economic modernization in China paralleled the increase in divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). Western ethical ideation also affected China's divorce rate once the economic surge occurred. Q. Wang and Zhou (2010) reported that the factors contributing to the rise in divorce included economic growth, education, and the rise of Western individualism. Weber (2017) also identified the high divorce rate as due to China's own "me generation" phenomenon. In the 1980s, China invoked a policy limiting each family to one child, which created a generation of people incapable of cooperation and indifferent to the basic needs of other people. Marriage between children from single-child families is a key element of strife in current Chinese households. Young couples are impetuously falling in love, marrying, and divorcing within months or even hours after the marriage certificate is signed (Weber, 2017). The speed of divorce is also attributed to changes in the law. In the past, couples had to get permission from the people who employed the couple or the local government; that law no longer exists (Weber, 2017). According to Weber (2017), the divorce rate in Beijing is much higher than the national average for China, due in part to increased education for women, which makes them financially independent of men. Women's financial independence contributes to divorce in many countries.

In the United States, the modernization impact provided stark numbers of divorced couples, although researchers have challenged the specific data. Copen et al. (2012) utilized the National Survey of Family and Growth (NSFG) to demonstrate with statistical data the correlation between first marriages and divorce; the data showed that less than half of first-year marriages ended in divorce. Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) questioned the validity of the NSFG

report. As stated earlier, Kennedy and Ruggles expanded the age variable and found a significant rise in divorce among older adults. Even in the measuring of divorce, there can be discrepancies.

As stated before, nothing compares to the monumental increase in gray divorce. Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) implied trends toward higher divorce rates come from the “Baby Boom generation” (p. 595). Brown and Lin (2012) reported that the baby boomers experience more divorce because this cohort divorced earlier and remarried. Serial marriages, according to Sweeney (2010), exhibit less stability than first marriages, and within a 10-year period close to half will end up either separated or divorced.

In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) claimed a decrease in the rate of divorce (CDC, 2017). However, Amato (2010) noted that not all states contribute to the critical divorce indicators held by the federal government. Further, the literature suggested that people are living longer, which increases the numbers heading to divorce court (Schwartzhoff, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The foundation for this study was empirical research on the three spiritual appraisals connected to divorce and the positive and negative attributes associated with divorce adjustment (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). According to Maple and Edwards (2010), listening to the “voices” (p. 34) of individuals telling life episodes is an optimum way to understand the matters that engulf the narrative story. Due to the serial marriage phenomena amongst the baby boom generation and paucity in the literature, there is a need to hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describing his divorce adjustment. The “search for significance” (Pargament, 2010, p. 270) was one of the key components this Christian non-

initiator embraced as he committed to living in China and remaining single. To seek significance encompasses a quest to find meaning and purpose while growing deeper into a transformational relationship with God. Pargament (2010) stated that there are different courses of action or pathways to preserve and protect the acquired significance. The first pathway is knowing God, which occurs via studying the Bible; the pathway of acting is participation in church worship and ceremonial traditions; the pathway of relating to others occurs through evangelism; and the pathway of experiencing happens via privately thinking and talking to God (Pargament, 2010). These are measures that reinforce significance during uphill struggles such as divorce (Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Tsang & McCullough, 2003).

Research has focused on the statistics of divorce, divorce and children, the baby boomer divorce phenomenon, divorce adjustment in relationship to gender, and the spiritual aspect of divorce (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Krumrei et al., 2011a; Roberts, 2013; Steiner et al., 2011; Steiner et al., 2015). This study focused on the story of the non-initiator expatriate's spiritual appraisal and search for significance in China from a Christian perspective.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Baddeley and Singer (2007) explained that narrative research chronicles how family, friends, and community, along with "societal scripts and templates" (p. 178), take an individual's life story down clear established pathways. As the individual tells their culturally similar life story, a new perspective is added through their distinctive life experience and intimate memories. The life story explored in this research focused on spiritual coping with an unwanted divorce, the journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and the search for significance by leaning on God (Pargament, 2010).

The purpose of this qualitative-narrative study was to explore how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his divorce adjustment. There is copious research on managing troubled times that does not incorporate the aspect of religious coping. Pargament (2010) theorized that this stems from “Freud and Skinner who viewed religion through jaundiced eyes” (p. 270). Harrow and Gardner (2010) and Tsang and McCullough (2003) claimed that Freud accused religion of being a crutch that prevented individuals from facing life realistically. The framework of this study was based on the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010), who researched the unrecognized importance of religion in managing stress. This foundation set the theme that threaded through the participant’s life story of understanding spiritual appraisal in divorce adjustment and searching for significance by sacrificially serving God while living in China, knowing and accepting that the longevity of divorce adjustment is unpredictable (Steiner et al., 2011).

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the line of inquiry for this narrative study:

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

**Theoretical framework.** The two main themes that guided the story of the individual’s divorce episodes were the search for significance, found in the “Theoretical Model” (Pargament, 2010, p. 270), and the study on the three spiritual responses to divorce for emotional adjustment by Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a). Pargament (2010) noted that observational studies showed that

during the most difficult events in one's life, faith often helps with coping, as well as the altruistic pull factor to move to a foreign country.

These themes of search for significance and spiritual appraisal threaded through the participant's culturally normative story to gain new perspectives "through . . . idiosyncratic life experience and personal memory" (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 178). The foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010) provided the footing and attributes for the episodes to be examined through the lenses of spiritual appraisal, divorce adjustment, and the search for significance in the life of a single expatriate Christian non-initiator divorcé.

***The spiritual appraisal study.*** Krumrei et al. (2009) examined three spiritual appraisals—sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping—and discovered that out of the 100 adults engaged in the study, the highest percentage utilized spiritual coping in response to divorce. Krumrei et al. also found that more people relied on spiritual coping and struggle during post-divorce adjustment than on non-spiritual coping and struggle. The study demonstrated that in America, religious beliefs have an influence on how people react to difficult circumstances such as divorce.

Krumrei et al. (2009) stated that the outcome of the study was to dig deeper into spirituality rather than limit the study to "global measures of religiousness" (p. 373). This deeper digging into spirituality would bring awareness of explicit divine means that contribute to a positive adjustment to divorce.

***Sacred loss/desecration.*** The first spiritual appraisal, sacred loss/desecration, is assessing divorce as the defilement of a marriage that was consecrated by God. Ideally, those suffering from the trauma of divorce would seek out God "who comforts us in all our troubles" (2 Cor. 1:4 NIV) by engaging in prayer and repentance, personal spiritual practices, or community worship,

to mention a few (Pargament, 2010). Pargament et al. (2005) created a 28-item assessment of sacred loss and desecration that Krumrei et al. (2009) administered to 100 adults and discovered that 78% considered divorce a sacred loss/desecration. The results also showed higher levels of depression when viewing a divorce through the lens of sacred loss and desecration. There was no correlation between “post traumatic growth” (Krumrei et al., 2009, p. 377) and the way an individual observed sacred loss and desecration. The more individuals viewed their divorce experience as a sacred loss and desecration, the greater the experience of depression.

*Adaptive spiritual coping.* Just as sacred loss/desecration is an internal relational construct, so too is adaptive spiritual coping. The essential difference is finding comfort externally through the church congregation, among the pastors, and in the intimate closeness of Bible study (Ellison et al., 2011; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Sedlezky, 2004). Krumrei et al. (2009) hypothesized that adaptive spiritual coping would significantly increase positive divorce adjustment, even more than nonspiritual coping. Utilizing the positive points on Pargament, Koenig, and Perez’s (2000) Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE), the positive coping mechanisms were measured. The items were “Benevolent Religious Reappraisal, Seeking Religious Direction, Seeking Spiritual Support Religious Focus, and Seeking Support from Clergy or Members” (Krumrei et al., 2009; Pargament et al., 2000). Krumrei et al. (2009) found that out of 100 adults, 88% engaged in adaptive spiritual coping. As anticipated, higher levels of posttraumatic growth connected to adaptive spiritual coping also occurred, unrelated to depression. The greater the adaptive spiritual coping, the greater the growth in the posttraumatic period of a divorce. Krumrei et al. (2009) stated that “spiritual coping contributed unique variance to posttraumatic growth beyond parallel, nonspiritual coping” (p. 379).

*Spiritual struggle.* Krumrei et al. (2009) measured spiritual struggle utilizing the negative items from the RCOPE, “Punishing God Reappraisal, Reappraisal of God’s Powers, Passive Religious Deferral, Pleading for Direct Intercession, Spiritual Discontent, and Interpersonal Religious Discontent” (Krumrei et al., 2009; Pargament et al., 2000). They found that 79% of the 100 adults studied experienced a spiritual struggle in divorce adjustment. The researchers also found that high levels of spiritual struggle such as awareness of desertion, disloyalty, God’s disciplining action, doubting God’s sovereignty, or suffering from ethical shame were strongly connected to an increase in depression. However, spiritual coping was a definite resource for posttraumatic growth (Krumrei et al., 2009).

*Search for significance.* Pargament (2010) stated that in difficult times of insecurity, loss, or heartbreak, such as after a divorce, spirituality offers meaning and purpose. At stressful times, the community of believers called the church can bring about a feeling of acceptance and love. In times of calamity, connectedness with God builds one’s faith. Finally, spiritual coping provides a pathway to transform what is significant in the life of an individual during periods of blessings and hardship. Pargament (2010) defined religion as the search for significance, emphasizing three words: “significance, search, and sacred” (p. 270). In times of insecurity, loss, heartbreak, stress, calamity, and finally transformation, it is the sacred in the search for significance that postulates spiritual coping.

According to Krumrei et al. (2009) and Pargament (2010), in coping with tragedy such as divorce through the lens of religion, inclusion of the search for significance and spiritual appraisals are the building blocks to research questions such as how a single non-initiator describes the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on divorce adjustment.

## **Review of Literature**

The review of literature creates a foundation that characterizes the demographics of the divorce adjustment study. In this study, the Christian non-initiator participant was a member of the baby boom generation. He was cognizant of the predictors of divorce, which offered validation of the truth and allowed his mature faith to inspire an attitude of forgiveness. The search for spiritual understanding and significance in the divorce adjustment period prepared the Christian non-initiator to respond to the expatriate altruism pull to move to China.

**Gray divorce.** As previously stated, rates of gray divorce in the United States have increased over the past two decades (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Gold, 2015; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Makidon, 2013). Makidon (2013) completed a dissertation on women baby boomers and wrote about the hazards that impeded positive divorce adjustment as well as preventive measures to achieve a positive divorce adjustment. Feelings of guilt, fear, and anger prevented a positive divorce adjustment, whereas maintaining relationships with in-laws and children, allowing the empty nest to occur, and counseling, among others, would produce a positive divorce adjustment. Brown and Lin (2012) attributed the increased divorce rate among baby boomers to the fact that these were serial marriages rather than first marriages. Many baby boomers have experienced divorce, so the stigma decreases. Women are also more likely to divorce in this cohort due to economic independence. Brown and Lin gave the statistic that one out of four divorces in 2010 were gray divorces. This complicates the family structure; may lead to health issues, especially for the non-initiator; and puts a burden on society if the gray divorce happens to someone without a family. Rates of gray divorce have been increasing in Canada as well. Canham et al. (2014) attributed this to several factors, including an increase in life span; changes in the composition of the family, as laws are changing so two parents and children do

not constitute the definition of family; issues with maleness and femaleness; and the changing standards of society.

This study focused on the gray divorce cohort because it is relevant to the narrator of the narrative. Gold (2016) stated that about 25% of the divorces in America fall into the gray divorce cohort. That age group is also described as expatriates who move to a foreign country for reasons of altruism (Oberholster et al., 2013). The connection between the age of the non-initiator expatriate, ministry in the foreign country, and the degree of influence this has on divorce adjustment is not known.

**Predictors of divorce.** Adultery is one of the top reasons couples divorce, along with irreconcilability, problems with consumption of alcohol and the misuse of drugs, and mounting dissatisfaction (Amato & Previti, 2003; Barta & Kiene, 2005; DeMaris, 2013; Previti & Amato, 2004). The fact is that commitment in today's society carries little value. Previti and Amato (2004) researched infidelity as a precursor to divorce. The question arises as to whether extramarital sex (EMS) occurs because of an unhappy marriage or whether the infidelity causes the breakup of the marriage (Previti & Amato, 2004). Another factor that contributes to EMS is what DeMaris (2013) classified as "the waxing of intimacy and the waning of passion" (p. 1477). Conflict arises in a marriage, one or both partners seek out an empathetic ear, and the sympathetic listener evolves into a passionate partner over time. Yet this new relationship may wane when enticing information about the conflict evaporates (DeMaris, 2013). Barta and Kiene (2005) considered personality traits and emotional and sexual classifications that resulted in EMS.

Previti and Amato (2004) indicated that couples that are predisposed to divorce are more likely to engage in EMS, which subsequently decreases marital contentment, propels the couple

into thoughts of divorce, and escalates the drive to follow through on a divorce. What contributes to this radical ending of a marriage? Barta and Kiene (2005) examined personality traits and concluded that “neglect and anger attributed to the Neuroticism personality construct and gauging low on Agreeableness” (p. 339) contribute to divorce. They also found that anger factors into the inability to forgive oneself, which inhibits divorce adjustment.

**Spiritual appraisal.** Krumrei et al. (2009) investigated the part that spirituality played in divorce adjustment. Krumrei et al. (2011a) stated that the lack of spirituality research in divorce proved surprising given that the majority of Americans claim to hold Christian beliefs. Newport (2015) reported that over 75% of Americans identify as Christian. That would support Pargament’s (1997, 2010) statement that Americans utilize spiritual coping skills during life stressors.

Krumrei et al. (2009) identified three spiritual mechanisms or appraisals that may affect divorce adjustment: “sacred loss/desecration . . . adaptive spiritual coping . . . spiritual struggles” (p. 373). Hawley and Mahoney (2013) described sacred loss as losing something considered a testimony to God and desecration as a violation of something blessed by God, such as a marriage vow. Contrary to the appraisals, there appeared to be a positive connection between spiritual growth and the adjustment outcome, although the divorce was devastating. Krumrei et al. (2009) explained adaptive spiritual coping as seeking comfort and support from a church body, pastors, or another relationship. The third appraisal, spiritual struggle, was the attempt to make sense of a divorce and the negative perceptions one may perceive from others, self, and God. Krumrei et al. (2009) noted that the first appraisal, sacred loss/desecration, and the third appraisal, spiritual struggle, led to a higher incidence of hopelessness, whereas the second appraisal, adaptive spiritual coping, resulted in more positive outcomes after divorce. Webb et al. (2010) affirmed

that managing one's emotional reaction to divorce spiritually might ease the indicators of hopelessness and dissatisfaction with life within 2 years after a divorce.

**Demonization appraisal.** Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament (2011b) added another spiritual appraisal that negatively affected divorce adjustment, "demonization" (p. 90). "Demonic reappraisal has been examined embedded within the construct of negative religious coping" (Krumrei et al., 2011b, p. 92). Spiritual struggle, the third appraisal, identifies the evil spiritual world as a force that perpetuates divorce and adversely impacts the divorce adjustment period. Gray and Wegner (2010) stated that people either assigned blame for unjust suffering, as in divorce, or gratitude for unearned kindness; hence there was a need for a "dyadic structure of morality . . . a moral agent . . . [to inflict the] evil/good . . . [on the] moral patient" (p. 8). To understand the pain and anxiety of a stressful experience, individuals may identify Satan as the perpetrator or the instigator coercing the initiator into action, while steadfast in an altruistic view of God and society (Krumrei et al., 2011b). A dissolved marriage forces the individuals to construct a subjective assessment of emotional duress and the coping skills needed to ensure the adjustment. The non-initiator, or moral patient, appraised the divorce as apocalyptic, whereas the initiator, or moral agent, viewed the divorce as liberating (Krumrei et al., 2011b).

Statistics demonstrated that older Americans' belief in the devil and heaven is weaker than that of younger people (Blanton, 2004). Consequently, the concept of demonic influence is not as strong in the older generation as it is in the younger generation. More than half of Americans believe in God, and a majority of American evangelical Christians believe heaven and hell exist (Murphy, 2015; Newport, 2016). When asked about the existence of Satan, 57% of Americans polled agreed he existed, and 51% of them acknowledged that demonic forces possessed people (Jagel, 2013). The acceptance of external demonic forces and heavenly beings

may affect the coping mechanisms of an individual during stressful life circumstances (Krumrei et al., 2011b; Pargament, 2010). Studying the Bible, helping others in times of need, evangelism, thinking, and talking to God are coping mechanisms that can decrease stress (Pargament, 2010).

An individual who did not initiate a divorce experienced more pain and bewilderment during the divorce process and found it hard to discover the normal (Pargament, 2010). As the non-initiator's life spiraled out of control, a reframing of spiritual commitment induced a positive sense of well-being. Pargament (2010) framed the adjustment period as a time when individuals regain emotional control of their lives and safeguard their newly transformed acceptance of significance. Closely guarding spiritual significance potentially challenges and redirects an individual's vision for the future. The negative path that the non-initiator followed that did not nurture a newly transformed significance was the concept of demonization in the spiritual struggle appraisal (Krumrei et al., 2011b; Pargament, 2010). The second spiritual appraisal, adaptive spiritual coping, draws a link to the construct of forgiveness appraisal.

**Forgiveness appraisal.** Harrow and Gardner (2010) conducted a survey of 301 adults to determine the connection between "faith maturity, threat and challenge appraisal, religious coping, positive and negative affect and stress-related growth" (p. 208). Tsang and McCullough (2003) proposed that examining the way people use faith-based concepts opens a window into the ability to grapple with difficult circumstances. Harrow and Gardner (2010) alluded to faith maturity, as found in Matt. 22:37-39 (English Standard Version): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Mature faith, an assured bond with God, does not negate difficult circumstances, but rather inspires a "light at the end of the tunnel" outlook. The deeper the relationship with God,

the stronger the ability to demonstrate positive coping skills in difficult circumstances. If individuals have a distant relationship with God and lack mature faith, they are more likely to demonstrate negative coping mechanisms (Harrow & Gardner, 2010). Tsang and McCullough (2003) noted that a canonical belief does not guarantee justice, but well-being can be a by-product of mature faith.

Linking the maturity factor of faith and the close relationship to God with the concept of forgiveness equipped the non-initiator to create a pathway of positive post-divorce adjustment. Rohde-Brown and Rudestam (2011) noted that a 2-year divorce adjustment period affords the individual time to assimilate the divorce status into all parts of life. Forgiveness, an intentional act, is part of this assimilation process. Demonstration of anger toward an individual is a predictor of divorce, inhibits the ability to forgive, and may also lead to a negative adjustment period (Harrow & Gardner, 2010; Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011; Tsang & McCullough, 2003; Webb et al., 2010).

Harrow and Gardner (2010) acknowledged a correlation between faith-based maturity and the ability to assess challenges with a positive attitude, although faith-based maturity is open to more research. Harrow and Gardner defined religious coping, the third appraisal in forgiveness, as “religious thoughts and behaviors used in understanding and dealing with significant demands” (p. 209). Those individuals who have faith-based maturity and a close relationship with God recognize the need for religious coping during stressful times (Harrow & Gardner, 2010; Tsang & McCullough, 2003).

Ability to cope with stressful experiences such as divorce is related to the individual’s relationship to God, the maturity of faith, and appraising stressful situations in light of the challenges faced. “For this very reason . . . supplement your faith with virtue . . . virtue with

knowledge . . . knowledge with self-control . . . self-control with steadfastness . . . steadfastness with godliness . . . godliness with brotherly affection . . . brotherly affection with love” (2 Pet. 1:5-7 English Standard Version). The sounder a person’s faith, the more likely they are to experience a positive divorce adjustment outcome; lack of faith or weak faith inclines a person toward more negative divorce adjustment (Harrow & Gardner, 2010).

**Spiritual appraisal of China.** The pathway of evangelism is one aspect of the search for significance, which can lead to a positive divorce adjustment experience (Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Tsang & McCullough, 2003). Johnson (2017) authored the book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao* and talked about how the Chinese people are exploring spirituality and the search for significance. According to Johnson, China is reevaluating the search for significance in morals and beliefs in the lives of Chinese people. The events in China following World War II and the Mao Zedong regime precluded the search for significance.

China is the second largest global economy and has an estimated population of over 1 billion (Countrymeters, 2017). In the 1980s, after the disastrous Great Leap Forward 1958, the most devastating famine in recorded history, and the Cultural Revolution of 1966, China opened the doors to external investors as well as an internal surge of land development (Aikman, 2003; Johnson, 2017; Kissinger, 2012). China went from extreme poverty to extreme wealth rapidly. The anticipated security that materialism promised failed, and disillusionment and skepticism set in, which turned many to religion (Johnson, 2017). Johnson (2017) compared this time in China to the “Great Awakening in the United States in the nineteenth century” (Chapter 2, para. 6).

China’s religious history was influenced by a variety of different religions, but not guided by a canonical book. The religion was ritual-based and permeated the political and social culture

(Johnson, 2017). Degrees of assault on religious organizations had occurred during China's history, but not like the battering in 1966 under the Mao regime. Johnson (2017) wrote:

In the Catholic stronghold of Taiyuan in Shanxi Province, the central cathedral was turned into a "living exhibition" of how backward religion was. Priests and nuns were held in cages and local residents ordered to troop by and watch them . . . Catholic clergy who had taken vows of chastity were forced to marry. (Chapter 2, para. 33)

Chinese people made Mao Zedong into a breathing god, considered the writings of Mao as absolute truth, and vehemently destroyed any artifact or ideation disloyal to Mao's thought. However, the impact of Mao's philosophy did not last, and in 1976 Mao Zedong died (Johnson, 2017; Kissinger, 2012).

According to Johnson (2017), it has been difficult to estimate the growth of Christianity in China for many reasons, one of which is that Western pollsters have used words and phrases that do not translate into the Chinese language. Zhang (2016) stated that the Chinese government in 2010 estimated the number of Christians at 23 million. The growth of Christianity happened in all levels of society. Aiken (2003) reported that "consultant officers, entrepreneurs, actors, singers . . . Christian-run homes for old people . . . orphanages . . . hospitals . . . Christian private schools" ("Christians Everywhere," para. 5, 6, 7) had sprung up throughout China. There are also personal examples of the spread of Christianity. Zhang Boli, a leader of the Tiananmen protest, was a wanted criminal after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989. He is now a pastor of two churches in the Washington, D.C., area (Aikman, 2003). Wu'er, also a student protestor from Xinjiang Province, made his way to Taiwan, where Zhang Boli baptized him in 2002 (Aikman, 2003). One of the hardliners of the Communist Party during the Tiananmen student incident was Premier Li Peng, whose last post before retirement was "chairman of the National People's

Congress” (Aikman, 2003, "The Communist Party," para. 3). His daughter was educated in Japan and became a baptized believer. Li Peng’s daughter demonstrates that the Chinese people are searching for spiritual significance and religious faith that the government and the accumulation of wealth cannot provide (Phillips, 2014).

Since the death of Mao Zedong, the number of Christian churches in China has increased dramatically (Aikman, 2003; Johnson, 2017; Phillips, 2014). Expatriates have contributed to this change by establishing Christian churches in large cities like Beijing. Beijing International Christian Fellowship (BICF) hosts services in different languages for international Christians (Law, 2005). BICF also provides printed materials in Chinese for the Chinese churches, as well as fulfilling a plethora of social needs. BICF is a congregation of expatriates and repatriating Chinese who worship and volunteer to serve God in China.

The growth of Christianity in China synchronizes with many facets, one of which is the number of Chinese students and scholars studying in America. Events like the Tiananmen incident “shattered the idealism many Chinese had once harbored” (Zhang, 2016, para. 22). Fu (2012) wrote his dissertation on Chinese students and scholars finding Christ in the United States. A few of the reasons Fu gave for the gap in knowledge included the lack of exposure and the atheistic education that permeates throughout China, the concept of only one true religion over the ideology of multiple truths, and the perception that Christianity is for the rural population and not the educated. According to Aikman (2003) and Lin (2017), cities in China are seeing more young and middle-aged people accepting Christianity, but are lacking in discipleship opportunities. Aikman described a group of Americans touring the province of Guangzhou and visiting some young Chinese Christians, who were eager to talk about their lives and faith to the middle-aged foreign Christians and to connect with an older generation.

**Expatriate appraisal.** The Open Door policy of the late 1970s led by Deng Xiaoping brought about the greatest societal and economic transformation in China (Selmer, 2009). Kissinger (2012) described Deng as a man that “fulfilled the ultimate task of a leader . . . taking his society from where it is to where it has never been” (p. 572)

Since the 1980s, China has had a standard development rate of 9%, due in part to the influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) positioning China’s mainland as the principal beneficiary of FDI for the past 20 years (Pitsilis, Woetzel, & Wong, 2004). Xinhua (2017) reported that in 2016 an estimated 900,000 expatriates held jobs in China, compared to less than 10,000 in the 1980s. Many companies that invest in China send employees to work in China. Another cohort of expatriates, known as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), manage their own careers living in a foreign country such as China for an extended period of time (Makkonen, 2016; Muir et al., 2014; Vance, 2005).

Along with foreign investments, China is positioned second to the United States as the country that hosts the most expatriates (Bruning, Sonpar, & Wang, 2012). Ironically, China is ranked as the country with the greatest number of difficulties for expatriates (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016; Bruning et al., 2012). Some issues that make life hard in China are “quality of living conditions, pollution, language and adaptability, currency, work permits, red tape, and adaptation to local culture” (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016, p. 40). Even so, SIEs venture aboard to gain international work experience (Makkonen, 2016; Muir et al., 2014; Zhong, Zhu, & Zhang, 2015; Vance, 2005). Doherty (2013) described the SIE as a young and mobile educated professional. Due to the diversity in the definition of the SIE, the paradigm focused on “demographics, individual agency in instigating a move, intention to repatriate, home and choice of host location, whether the move is between developed countries or between

developing and developed countries” (Doherty, 2013, p. 448). The SIE can be studied as an individual at the “micro level . . . can be examined as a source of global talent at the macro level . . . [and can be] investigated as an organizational resource at a meso level” (Doherty, 2013, p. 448). This can guide future heuristic studies on the individual SIE in the context of their talent and organization.

Oberholster et al. (2013) drew attention to an older generation of SIEs who moved abroad with the motivation of “altruism” (p. 22). What is not known and remains as a gap in the literature is how the expatriate experience may influence the divorce adjustment of these individuals, including the participant in this study.

*Micro level.* Bruning et al. (2012) suggested the two types of personalities that fit the SIE are “extraversion . . . openness to experience” (p. 445). SIEs are people who are socially and verbally active and are not afraid to explore new places (Bruning et al., 2012; Doherty, 2013). Doherty (2013) described the SIE as a person who does not necessarily plan mobility, but is sufficiently flexible to respond to the global market. Muir et al. (2014) described these global opportunities as the “pull factor variables” (p. 246). Life-changing encounters through the pull factor affect not only the individual SIEs, but also their families. Both genders contribute to the pool of SIEs moving abroad for the global professional experience and the employability factor when repatriating.

Muir et al. (2014) studied expatriate women living in Beijing and found that the decision to move to Beijing was by far the best career option for them. These women were pursuing a change in lifestyle, adventure, and an attempt to eliminate monotony, to mention a few. Across the demographic age span, they gave different scenarios for the move, but were consistent on the idea of experiencing a challenge and pursuing a significant job.

Bruning et al. (2012) also researched the North American expatriate demographic living and working in China. Their study revealed that SIEs understood the importance of building relationships in China with Chinese nationals. The Chinese word for this process is *guanxi* (关系). These relationships are vital to a successful experience and align with the extraversion personality trait. However, Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, and Shin (2010) warned of the downside of employing an SIE: if the SIE is unstable and unreliable, expenses may be incurred by transitioning this employee as well as positioning the SIE among other employees.

*Meso level.* Because the migratory global population is growing beyond organizational expatriates, there are innovative strategies to change the traditional expatriate job description to more of a mobile short-term stay abroad. Organizations find it difficult to fill the mobile jobs, so there is a trend toward investing in SIEs (Doherty, 2013). There is inconclusive research on the risks that come with hiring SIEs due to the “lack of organization-specific knowledge . . . and lack of adjustment to the host corporate culture” (Doherty, 2013, p. 452). Muir et al. (2014) stated that SIEs are generally hired for positions in middle to lower management or technical support jobs. The appealing aspects of SIEs, according to some research, are the personality traits, language acquisition, cultural adaptability, longevity, and mobility (Doherty, 2013).

Doherty (2013) cited some attributes of the SIE that could be construed as negative, such as being independent, self-assured, and somewhat of a renegade. Yet, hypothetically an SIE could contribute “entrepreneurial skills, proactivity, flexibility . . . alternative views of the world and a more encompassing, inclusive approach to work and non-work life” (Doherty, 2013, p. 458). The attributes of flexibility and inclusiveness fit well in the Chinese corporate world, where working hours are long and boundaries between work and private time are few (Bruning et al., 2012).

Oberholster et al. (2013) described the categories of motivation to expatriate; “integrated regulation” (p. 22) best describes the motivation of the participant in this study, as the amalgamation of a Christian individual’s professional goals with the desire to tell others about God. Christian expatriates have an “intrinsic motivation of making a difference” (Oberholster et al., 2013, p. 9) in the lives of people that surround them. Incorporating the desire to share the gospel and flexibility allows for the Christian expatriate to get personally involved with Chinese coworkers.

*Macro level.* Doherty (2013) stated that owing to the fundamental characteristics of SIEs, tapping this significant talent pool could benefit not only the country they work in, but also the home country. The traits of extraversion and openness to experience could potentially lead an SIE on a journey with several steps. The first step is the building blocks that produce global familiarity through “exposure and immersion” (Vance, 2005, p. 378)—experiences such as travel, studying abroad or inviting a foreign student to live in your home, and learning a foreign language in that country. A complete entrenching into the culture entails continuing the foreign language study abroad program, which was recommended as the most important strategy for SIEs, taking higher education classes, getting a job in the foreign country, or becoming a missionary, to mention a few. The second step, “specific preparation” (Vance, 2005, p. 378), is preparation for traveling to a specific country and obtaining a job in the targeted country. People with prior experiences who have repatriated from the intended country can coach the SIE in developing valuable skills. The last step is “securing foreign employment” (Vance, 2005, p. 380). SIEs have many opportunities in a global market to make their imprint. Their characteristic adventurous drive leads them on a pathway toward living and working in a foreign country.

**Methodology.** Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described the qualitative narrative methodology as a way of depicting the unusual life episodes of an individual. In this study, qualitative narrative methodology was used to explore the story of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China and how spiritual appraisal and search for significance influenced his divorce adjustment.

The study was founded on the work of Krumrei et al. (2009) on spiritual appraisal. Krumrei et al.'s first spiritual appraisal, sacred loss/desecration, was assessed in a study that included 100 divorced adults in the first 6 months after divorce. Demographics collected from each participant included age, resident location, and the number of children. The current study used a multi-method approach including semistructured open-ended questions, direct structured observation and field notes, critical whole-text analyses by the researcher and narrators, semistructured analyses, and feedback from the narrator (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). According to Morse (2015), it is vital to spend an extended period of time with the participant in order to develop trust. Developing trust then provides authentic data. Morse acknowledged the benefits of building an intimate relationship between narrator and researcher when engaging in conversational interviews. Morse suggested that coding be used in semistructured interviews because the researcher is more acquainted with the topic and the interview develops more of a format. The coding analysis then augments validity.

The Sacred Loss and Desecration and RCOPE surveys were referenced to familiarize the participant with the language of spiritual appraisal and create a "cognitive tool" (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 749) to chronologically arrange occurrences that happened over prolonged intervals of time (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Both surveys contributed to creating open-ended questions for conversational interviews that generated a discussion on the different spiritual

appraisals the participant experienced in the divorce adjustment period. The conversational interviews also included a demographic set of questions to obtain biographical information on the participant (Krumrei et al., 2009).

Muir et al. (2014) used a qualitative investigative approach to discover what was not known about SIE women in Beijing and how they guided their careers in a global market. Their approach to data collection was “narrative in-depth, semistructured interviews” (Muir et al., 2014, p. 240). This research used a similar narrative in-depth semistructured interview approach.

As previously stated, the purpose of this qualitative-narrative study was to explore the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China and the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his adjustment to divorce. Multiple sources of data were used, including interviews or open-ended conversation, direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator, semistructured analyses, narrator feedback, and documents. This study used the narrative to examine spiritual coping with an unwanted divorce, the journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and the search for significance by leaning on God.

The framework of this study was also based on the work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a), and Pargament (2010), who researched the unrecognized importance of religion in managing stress. The research is well defined on the spiritual appraisal of divorce adjustment when the expatriate variable is not included (Krumrei et al., 2009, 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament et al., 2005). Incorporating the spiritual appraisal aspect into divorce adjustment appears to increase the positive connection between spiritual growth and the adjustment outcome (Pargament, 2010). Along with enhancing spiritual growth, the non-initiator can follow a spiritual pathway of life that enriches the search for significance (Pargament, 2010). Carefully guarding spiritual

significance potentially challenges and redirects an individual's vision for the future. Growing richer spiritually while searching for significance during the divorce adjustment period can lead to life-changing encounters through the pull factor (Muir et al., 2014). This pull factor is the response to global opportunities. It can take the shape of an SIE pursuing a job in a foreign country combined with the intrinsic desire to share the gospel (Oberholster et al., 2013).

As stated before, the two main theories that guided this study were Pargament's (2010) work on the search for significance and Krumrei et al.'s (2009) study on the three spiritual responses to divorce for emotional adjustment. The study used data from interviews and conversations, direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by the researcher and narrators, semistructured analyses, narrator feedback, and documents to focus on spiritual coping with an unwanted divorce, the journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and the search for significance by leaning on God while living in a foreign country (Pargament, 2010).

This narrative inquiry research is relevant, considering the world is an established global market. Organizations are sending more employees to China due to the expansion of China's market economy (Bruning et al., 2012). SIEs are also flocking to China for employment opportunities (Bruning et al., 2012; Muir et al., 2014; Oberholster et al., 2013; Vance, 2005). Some expatriates, like the participant in this study, may arrive in China having experienced an unwanted divorce, spiritually coping through the divorce adjustment, and searching for significance as the altruistic pull factor takes hold of their lives.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

This study used a narrative inquiry approach to explore the story of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China and how spiritual appraisal and the search for

significance influenced him in the divorce adjustment period. The narrative revealed themes such as spiritual appraisals, becoming an expatriate due to the altruistic pull factor, and the search for significance for the non-initiator of the divorce, which is defined in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

This study used a narrative inquiry design and a qualitative methodology to explore the story of a Christian non-initiator American white male, approximately 60 years old, moving to China to live out the divorce adjustment period. The qualitative-narrative inquiry design is the “study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4). Lived experiences are the foundation that narrative stories are built on and researched (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Chase (2017) defined a personal narrative as follows:

[A] distinct form of communication . . . meaning making through the shaping of experiences . . . understanding . . . other’s actions . . . organizing events, objects, feelings or thought in relation to each other . . . connecting . . . the consequences of actions, events, feelings, or thoughts over time. (p. 546)

The emphasis is put on a complete description of life episodes and how they synthesize into the whole story rather than contributing to a theme (Chase, 2017). The non-initiator divorce narrative of this study explored an individual’s experience in divorce and moving to China, producing awareness of the changes through life episodes.

This narrative inquiry explored the participant’s new environment, life, society, and world and how they encompassed spiritual appraisal and the search for significance during his divorce adjustment (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Five other individuals were selected by the participant, Ethan, to corroborate his story. There is a gap in the literature showing a need to hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China, as examined in this study.

Before the narrative design was selected, the plan was to use a case study methodology. Unfortunately, not enough participants were available to explore the data. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) listed four reasons to make a paradigm shift to a narrative inquiry for research: the relationship a researcher develops with the participant, incorporating words into data findings instead of statistics, focusing on specifics rather than a broad spectrum or generalization, and acknowledgment of different “epistemologies or ways of knowing” (p. 7). The first reason for a paradigm shift is the relationship the researcher and the participant develop, knowing that both will learn and change together during the research process. A narrative researcher knows that people and relationships are not static and border bound, and the assumption that the researcher will maintain the stance of a distant, objective observer stifles the research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The second reason for a paradigm shift to narrative inquiry is to collect data through words instead of numbers (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Pinnegar and Daynes stated that numbers identified in “formulas, charts, graphs, and tables” (p. 20) set bounds on the ways of identifying the compassions that surface in an inquiry involving individuals and interactions that evolve. The arguments for the shift from number data to word data are the ability to capture the intricacy of an individual’s behavior; the randomness of assigning a number to opinions, thoughts, and reflections; the ability for the researcher to capture an individual’s interaction with others; and reluctance to trust data that is symbolized by only a number (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The third reason for a paradigm shift toward narrative inquiry is pursuing the value of specific experiences, in a particular arena, with specific people (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The accounts that Pinnegar and Daynes described as examples of the benefits of social science were about women’s issues and African American places of worship in the South. These movements

elevated academic researchers who contributed their stories, which influenced the approaches to research both overtly, by contributing to social scientific suppositions via academic autobiography, and covertly, through the evidence collected from personal stories. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) reiterated that “personal stories added richness to social scientific works . . . narratives became the basis for innovation in theory and presentation of social science” (p. 24).

The fourth and final reason for a paradigm shift toward narrative inquiry is the idea that there are many paths to finding significance and grasping an individual’s experience of the world (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The certifying mark of the significance of narrative inquiry is the idea that interpersonal and interactive collaboration with people is possible in science research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Researchers that utilize narrative inquiry for research know and trust that this qualitative design provides truthfulness and rich discoveries (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Multiple studies of divorce adjustment have examined the phenomena of infidelity, uncoupling, and remarriage and their effects on people of all ages, demographics, and spiritual orientations (Jensen & Bowen, 2015; Krumrei et al., 2009, 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Perrig-Chiello, Hutchison, & Morselli, 2015; Steiner et al., 2011, 2015; Tuttle & Davis, 2015). However, no previous research has explored the specific phenomenon of a Christian non-initiator moving to China to live out the divorce adjustment period.

Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2017) stated that investigations are focusing on individual experiences, predicaments, and singular epiphanies that challenge the norm of research. This research investigation utilized a qualitative-narrative inquiry design with a single participant to understand the phenomenon of a single divorced non-initiator following the pull factor (i.e., the desire to go abroad) and moving to China for the purpose of evangelizing during the divorce

adjustment period. A relationship developed between the researcher and the narrator, words replaced numbers in the data collection, and the personal stories of the narrator corroborated by his family, friends, and CR accountability partner added rich description as well as trustworthiness.

### **Research Questions**

According to Atkinson (2007), specific research questions are not a vital part of a narrative inquiry design, but the questions may be required. The research questions in this study were formulated to target spiritual appraisal and the search for significance. Two foundational studies (Krumrei et al., 2009; Pargament, 2010) provided the footing and attributes to explore spiritual appraisal, divorce adjustment, and the search for significance for the expatriate, single non-initiator. The narrative inquiry gave voice to the participant in answering the following two questions.

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) defined the purpose of a narrative inquiry study as to “study experience as a story” (p. 38). According to Maple and Edwards (2010), listening to the “voices” (p. 34) of the individuals telling life episodes is an optimum way to understand the matters that engulf the narrative story. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China, and to understand how he described the influence of spiritual appraisal, the search for significance, and the expatriate

experience on his divorce adjustment. The study pursued a researcher/participant relationship, incorporated stories as the primary source of data, focused on specifics rather than a broad spectrum or generalization, and acknowledged the importance of epistemologies of knowing with a single individual living in China that were corroborated by his family, friends, and CR accountability partner.

A comprehensive study requires real-time access to the participant involved in the research (Yin, 2014). One ideal demographic for this research was an individual living in Beijing who would have access to a real-time communication network via VPN. Meler (2013) conducted a field study on the topic of divorce among Israeli-Palestinian women and used friendship contacts and coincidental encounters to gain participants. Similarly, this study used the friendship and coincidental encounter approaches to locate the participant.

According to Yin (2014), an “empirical inquiry ... investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (“Twofold Definition,” para. 1). This narrative inquiry gained the real-world framework by collecting the participant’s story through lengthy interviews, interaction with the participant, observations, and corroboration from his family, friends, and CR accountability partner. Pargament (2010) credited religion as a significant contributor to coping with stress. Faith was a contributing factor to the unknown connection between the Christian non-initiator expatriate, his ministry in China, and the new perspective this gave him on divorce adjustment.

The narrative inquiry approach in this study focused mainly on “idiographic” (Morrow, 2005, p. 252) participant interviews corroborated by a selection of family and friends. Lincoln et al. (2017) stated that “new-paradigm inquiries . . . are increasingly concerned with the single

experience, the individual crisis, the epiphany or moment of discovery, with that most powerful to all threats on conventional objectivity, feeling, and emotion to action” (p. 138) and that paradigmatic debates are at the precipice of qualitative methodology, forecasting a hopeful future. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) and Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) mentioned interviews or open-ended conversations, direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator, semistructured analyses, narrator feedback, and documents as tools used to obtain the narrator’s story.

In this narrative study, the focus was on the participant’s life experience of divorce and the themes of sacred loss/desecration, adaptive spiritual coping, and spiritual struggle that threaded through his experience of expatriating to China during the divorce adjustment period. Open-ended questions developed from the Sacred Loss and Desecration and RCOPE documents guided the beginning stages of the semistructured interview process. The interview questions focused on the spiritual aspects of the phenomenon and how each interview fit into the episodes of the whole story. Direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by the researcher and narrators, semistructured analyses, narrator feedback, and documents were also used as sources of data. Yin (2014) recommended having the mindset that data collection is from real-world events, which calls for adaptability and adjustment according to the situation and the participant’s response. The final evidence of the phenomenon came from the corroboration of the participant’s family, friends, and CR accountability partner.

Before the narrative design was chosen, the plan was to use a case study design. Unfortunately, not enough participants were available to explore the data, which led to the paradigm shift to narrative inquiry. This shift allowed for a relationship with the participant, incorporating words into data findings instead of statistics, focusing on specifics rather than a

broad spectrum or generalization, and acknowledgment of different epistemologies or ways of knowing.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

A narrative inquiry collects stories from an individual and involves a great deal of interaction between the researcher and the individual telling the stories (Creswell, 2013). The storyteller in this narrative research was a single Christian American white male, approximately 60 years old, the non-initiator of a gray divorce, who moved to China via a mission organization because of the altruistic pull factor to evangelize.

The individual centered in this research was part of the gray divorce population, which is the highest contributor to divorce statistics in the 21st century. Brown and Lin (2012) gave the statistic that one out of four divorces in 2010 were gray divorces. The narrator told his story of working as a single expatriate in China and the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment. The narrative also incorporated verification of the story episodes from friends, family, and the narrator's CR accountability partner.

**Sampling method.** Creswell (2013) stated that a narrative inquiry optimally encapsulates the meticulous life experiences of a single narrator participant. Morrow (2005) stated that sampling in qualitative research is concretely "purposeful . . . criterion-based" (p. 255). The friendship and coincidental encounter methods were used to find the participant. The sources for verification came from the narrator's intimate circle of friends, family, and colleagues. The participant and the corroborators provided purposeful, rich, descriptive data on the phenomenon of a non-initiator of a gray divorce moving to China.

## **Instrumentation**

According to De Clerck, Willems, Timmerman, and Carling (2011), there are three attributes that a social scientist ought to possess to construct a purposeful qualitative research outcome: developing a rapport with the participants effortlessly, being perceptive of their environment, and not hesitating to ask questions that generate a learning experience. McCormack (2004) acknowledged that narrative inquiry commonly involves an in-depth conversation between the researcher and participant. The audio recordings of these conversations then need to be turned into interview transcripts, which are coded to track the themes threaded through the life episodes of the participant. The open-ended questions were adapted from the Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale and the RCOPE (see Appendices A and B). The positive and negative interview questions focused on the spiritual aspects of the phenomenon and how the narrative fit into the episodes of the whole story. Direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrators, semistructured analyses, narrator's feedback, and documents also contributed evidence (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated that collecting observational field notes on the participant in a common setting of both the researcher and narrator is considered a major tool in qualitative-narrative design (see Appendix E).

## **Data Collection**

The data collection started with the audio recording of a semistructured interview utilizing the guided questions found in Appendices A and B and direct structured observation field notes. Yin (2014) cautioned that shared stories could potentially involve moral quandaries as well as dealing with other conflicts. Thus, the researcher adhered to the attributes of asking good questions, being a good listener, adopting an adaptive attitude, cultivating a firm grasp of

the issues, and avoiding biases during the interview process (Yin, 2014). McCormack (2004) and Yin (2014) suggested engaging in extended interviews that take place at various times.

The first semistructured interview recording was transcribed and the written story was returned to the narrator as part of what Creswell (2013), Loh (2013), and Morse (2017) referred to as *member checking* for reflection, review, corrections, and clarification. The narrator's documents and interview transcripts were used to validate and divide the story into episodes for organizational purposes. In the second interview, the member check of the transcript was discussed, and explicit questions were asked to obtain details related to the spiritual appraisals and search for significant themes in each episode. The second interview also provided continuous observation opportunities. Like the first interview, the second interview was then member checked.

Beyond the open-ended questions in the semistructured interviews and direct structured observation with field notes, the researcher engaged in critical whole-text analyses and semistructured analyses, and examined narrator feedback as well as documents created by the narrator. The narrator's feedback involved what Bluck and Habermas (2001) called "autobiographical reasoning" (p. 136), which is the ability of the participant to reflect and draw learned conclusions from life episodes. Baddeley and Singer (2007) stated that life episodes have "moments of discontinuity . . . held together by causal coherence and thematic coherence" (p. 183). Causal coherence is the linking of episodes to personal beliefs, attributes, and inclinations, whereas thematic coherence is an umbrella of episodes that tie together attributes of kindness, faithfulness, and hopefulness when facing traumatic times. The feedback, which included autobiographical reasoning, causal coherence, and thematic coherence, added to the rich description of the narrator's life episodes.

Once the interviews were transcribed and member checked, the narrative and observation field notes were coded verbatim for “essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute of a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Appendix C is a flow chart demonstrating the steps in data collection with the narrator as well as the people selected to corroborate the narrator’s story.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The attributes that guided this narrative and created the framework of this story were based upon the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010), who researched the unrecognized importance of religion in managing stress. The narrative in this research built a chronological foundation applying the spiritual appraisal of sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping connected to divorce and the positive and negative attributes associated with divorce adjustment (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). The narrative shifted when the narrator moved to China and embraced Pargament’s (2010) search for significance pathways.

According to De Clerck et al. (2011), there are three attributes that social scientists ought to possess to construct a purposeful qualitative research outcome. They should have the skill to develop a rapport with the participants effortlessly, be perceptive of their environment, and not hesitate in asking questions that generate a learning experience. The researcher in this study also took into consideration and adhered to the attributes of asking good questions, being a good listener, adopting an adaptive attitude, cultivating a firm grasp of the issues, and avoiding biases during the interview process.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Polkinghorne (1995), there are two kinds of narrative inquiry structures: “analysis of narrative and narrative analysis” (p. 5). McCormack (2004) defined analysis of narrative as “where researchers seek stories as data and then analyze those stories for themes” and narrative analysis as “gathering descriptions of actions and events as data that are then used to generate stories through a process of emplotment” (p. 220). In other words, in analysis of narrative, the researcher pursues the individual’s everyday life narrative and finds commonalities and themes, whereas narrative analysis is the compiling of themes or episodes that produce a narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995).

In this study, both analysis of narrative and narrative analysis were used to understand how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment. The inquiry drew on semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions, direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator, semistructured analyses, and narrator feedback to develop a knowing and understanding of spiritual coping with an unwanted divorce, the journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and the search for significance by leaning on God (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Pargament, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

After recording the first interview, the researcher transcribed the spoken story verbatim and returned the story to the narrator for member checking. In this type of research, it is essential for the narrator to review the document and the analyses to propose alternative assessments of the data (Loh, 2013). In the second interview, the researcher and narrator engaged in critical

whole-text analyses, jointly scrutinizing the language of the initial conversation recording for the following:

- Word groupings . . . that indicate a relationship of self and society (e.g., *of course*)
- Words that assume common understanding or uncontested knowledge, or signal a request for understanding (e.g., *you know*);
- Words that make space for thought (e.g., *um*)
- Specialized vocabulary
- Words participant uses to talk about . . . self image (McCormack, 2004, p. 225)

McCormack (2004) also addressed unspoken words that come from pauses, talking speed, variations in voice and sound, and emotional quivers, which create reflection and clarification. The narrator and researcher applied these steps to create an authentic written version of the recorded conversation through a semistructured analysis.

### **Limitations and Delimitations for Research Design**

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) stated that limitations come from the researcher's "expertise, knowledge, and intuition" ("Limitations of Case Studies"), and the fact that narrative inquiry is the narrator telling life episodes to a researcher while each filters the told story through the lenses of culture instincts, background knowledge, and religious perceptions. McMullen and Braithwaite (2013) drew attention to three other limitations on narrative research. The first limitation is the assumption that the narrator's story stands as truth rather than viewing the episodes of the story through the "social and cultural context" (McMullen & Braithwaite, 2013) p. 102). The second limitation is locating a participant willing to divulge life episodes in a comprehensible study rather than as a statistical number. The third is the balance between the process of proving a theory and forfeiting the lucid quality of the narrator's story.

One of this study's delimitations is that it was confined to the story episodes of one narrator, a single Christian non-initiator of a gray divorce responding to the altruistic pull factor to move to China (Creswell, 2013). The purposeful boundaries of a specific monotheistic religion, Christianity, and a narrow focus on gray divorce sequestered a particular narrative. Another clear demarcation was attributing the altruistic pull factor as the call of God.

How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one who they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14–15 NIV)

The narrative inquiry method of research focuses on specifics rather than generalizations and is defined as a phenomenon rather than typical (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). The limitations and delimitations kept this qualitative-narrative inquiry bound to the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China, describing the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment.

### **Validation**

The narrative analysis, which centered on the spiritual appraisal data found in the Sacred Loss and Desecration and RCOPE documents and the search for significance, needed to be underscored in describing the actions and events in the life episodes of the narrator. The narrator's story episodes were examined for clarity and validation not only by the narrator, but by four other people, including friends, family, and the narrator's Celebrate Recovery (CR) accountability partner. The narrator's extensive journal was also consulted. Ochs and Capps (1997) stated that trustworthiness hangs in part upon the believability of a sequence of unbiased events and whether they can be corroborated.

Dahler-Larsen (2017) stated that “qualitative evaluators are walking a fine line in arguing about exactly how trustworthy” (p. 188) evaluative data can be. Qualitative evaluation is a challenging investigatory practice that entails “conflict . . . pressure for change . . . perceived quality in the evaluation . . . how surprising the findings” (Dahler-Larsen, 2017, p. 882). Morrow (2005) challenged those that question the validity of data due to the researcher’s personal attachment to the topic, assumptions formed from writing the literature review, and the time collaborating with the narrator. Morrow argued that it is the saturation of literature in the phenomenon that prevents bias. To further avoid all personal feelings about the topic and the collaboration, qualitative researchers “attempt to approach their endeavor reflexively” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254).

Reflexivity, according to Richardson and St. Pierre (2017), is in “post-structuralism [which] . . . links language, subjectivity, and social organization” (p. 820), and which comes out of postmodernism. It is in the language, which is the most important of the three, that post-structuralism guides the qualitative researcher to self-reflect and eliminates the demand to construct a one-time document for all. The idea is for the researcher to create a reflexive journal in the narrative inquiry design to enhance the understanding of the research. The validation comes from the narrative writing as a way of knowing through cultivating the personal “voice” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 821).

Morse (2015) listed the approaches that warranted trustworthiness; the approaches used in this narrative study were “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and thick, rich description . . . peer review . . . member checking” (p. 1214) as well as the participant’s extensive journal. The researcher spent extended periods of time with the participant to get to

know him and develop a trust factor. These encounters allowed for semistructured interviews and direct structural observation to generate richer and deeper data.

Once a trusting relationship developed between the researcher and participant, the interviews took on a less structured format and the participant elaborated on the episodes at his own pace. Each interview was followed with a transcript that was returned to the narrator for reflection, review, corrections, and clarification, or “member checking” (Creswell, 2013, p. 54). McCormack (2004) suggested that upon return of the written story, these questions should be addressed:

- Does what I have written make sense to you?
- How does this account compare with your experience?
- Have any aspects of your experience been omitted?
- Do you wish to remove any aspect(s) of your experience from this text?
- Please feel free to make any other comments. (p. 224)

These questions were used as a deliberate process to make sure the story was told in his intended voice. The episodes were shared with the participant’s family, friends, and accountability partner during further semistructured interviews to corroborate the facts of each episode and to add essential events (see Appendix D for interview questions). The peer review process will occur when the story is presented as part of the whole dissertation document to the committee for edits and clarification.

### **Ethical Issues of Study**

Josselson (2007) defined the ethical attitude toward narrative inquiry as the moral duty to guard the confidentiality and self-respect of the participant who is allowing the researcher to investigate life episodes that provide knowledge in a scholarly arena. According to the National

Research Council (2003), researchers should adhere to three basic moral standards when dealing with participants: “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice” (p. 23). The National Research Council (2003) listed the “Belmont principles in designing and reviewing protocols and monitoring ongoing research . . . Informed Consent, Assessment of Harms, Risk, and Benefits, Fair Selection of Research Participants, and Confidentiality Protection” (pp. 24–26).

According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012) a researcher should “pick a topic . . . that peaks your curiosity” (p. 2). Ethan’s story parallels particular life episodes of this researcher, which provided an incentive to discover what was known about a non-initiator of divorce and the paucity in the research. Thus understanding this connection and possible conflict of interest, the researcher adhered to the attributes of asking good questions, being a good listener, adopting an adaptive attitude, cultivating a firm grasp of the issues, and avoiding biases during the interview process (Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) stated that it is the norm to obtain permission from an institutional review board (IRB), which in this case was that of Concordia University–Portland. Concordia University required the completion and acceptance of the IRB documents to ensure the anonymity of the participant and the corroborators that contributed to the narrative. Part of the IRB documentation procedure was obtaining consent form signatures from the interviewees guaranteeing the confidentiality of the interview scripts and anonymity of the participants using pseudonyms. To ensure credibility in the transcript and data output and avoid researcher bias and conflict of interest, member checking was included, as documented in Appendix C. The interview scripts will be stored on a computer in China for three years. There were no other foreseen risks involved in this narrative design study.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative-narrative inquiry was to explore how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment. The investigation sought to understand the phenomenon of a gray divorced non-initiator following the altruistic pull factor, or call of God, and moving to China for the purpose of evangelizing during divorce adjustment. This biographical study used multiple data collection approaches, including open-ended semistructured interviews, direct structured observation and field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator, semistructured analyses, and narrator feedback. Also, trustworthiness was ensured via the corroboration of the episodes by four people close to the narrator, his CR accountability partner, and the participant's extensive journal. The results provided evidence of the influence of sacred loss/desecration, adaptive spiritual coping, spiritual struggle, and the search for significance on a Christian non-initiator working in China.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

### Introduction

This study using narrative inquiry design methodology explored how the non-initiator of a gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on his divorce adjustment. The episodes in Ethan's (pseudonym) lived experience gave voice to the phenomenon of a single divorcé following the pull factor (i.e., the desire to go abroad) and moving to China to follow the pathway of evangelism during his divorce adjustment. Ethan stated in the interview:

I was living in a borrowed house [and] my stuff in storage. I had no job . . . [and] a stack of rejection letters from churches . . . David [missionary in China] came to me and said, "Have you ever thought about China?" So it was the one open door that I had to continue in ministry. And I viewed that as God's hand.

Five individuals, who contributed rich and thick description as well as trustworthiness, corroborated the episodes in Ethan's story.

This investigation developed through a researcher/participant relationship. Stories collected via semistructured interviews and Ethan's journal entries were the primary source of data. The narrative inquiry data focused on specifics rather than generalizations, and acknowledged the importance of epistemologies of knowing Ethan's complete description of life events and how his episodes synthesized into the whole story (Chase, 2017). Capturing the details of Ethan's behavior, feelings, and thoughts, as well as observing his relationship with his new environment, life, society, and world as it encompassed the spiritual appraisal and search for significance during the divorce adjustment, gave credence to an alternative path after divorce.

This narrative inquirer discovered the complexities of the specific experiences echoed through Ethan's story via semistructured interviews. To ensure creditability within the data, member checking was included. Ethan's journals, observation field notes, and corroborative semistructured interviews with family, friends, and his CR mentor were added forms of data collection meriting truthfulness with rich and thick descriptions.

Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) reported that over the past 20 years, divorce momentum has increased twofold among those over 35, with an even more dramatic increase in divorce for those 50 and older. Banschick (2012) and Wevorce (2017) reported that 67% of second marriages end up in divorce. Ethan's story is an alternative to repartnering and serial marriages in divorce adjustment that illuminated the paucity in the literature and the need to hear such a story. This narrative inquiry examined Ethan's divorce adjustment construct, and was guided by the following two questions.

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

Interviews with Ethan utilizing open-ended semistructured questions, direct structured observation with field notes, critical whole-text analyses by researcher and narrator, semistructured analyses, narrator feedback, and Ethan's journal were the sources of data that developed a knowing and understanding of Ethan's spiritual coping with an unwanted divorce, his journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and his search for significance by leaning on God. This narrative inquiry design study also incorporated five corroborators to

verify the episodes in Ethan's story, as well as referring to Ethan's journal and a reflexive journal kept by the researcher.

After transcribing the interviews, returning them for member checking, and critical whole-text analyses with the narrator's feedback, all documents were coded to achieve "analytic memo reflection" (Saldana, 2016, p. 77). Incorporating all these components in the process of giving voice to Ethan's story illuminated the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance in the divorce adjustment period of his life.

### **Description of the Sample**

After this narrative inquirer heard Ethan preach a testimonial sermon on a Sunday morning in China, a researcher/participant relationship developed. The goal established for this study was developing an understanding of how a non-initiator described the influence of spiritual appraisal, search for significance, and the expatriate experience on divorce adjustment in China. Ethan became the subject of this narrative research. He was a Christian, Caucasian American male non-initiator who remained single after the divorce. He was approximately 60 years old, falling into the gray divorce age bracket, and moved to China via a mission organization.

Due to added requirements for the verification of Ethan's story-episodes, four people from his circle of friends, family, and colleagues, and his CR mentor participated in semistructured interviews conducted face-to-face and over the Internet. Each individual was identified as a corroborator and received a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

Corroborator 1, Lucy (pseudonym), a Caucasian American woman in her 70s, contributed to the authenticity of the narrative. Lucy is one of Ethan's siblings and a member of the same religious denomination, and she works in the field of mental illness. She holds secondary education in the medical field.

Corroborator 2, Glen (pseudonym), is a Caucasian American man in his 70s. Ethan and Glen knew each other in college. Glen is also a member of the same religious denomination as Ethan. He was Ethan's accountability partner as required by the church during Ethan's disciplinary period. Glen is retired from a leadership position in the church; his highest level of education is a Ph.D.

Corroborator 3, Peter (pseudonym), is a Caucasian American man in his 40s. Peter is one of Ethan's children and is also a member of the same religious denomination. Peter works in the missions department for the denomination, and his highest level of education is a BA.

Corroborator 4, Brian (pseudonym), is a Caucasian American man in his 70s. Brian is also a member of the same religious denomination as Ethan. Brian retired from a leadership position and became involved with the CR organization. Ethan joined Brian's CR group, and Brian became Ethan's mentor. Brian had the full knowledge of and insight into Ethan's story and was quoted more frequently than the other four corroborators.

Corroborator 5, Lacy (pseudonym), is a Caucasian American woman in her 40s. She is one of Ethan's siblings, an independent business owner and the founder of a nonprofit organization. Lacy's highest level of education is a high school diploma. Lacy gave an extensive interview, but mysteriously the interview did not save to the recording device. After discovering this error, the researcher immediately recorded a reflexive journal entry recalling much of her interview content and observation. Due to this mistake, the researcher petitioned the IRB to add Peter to the cohort of corroborators. These corroborators added rich and thick description as well as trustworthiness (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

## **Research Methodology and Analysis**

This study used the qualitative-narrative design to tell the story and hear the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China, describing the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his divorce adjustment. Developing this study required a deeper research/participant relationship beyond the acquaintance relationship established in Beijing. After the IRB document authorization, semistructured face-to-face interviews with Ethan and two of the five corroborators were conducted over 3 days in July 2018.

The narrative in this research built a chronological foundation applying the spiritual appraisal of sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping connected to divorce and the positive and negative attributes associated with divorce adjustment (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). The data collected to build a chronological foundation came in part from interviews with Ethan. The open-ended questions that targeted the spiritual appraisal of adaptive spiritual coping and spiritual struggle guided the first semistructured interview. The second part of Ethan's semistructured interview was guided by the questions targeting sacred loss/desecration. Hawley and Mahoney (2013) defined sacred loss as losing something considered a testimony to God, and desecration as a violation of something blessed by God, such as a marriage vow.

After the semistructured interviews with Ethan and two of the corroborators, time was spent getting to know Ethan's environment and how he related to his family and acquaintances. During the 3 days, meals were shared, and Ethan gave a tour of his hometown, led a Bible study, and attended a CR meeting with the researcher. The observation of the CR meeting demonstrated the impact this organization had on Ethan's spiritual struggle and spiritual coping appraisal.

The 14 identical open-ended semistructured questions asked of Ethan guided the corroborators' interviews as well. The interview questions focused on the spiritual aspects in the episodes of Ethan's story. The corroborators' answers reinforced, highlighted, and clarified the episodes of the whole story. As previously mentioned, the days spent with Ethan included watching the interaction among family members, three of whom were also corroborators. Observations and field notes from the events were recorded utilizing Delabrer's (2017) Structured Observational Field Notes form.

Data were obtained from Ethan and the five corroborators (three individuals face-to-face and two individuals over skype) via semistructured interviews utilizing 14 open-ended questions. The interviews with the CR mentor and the second corroborator occurred via the Internet. Appendix C is a flowchart demonstrating the steps in data collection with Ethan as well as the five corroborators selected to validate his story.

Other documents used in the verification of Ethan's narrative included an extensive journal and the researcher's reflexive journal. The interviews, documents, observations, field notes, and reflexive journal were coded "verbatim" (Saldana, 2016, p. 105) to track the themes threaded through Ethan's life episodes. The verbatim coding highlighted the two main themes, spiritual appraisal and search for significance. The spiritual appraisal theme questions focused on the spiritual struggle and spiritual coping of the divorce. The verbatim coding consisted of direct quotes taken from the corroborator interviews and Ethan's interview and journal. The verbatim coding quotes identified the episodes of spiritual struggle and spiritual coping as voiced by each interviewee's answers to the 14 semistructured questions and Ethan's journal. The search for significance theme was also coded verbatim. The verbatim coding illuminated the individual corroborators' passionate explanations of the episodes in Ethan's story.

## **Presentation of the Data and Results**

This narrative inquiry focused on the spiritual appraisals and search for significance in the whole story of Ethan's divorce adjustment. The point of this dissertation was to answer two research questions:

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

This chapter presents the "restorying" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 330) of raw data obtained from the open-ended questions, which framed Ethan and the five corroborators' semistructured interviews. Data were also acquired from Ethan's journal and the researcher's observation field notes. These data generated support and substantiated Ethan's whole story to create a "framework that makes sense" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

The presentation of the data included a timeline of events restoryed chronologically, which "provided a causal link among ideas" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 330) and logically developed the episodes in Ethan's story. The verbatim coding of the five interviews and Ethan's journal supported Ethan's chronological timeline of events. The coding also generated emergent themes that aligned with the chronological timeline of the events in this narrative inquiry.

This restorying confirmed the rich and thick description as well as the trustworthiness of the spiritual appraisals connected to the positive and negative elements associated with Ethan's divorce adjustment. Ochs and Capps (1997) stated that trustworthiness hangs in part upon the believability of a sequence of unbiased events and whether they can be corroborated. The

corroboration of Ethan’s narrative to build trustworthiness came from the interviews of five people associated with Ethan’s story, Ethan’s journal, observation field notes, and the reflexive journal kept by the researcher.

Table 1

*Ethan’s Divorce Timeline*

Month/Year	Event
June 2008	Discovery of pornography addiction
June 2008–March 2009	Nine months of marital conflict
March 2009	Mother-in-law passes away
April 2009	Ecclesiastical trial
	Hospitalization
	Contemplated suicide
Late April 2009	The incriminating letter
April/May 2009	Confession to family
June 2009–May 2010	Christian Step Program
July 2011	Divorce process begins
May 2012	Divorce finalized
June 2012	Invitation to China
July 2012–Jan 2014	Approvals and fundraising
Jan 2013–July 2014	China

**Timeline.** Table 1 sets the episodes of Ethan’s story in a chronological timeline. Direct quotes from the interviews and Ethan’s journal are then provided to describe each event on the timeline. The discovery of his addiction to pornography was the shattering event that started

Ethan's story, the first episode that catapulted his life into the depths of spiritual depravity, which eventually led to the "saving of his soul" and leaning on God.

***Discovery of pornography addiction.*** Ethan wrote in his journal:

One June day I was supposed to be working on an eight-day Bible study for a family camp. But I was surfing the web for porn when my wife walked into my home office and saw the porn on the screen. From there life cascaded into five years of chaos that ultimately led to my wife filing for and being granted a divorce. It was also the last day I used pornography.

***Nine months of marital conflict.*** Ethan wrote in the journal:

We fought for nine months over whether or not I should confess. During that time I worked with a therapist to unravel my addiction and try to find answers to my problem. I engaged a service to monitor my computer for pornography and notify an accountability partner if I relapsed. We changed the setting on our cable TV and my wife set the security code so I could not access inappropriate channels. I begged my wife for another chance. I explained how much we had to lose and tried to convince her that my sin was really just between the two of us. I pleaded with her to understand the pain we would experience and the professional, financial, and personal devastation that would come with my confession. She would have none of it.

***Mother-in-law passes away.*** Ethan wrote in the journal:

During this time my wife's mother, who lived with us, was dying with cancer. We agreed that there was no reason to burden her with my sin or our crisis. But, after my mother-in-law's death, my wife declared that if I didn't confess she would report my porn addiction

to the church authorities. Ultimately, I relented and confessed. I was held accountable for my sin, suspended from ministry for a year, and asked to resign.

***Ecclesiastical trial.*** Ethan wrote some sections of his journal in third-person story form for anonymity's sake, although his objective to publish them never solidified. One of these is the section that details his trial:

In the spring of 2009, he [Ethan] stood in the hall outside the conference room waiting for his trial to begin. The opening lines of Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* floated through his mind. "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Well, Dickens was half right. This was truly the worst of times.

When it was over he was no longer a respected, highly placed clergyman. He was a defrocked minister, removed from his position and facing the humiliation of the public revelation of his failures. They offered and he accepted their standard restoration plan. But he knew what they knew. He would never be truly restored. He might get his ordination back but he'd never hold a responsible position in the church hierarchy again, he'd never get his reputation back and he'd never truly be part of their community again. They'd keep his name on the list, pat themselves on the back, and talk about how good they were to him. But from that day on he was an exile.

***Contemplated suicide.*** Ethan wrote in his journal:

The next weeks were spent in the depths of depression to a degree that I had never known and hope to never pass through again. It was the closest thing to hell I can imagine. One day when my wife was at work, I walked to the basement, opened the gun safe, chambered a round in a rifle, sat down, rested the shoulder stock on the floor and my chin on the muzzle, and put my thumb on the trigger.

***The incriminating letter.*** Ethan wrote in the journal, “Because I held a prominent position in the state office, a letter describing my failure and explaining my removal was sent to every minister of my denomination in [state]. Colleagues in the national church were similarly notified.” Ethan also described this in his interview as “to lose . . . being highly placed in [state] and recognized in the national church in a variety of ways . . . to go from that to being pariah.”

***Confession to the family.*** Ethan wrote in his journal, “Ultimately I confessed my sin to my children, my siblings, my extended family, and most painfully to my 88-year-old mother and asked for their forgiveness.” Lucy, one of Ethan’s siblings, spoke of this meeting in her interview:

[Ethan] had a family meeting . . . it was gut-wrenching. He wept and apologized to all of us. He said to us that he needed to go to all of the nieces and nephews . . . [we] kind of said you don’t have to do this. We’ll handle it with our own children. We don’t want you to have to keep the agony of that kind of confession to every single one of us. Let us take some of that on for you. I’ve never seen repentance, what I saw as described as Godly sorrow. I never saw it like I saw it in him.

***Christian Step Program.*** Ethan wrote in his journal:

In the depths of this struggle a friend mentioned [Brian] and Christian Step Program. His son had dealt with an addiction to pornography and [Brian] and Christian Step Program had helped him. I had known [Brian] in my “former life.” Our daughters attended and graduated from the same Christian High School. We had attended the same church. There were a lot of reasons I didn’t want to talk to [Brian]. But I was desperate. So I called. [Brian] met me for lunch, explained that he had walked through the same struggle I was facing, helped me understand Christian Step Program and invited me to join a “step

study” with a group of men struggling with the same addiction. The rest as they say is history.

Coming clean and the opportunity to be open and honest about my addiction changed everything. We really are as sick as our secrets. The opportunity to confess and be held accountable in a safe, open, loving environment was one of the healthiest things I had ever experienced. It changed how I saw God, myself and the church. I found a richness of grace, forgiveness and healing I never thought possible as I worked the steps and followed the principles. That year long step study was absolutely essential to my recovery and to rediscovering the joy of knowing Jesus and finding hope for the future.

I am thankful for my accountability partner, other friends who encouraged me along the way and the therapists I worked with. I believe they were part of God’s grace to me and I am forever in their debt. I am glad my denomination has a restoration plan and does not just throw people like me away. That too, is God’s grace. I am thankful for a wise and skilled physician who properly diagnosed and treated my depression.

But, without a doubt the most significant part of my recovery was [Brian], that group of men, the CR step study and now the weekly CR meeting. Without them I would not be here. I frankly don’t know where I’d be. I don’t know if I’d still be alive.

Working the program gave me what I needed most. It gave me a systematic way to face my “demons” in the context of supportive friends who had the courage to look me in the eye and hold me accountable for my attitudes and actions. Each step, in its own way met a specific need in my life, at the right time and in the right way. Working the steps and following the principles enabled me to see a path forward, address issues and then, when I was ready, take the next step. For years I had seen no way out of my

addiction. In Christian Step Program I encountered a ministry that gave me a process I could work, hope I could indeed recover and people who would walk with me. I didn't have to do it alone. CR was my "light at the end of the tunnel."

Perhaps the most significant principle and step for me were the first that make the same critical point. *"Realize that I am not God and that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life has become unmanageable."* (Principle #1) *"We admit we are powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors. That our lives have become unmanageable."* (Step #1)

I had believed for so long that the solution to my addiction rested in my self-control, my strength and my self-discipline. Of course that wasn't true. I failed again and again and again. When I failed I blamed myself. That guilt and blame contributed to my despair and depression and became a trigger for more pornography. I came to realize and ultimately admitted that of all the lies I believed the lie of self-reliance was the worst. It is the first lie Satan told our ancestors. It is the lie that we can be like God and do for ourselves what God alone can do.

It wasn't until I was completely broken by my failure and completely devoid of any hope in my own ability that I finally realized and admitted I couldn't set myself free. My life really was unmanageable. I really was powerless. Continuing that pattern was simply insane. Only God could return me to my right mind. The realization of my utter dependence on God was completely contrary to my culturally defined conception of what it means to be a man and sadly much of what I took from my religious upbringing. It freed me to rest from my striving and relax in His grace and power.

It was that dependence on God that most enabled me to meet the challenges of each successive step. Again and again I turned to God and reminded Him (and me) that I was powerless and my life was unmanageable. My life was chaotic and out of control and I needed His help. Again and again He did exactly that. He helped me take that next step on the road to recovery and then take the next.

***Divorce process begins.*** Ethan wrote in one section of his journal:

Wife has at least three options; one, to separate and divorce, two, to maintain the status quo, or three, to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation. It strikes me that as painful and destructive as separation and divorce are to both of us, our children, grandchildren, family, and future and finances, it is her easiest choice. This is a perspective, with which she would not agree.

Easiest, because it allows her to focus on my faults and failures, see herself as the victim and excuse her own conduct. It also allows her minimize her failings because my sin is a worse sin than hers. To do so she must re-write my life and our life together, turn me into a sick and irredeemable monster from which she must escape.

It is now a full on assault to re-define me in every way, to exaggerate my failings, paint herself as the suffering victim who did all she could to hold the marriage together while I failed at every turn.

In another section of his journal, Ethan wrote:

Unfortunately after four years of struggling to rebuild our broken life and marriage my wife filed for and was granted divorce. During those years we attended marital counseling and took other steps to restore our marriage. We worked hard to overcome the damage my failure did to our marriage. Despite those efforts the pain I inflicted on her

ultimately proved more than she could bear. While the divorce was not my choice I understand that she felt she could not go on and had to escape what had become a very toxic situation. I am not angry and I try to consistently pray for her recovery from the damage my failure caused and from the damage of other hurts in her life. I hope and pray that she finds the joy of recovery I've found.

***Divorce finalized.*** Another third-person section of Ethan's journal details the events of the divorce:

It had taken seven months. The night before the divorce he laid awake praying, hoping for a last minute reprieve. Maybe she would have a last minute change of heart. But when the judge asked if there was any possibility of reconciliation her answer was a clear, resolute and irrevocable, "No." The judge slapped her gavel on the desk and wished them both well . . . While he waited for a break in the traffic to clear he had one clear thought, "What the hell am I going to do now?" He decided to live not die, fight not quit, run to God and not away from him.

**Data and results.** This section of the study presents the data collected from interviews, Ethan's journal, and observation field notes to support Ethan's narrative (Pargament et al., 2011). Brief RCOPE survey was referenced to generate the interview guide and was used to present the data from the interviews, journals, and field notes. The statements that guided the data presentation appeared first, and then under the heading statements, the restorying of the verbatim coding of the data from the interviews, journal, and observation field notes emerged. Below are the interview guide statements:

- Looked for a stronger connection with God.
- Sought God's love and care.

- Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.
- Tried to put my plans into action together with God.
- Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.
- Asked forgiveness for my sins.
- Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.
- Wondered whether God had abandoned me.
- Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.
- Wondered what I did for God to punish me.
- Questioned God's love for me.
- Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.
- Decided the devil made this happen.
- Questioned the power of God. (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57)

Under each interview guide statement, the restorying of Ethan's narrative from the verbatim coding of the interviews, journals, and observation field notes ensued.

***Looked for a stronger connection with God.*** The event that triggered Ethan's transformative connection to God was the discovery of his addiction to pornography. Ethan wrote in his journal:

As an ordained minister for more than 30 years I struggled with an addiction to pornography. My life was a seemingly endless circle of binging, guilt, repentance, abstinence, struggle and ultimately returning to my addiction. I lied, hid and kept the secret from everyone. I was terrified that my use of pornography would be discovered and that my wife, my family and the church would hold me accountable.

The eventual exposure of the addiction initiated the loss of Ethan's career and the gradual death of his marriage. Ethan's journal includes a description of this moment:

One June day I was supposed to be working on an eight-day bible study for a family camp. But I was surfing the web for porn when my wife walked into my home office and saw the porn on the screen. From there life cascaded into five years of chaos that ultimately led to my wife filing for and being granted a divorce.

Just after the discovery of the pornography addiction, Ethan's wife demanded transparency to the denominational authorities. Ethan explained his struggle with her:

We fought for nine months over whether or not I should confess. During that time I worked with a therapist to unravel my addiction and try to find answers to my problem . . . I pleaded with her to understand the pain we would experience and the professional, financial and personal devastation that would come with the confession. She would have none of it.

This single event and all the ramifications that followed gave Ethan the "real sense God not only saved my soul in an eschatological sense but also in a deeply personal sense of my identity, character, and sense of who I am and whom I was created to be."

Ethan confessed his addiction to the denominational authorities, as written in the journal:

On the day I faced my "ecclesiastical trial" and received the discipline of the church I broke physically . . . The next weeks were spent in the depths of depression to a degree that I had never known and hope to never pass through again.

Corroborator Lucy commented on Ethan's relationship to God throughout the unraveling of the ramifications of his addiction to pornography: "[Ethan's] determination to serve God no

matter what. This is what I heard all the way through . . . the recurring theme. Though he slay me yet will I trust him.”

Peter, one of Ethan’s children, acknowledged that these events caused Ethan to develop a stronger dependency on God than ever before. This newfound trust in God had profoundly affected Peter:

[Ethan] absolutely is a hero. He is absolutely someone I have looked up to all of my life. And even though the way he walked through the pornographic situation, the way he walked through the divorce. I just have a tremendous amount of respect and I want to honor him in that walk with grace.

Ethan confessed his addiction and went through an ecclesiastical trial. The sentence handed down at the trial “suspended [Ethan] from ministry for a year and asked [him] to resign.”

Ethan wrote in a third-person journal entry:

When it was over he was no longer a respected, highly placed clergyman. He was a defrocked minister, removed from his position and facing the humiliation of the public revelation of his failures. They offered and he accepted their standard restoration plan. But he knew what they knew. He would never be truly restored. He might get his ordination back but he’d never hold a responsible position in the church hierarchy again, he’d never get his reputation back and he’d never truly be part of their community again. They’d keep his name on the list, pat themselves on the back and talk about how good they were to him. But from that day on he was an exile.

During the time of his suspension, Ethan met with Brian, who led a CR group. Brian became Ethan’s mentor during this time. Brian stated in the interview:

Ethan contacting me [Brian] and I welcomed him to join us [CR]. Ethan repents, confesses and acknowledges that and asks for forgiveness . . . I really believe that the moment of clarity, the moment of real freedom and hope for the future, was when Ethan did tell his employer.

Ethan described his initial experience entering CR in the journal:

Coming clean and the opportunity to be open and honest about my addiction changed everything. We really are as sick as our secrets . . . The opportunity to confess and be held accountable in a safe, open, loving environment was one of the healthiest things I had ever experienced. It changed how I saw God, myself and the church. I found a richness of grace, forgiveness and healing . . . and to rediscovering the joy of knowing Jesus and finding hope for the future.

Some of the corroborators commented on Ethan's entering the CR program and the closer connection it brought to God. His sister Lucy said that she "saw God's faithfulness . . . [in] the CR program that he was in. I think those people rallied around him." Peter, Ethan's son, said, "the whole CR cycle piece of his life . . . was hugely significant."

*Sought God's love and care.* Before the pornography addiction was discovered, Ethan described in his journal the struggle he lived with, knowing he walked on the tightrope of a divided life:

As the dissonance between my public life and private sin grew more and more intense I became more and more depressed, fearful and emotionally distant from those I loved and those who loved me. In the end, I resigned myself to the notion that this was my lot. Life would always be this way and I would never be truly free. All I could do was hide my

addiction, put on a brave and hypocritical public face and keep going. Despair was my constant companion.

To combat this companion of despair, Ethan took three specific actions to seek God's love and care after the pornography addiction was discovered, which he described in the interview:

I took a spiritual retreat. I went to a Catholic retreat center and did a three-day fast and prayer because . . . I knew that spiritually, if I did not reconnect spiritually, I was going to be hard pressed to survive . . . I attended a church not of my denomination.

Glen, a colleague and mentor of Ethan's, commented in his interview on attending another church:

I know he got connected with a pastor in a church in the area that again I think similar to me. [Ethan] was seeing this guy on a regular basis. I think he was attending his church ... this fella just really continued to help [Ethan] see his value and help him work through a lot of issues that were there ... ongoing regrets that what had happened ... sorrow ... what things he had done to his former wife, kids, reputation, you could see that fact that God was with him.

Ethan's third action was joining CR, where he found love and care from the men in his group. He learned that CR was what he called a "judgment-free zone." In his interview Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, said that Ethan "was able to repent, confess, and acknowledge that [addiction] and ask for forgiveness."

*Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.* One episode of letting go of anger occurred during the unraveling of Ethan's addiction. Ethan wrote in his journal:

After my mother-in-law's death my wife declared that if I didn't confess [the addiction] she would report my porn addiction to the church authorities. Ultimately, I relented and confessed. I was held accountable for my sin, suspended from ministry for a year and asked to resign . . . led to my wife filing for and being granted a divorce.

The church held an ecclesiastical trial. Ethan explained in his interview:

It was in this period of time, the people who had executed the discipline, watching them in my view falsifying information . . . feeling very, very angry. Then getting behind the wheel of a car and having this sense of, if I let this anger stay it will kill me. It will destroy me. And consciously saying [to God] in that moment in the car . . . "I want to forgive. Help me let this go."

Lucy, Ethan's sister, described in her interview the emotional pain caused by the way the church leaders, whom Lucy knew personally, handled Ethan's church discipline:

So my perspective of that kind of pain and emotional pain and the pain of rejection and the pain of betrayal are so huge that it's consuming . . . He was not handled properly with those, because he was incredibly repentant, he was completely transparent. He was bullied into what he did because of her [his wife]. I had quite a conversation with the district superintendent . . . I think that the betrayal was as deep as the betrayal by [the wife].

The next episode when Ethan wrote in the journal that he had to deliberately let go of his anger was the day the court decreed the divorce. Ethan's journal described it in third person:

It had taken seven months. The night before the divorce he laid awake praying, hoping for a last minute reprieve. Maybe she would have a last minute change of heart. But when the judge asked if there was any possibility of reconciliation her answer was a clear,

resolute and irrevocable, “No.” The judge slapped her gavel on the desk and wished them both well . . . While he waited for a break in the traffic to clear he had one clear thought, “What the hell am I going to do now?” He decided to live not die, fight not quit, run to God and not away from him.

In the third episode, there was a growing change in Ethan’s anger management once Ethan reached out to the men in his CR group, as Brian mentioned:

He cared about what they thought of him and was willing to share something that was embarrassing and big failure ... I think that he began to be transformed in terms of how he may be able to cope. And cope without resorting to pornography, without resorting to condemning others and being filled with bitterness and pain.

***Tried to put my plans into action together with God.*** Two key episodes gave Ethan the will to be obedient to God. Ethan felt it was important to acknowledge, confess, repent, and ask his immediate and extended family to forgive him for the egregious sin of pornography. He wrote in a journal entry, “Ultimately I confessed my sin to my children, my siblings, my extended family and most painfully to my 88-year-old mother and asked for their forgiveness.” Lucy, one of Ethan’s sisters, described the family meeting in her interview:

[Ethan] had a family meeting . . . it was gut wrenching. He wept and apologized to all of us. He said to us that he needed to go to all of the nieces and nephews . . . [we] kind of said you don’t have to do this. We’ll handle it with our own children. We don’t want you to have to keep the agony of that kind of confession to every single one of us. Let us take some of that on for you. I’ve never seen repentance, what I saw as described as Godly sorrow. I never saw it like I saw it in him.

Peter, one of Ethan’s sons, also spoke of the family meeting in his interview:

My dad called . . . I want to say Skyped. He walked through what was happening. He confessed essentially to me with tears and apologized and asked for forgiveness. And he communicated that he had a family meeting, that he talked to his mom and had to explain essentially what was going on. One of [the] things that I remembered him saying at that point was that this was no longer a matter [of] forgiveness, this was about his soul. This scenario was about saving his soul.

In the second episode, Ethan attempted the restoration of relationships with the people that he felt abandoned him during the whole process of church discipline and the divorce. Ethan wrote in his journal, “Feeling the sense of saying to God I’ve been stewing about some of these things . . . I just need to let this go. You need to help me let this go.”

*Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.* During the depths of despair, there were times when strangers assisted with Ethan’s actual needs. Ethan had been a career denominational leader earning a six-figure salary. Owing to the ramifications of being caught viewing pornography, Ethan found himself homeless and jobless. He told this story in his interview:

Well, I think that, for instance, early on in that process, coming into CR, these were all strangers. One of the people who I knew but I didn’t know him well was the head of the residential addictive recovery process called team challenge. I knew [Stan (pseudonym)], but I didn’t know him well. But he stepped out. He came to me and said, “You have a need. I want to help you. We have a house. You need a place to live.” . . . he stepped into that moment in a way that was really quite powerful.

Another extraordinary offer Ethan shared in his first interview was the call from David and Ruth (pseudonyms) to come to China. This couple worked in China for many years and

knew Ethan from working with him as a missionary couple for the same denomination. Ethan stated:

I knew [David and Ruth]. I worked with them when they were missionaries when they were here [the U.S.]. But his call to come to China was just out of the blue. It was unexpected. Sending other people in my life who demonstrated for me what I needed at the time, which was reassurance that I have some value some worth.

A sure sign that Ethan was allowing God to strengthen him were the times when friends and family would talk about the way Ethan was harassed by his wife into admitting his addiction to the denominational governing authorities. Lucy, one of Ethan's sisters, stated in her interview that Ethan "was bullied into what he did because of her." Ethan's response to negative comments was the admission that he was wrong. According to Lucy, Ethan took full responsibility for his addiction and admitted that he should have turned to God rather than pornography:

I have been troubled with the emotional abuse that I had watched her [his wife] do for years. There was a part of me that wanted to protect him. But he [Ethan] would say "... I was wrong . . . Regardless of what she did, what I did before God was wrong. Rather than turning to pornography I should have turned to God." So I saw Ethan take full responsibility for his own sin.

The connection Ethan made with the pastor from a different denomination also strengthened him spiritually. Ethan was able to deal with the spiritual struggles of regrets and sorrow for the pain he had inflicted on his family. Glen, Ethan's colleague and mentor from the church, explained in his interview:

I know he got connected with a pastor in a church in the area . . . on a regular basis. I think he was attending his church . . . this fella just really continued to help [Ethan] see

his value and help him work through a lot of issues that were there . . . ongoing regrets . . . sorrow . . . what things he had done to former wife, kids, and reputation, you could see that fact that God was with him.

After the ecclesiastical trial and the suspension of his job, Ethan got a job managing a failing off-site graduate program for a struggling university in another denomination. Ethan did not think this job would last very long due to a constrained budget. On a holiday break, Ethan was called into the administration office, arrived early, and went to the chapel to pray, as he described in a third-person journal entry:

After praying for about 30 minutes he heard the chapel's outer doors open. A man came in and turned on the lights. He wondered what brought the new arrival to the chapel. Maybe he was a custodian here to clean or repair something, or a musician here to practice on the chapel's organ or maybe just a guy looking for a place to pray. He was about six feet tall, thin and black . . . The new arrival turned and walked deliberately down the center aisle toward him. They met in front of the pulpit. "I was just praying. I'm done. I've got a meeting. I'll get out of your way."

"Please don't." The accent was thick and unmistakably African. He introduced himself and asked the newcomer, "Where are you from?"

"My name is Moses. I'm from Kenya. But my American friends call me Mose," he said with a bright grin highlighted by his dark features . . . "Are you a student here?" "Yes, I'm almost done," said Moses . . . "Well, it is nice to meet you...I'm going to head for my meeting," Ethan said as he turned away. "I've come to pray for you, Ethan . . . No, don't leave. I've come to pray for you!" Moses gently insisted as he took him by his right arm just above the elbow and led him past the lectern to the communion table where they

knelt and prayed together. . . . When they finished praying the two men shook hands again.

"One more thing..." said Moses. "I need to tell you one more thing to you. . . . Don't be afraid." Ethan wasn't sure he heard what he thought he heard. He needed to hear it again. "Don't be afraid. God says, Don' be afraid." Moses's voice was deep and clear and calm. He spoke with an unmistakable authority and certainty that resonated through the chapel with confidence. He pondered the strange moment as he walked out of the chapel and started across the parking lot to the administration building . . . Ethan caught a glimpse of Moses leaving the chapel. It confused him. How could this total stranger from the other side of the world know he would be in this chapel, know what was going on inside him and pray so fervently and so specifically for him? How could Moses know the fear he lived with the last three years or the anxiety he felt at that moment? They had never met. They had never talked. But Moses seemed to know and seemed absolutely certain there was nothing to fear.

Lucy, Ethan's sister, and Peter, Ethan's son, also spoke of this story in their interviews. This story was an essential factor in the way God strengthened Ethan during a difficult time. At this juncture in Ethan's timeline, he was facing another job loss as well as the loss of his marriage.

*Asked forgiveness for my sins.* Three episodes in Ethan's story described his quest for forgiveness. The first episode was when his wife caught him surfing the web for pornography. Ethan wrote in his journal:

I was surfing the web for porn when my wife walked into my home office and saw the porn on the screen. From there life cascaded into five years of chaos that ultimately led to

my wife filing for and being granted a divorce. I begged my wife for another chance. I explained how much we had to lose and tried to convince her that my sin was really just between the two of us. I pleaded with her to understand the pain we would experience and the professional, financial and personal devastation that would come with my confession. She would have none of it.

Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, spent time encouraging Ethan on forgiveness:

There was, as I am recalling now, the times together with [Ethan] over a period of several weeks, actually months, where it was so difficult for him to let go. He did really want to let go . . . he wanted to salvage it [the marriage], he wanted to make it work. And I recall just counseling with him, sharing as a brother in Christ. "[Ethan], it is so important for you to let go. Because the more you try to hang on to her the more she pushed away. So your only hope is to release her and let her go and then let it be her choice." And I think forgiveness is an important part of being able to do that . . . the CR curriculum, as much as we want to be in control, you have to acknowledge that we are not and let go of . . . I can't manipulate it, I can't make it happen as much as I want to. I think that the forgiveness part is when you forgive, and in your heart, not in your mind. But in your heart, that person does not owe me anything.

The second episode was when Ethan asked his family to forgive him for his lifelong addiction to pornography. Ethan described the meeting in his journal: "Ultimately, I confessed my sin to my children, siblings, my extended family and most painfully to my 88 year old mother and asked for their forgiveness." Lucy, Ethan's sister, also commented on the family meeting in her interview:

[Ethan] had a family meeting . . . it was gut-wrenching. He wept and apologized to all of us. He said to us that he needed to go to all of the nieces and nephews . . . [we] kind of said you don't have to do this. We'll handle it with our own children. We don't want you to have to keep the agony of that kind of confession to every single one of us. Let us take some of that on for you. I've never seen repentance, what I saw as described as Godly sorrow. I never saw it like I saw it in him.

Glen, Ethan's colleague and mentor, also spoke of Ethan's forgiveness:

I know for those of us who meet with him who had that connection, he basically did apologize to us and asked us for forgiveness. Did not have any trouble forgiving. I know he recognized his actions affected himself, wife, kids, position in leadership in the district . . . he did regret and needed to acknowledge admission to those willing to give him an opportunity to talk about it.

Ethan's son Peter was not able to attend this meeting, since he lived in a foreign country.

In his interview, he described how Ethan reached out to him:

He walked through what was happening. He confessed essentially to me with tears and apologized and asked for forgiveness. He communicated that he had a family meeting, that he talked to his mom and had to explain essentially what was going on. One of the things that I remembered him saying at that point was that this was no longer a matter of forgiveness, this was about his soul. My wife was part of that conversation. He was incredibly embarrassed, ashamed. For me and my wife, forgiveness was not hard.

The third episode was when Ethan appealed for forgiveness from the denominational state district superintendent, his boss, and his colleagues. In his interview, Ethan said that he felt "violated in the sense I felt that I was not granted the forgiveness. I was being punished for

something I had already repented.” Ethan continued to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation from those in the denomination leadership:

There are all sorts of dimensions in which I haven’t experienced forgiveness. I haven’t experienced reconciliation with people . . . a list of people out there who still won’t speak to me. Who still have nothing to do with me. So they may say, “I have forgiven you,” but they certainly have done nothing on their side. So that is a violation . . . of value of worth. It’s a violation of one of the most fundamental notions of Christianity, forgiveness and reconciliation.

To this day, Ethan continues to put into action the steps of CR reconciliation and forgiveness and aims to reunite with past colleagues.

*Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.* Once Ethan entered CR, he started to focus on the CR steps, which are grounded in doctrines from the life of Jesus Christ.

Ethan described the process in his interview:

The whole CR process does that [focus on religion] . . . In the recovery trend to deal with that. China comes at the end of that 4 years from the discipline and divorce is 4 years. I am at literally at no options. And maybe God brought no options because I am going to open this door. The one you’d never go to, the one you’d never see, the one you’d never . . . but it is the only one, that kind of door. I would not have gone to China if I had not done CR. The fact that I went through CR was part of that open door. China fits in . . . and I came to really see, that is, it was kind of a wow moment.

In her interview, Lucy, Ethan’s sister, acknowledged the effect China had on Ethan and the shift from concentrating on his problems to focusing on God:

I think it [China] gave him a sense that he could move on from the divorce. So, what the thing he said to me was, “I’m just going to give God everything the rest of my life, 100% completely.” I think he found some purpose some healing.

***Wondered whether God had abandoned me.*** Ethan wrote in his journal about an episode when it appeared that God had abandoned him:

After my mother-in-law’s death my wife declared that if I didn’t confess she would report my porn addiction to the church authorities. Ultimately, I relented and confessed. I was held accountable for my sin, suspended from ministry for a year and asked to resign.

Because I held a prominent position in the state office, a letter describing my failure and explaining my removal was sent to every minister of my denomination in [state].

Colleagues in the national church were similarly notified.

After Ethan finally agreed and confessed his sin, an ecclesiastical trial ensued. He received a suspension from preaching and teaching for a year, and eventually resigned from his administrative position at the state office. Ethan wrote in the journal:

The next weeks were spent in the depths of depression to a degree that I had never known and hope to never pass through again. It was the closest thing to hell I can imagine. One day when my wife was at work I walked to the basement, opened the gun safe, chambered a round in a rifle, sat down, rested the shoulder stock on the floor and my chin on the muzzle and put my thumb on the trigger.

Brian, Ethan’s CR mentor, also mentioned the story of Ethan going to the basement:

[Ethan] shared with me a time he actually went into the basement. So I think that would be the lowest. I think he felt hopeless, such a failure, you can imagine he felt like the

world would be better off without him. That kind of despair. So I would say that is where he felt most disconnected.

***Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.*** In Ethan's interview he stated, "My perspective on God is that God most often disciplines, he doesn't punish his children . . . I never saw God as punishing." Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, agreed with Ethan on the view of punishment: "I think [Ethan] took it as a discipline, as consequence, not as a punishment."

***Wondered what I did for God to punish me.*** Ethan explained in the interview his understanding of discipline and that God was not punishing him:

I never regarded God as punishing me. I understood that what God was saying to me. "You did these things. There are consequences for your behavior. This is now in the hands of these people but I am here when you are going through this . . . I haven't left you. I am still with you there."

***Questioned God's love for me.*** Ethan commented in the interview:

Were there times when I questioned God's love? In the depths of some of the depression, I felt some of that. It wasn't a lack of understanding of God's love. It was a belief that I've been so bad. I've done this horrible thing. That I can't ponder that God would still love me.

Peter, Ethan's son, went back to the story of Ethan's attempt at suicide: "Well, I know he questioned it when he got to the point of desperation. Very close to, actually very close to killing himself." Ethan had isolated himself from his family. Lucy, Ethan's sister, was not aware of the depth of Ethan's depression and despair. She said in her interview:

I never saw him not stay with God. In those moments of deepest darkness of depression when he isolated himself, I don't know whether he felt that way or not. I remember there

were times when he would say things like, if I gave him praise and support for who he was, he would say, he would kind of, “Well, I don’t know.” So whether those were moments he didn’t feel God’s love for him, I don’t know. I feel like we had a strong enough family system of unconditional love that almost, that carried him.

***Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.*** The abandonment that Ethan experienced was not only from the local church that he attended, but also from the denominational state district. Ethan’s job was assistant to the superintendent at the state level. Ethan said in the interview:

It was the ministry. . . . To have the level of responsibility and influence that I enjoyed at that time. To lose that, being highly placed in [state] and recognized in the national church in a variety of ways, to go from that to being pariah. . . . You go from everything to nothing.

The church’s abandonment of Ethan continued throughout the divorce process. At the final divorce court hearing, Ethan attended alone. Ethan commented in the interview:

There was this profound sense that I had been abandoned. You see, I didn’t ask my family to be at the divorce, my children or my sisters. The church knew. I had disclosed to them that she is filing. My brother, the people who were supposed to, my pastor, nobody showed up, nobody was there. I was entirely alone and walked away from that moment with this ... I invested my entire adult life in this organization, in these people, and the moment I need them most ... where are they?

Peter, Ethan’s son, knew the way Ethan’s fellow pastors and colleagues deserted him after almost three decades of service to his denomination, and echoed Ethan’s story of abandonment:

I never thought of my dad as a proud man, but he is always, he was always very successful in man's eyes, in the organization, recognized nationally in those type of things. I just remember, I don't want to say negatively, but there was just this discouragement. And I think, just the loss of friends. The loss of people that he had invested in and loved on for 20-some-odd years. The abandonment.

Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, also talked about the abandonment that Ethan felt from the church:

He did feel that way. He felt like his brothers, his fellow pastors, colleagues that he had been with for over 20 years, just abandoned him, they just, we hear the term "kicked him to the curb." We have to move. You messed up, we have to move on. There was formerly this rehabilitation program for 2 years that he submitted to. Yeah, he definitely felt abandoned, rejected, really condemnation.

***Decided the devil made this happen.*** Ethan stated in the interview:

Did I come to view this as a Satanic activity? The devil's business, kill, destroy, and takes advantage of every opportunity. I didn't ever view this as anything other than my fault in terms of what I did. But I did recognize there is a spiritual factor at work here. Both in my life and in this stirring up of the anger, the hostility. The spirit of accusations, all these things, um, that are really . . . satanic in their essences. I think it didn't because of God's grace in the moment, his spirit was such that I was nudged, drawn not away from him, but to him. I never, you know, it's a trick, I think, Satanic trick that people blame God. I never blamed God for this.

Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, never heard Ethan accuse or blame Satan for his failures, as he said in the interview:

I don't think he ever did express that. He never to me expressed that he blamed Satan for his circumstances. I believe he was, at least by the time he became engaged in the recovery program, he was taking responsibility. What he had done and understood. Satan lies to us, so we are we can be victimized in that sense that he lies to us, and we both ... what we were doing was victimless. Hidden and it wasn't like we were having an affair. But in reality it was. And it was not victimless. We believe that for a while. And that led us deeper and deeper into it, thinking that. Then you get farther into it, and then you're ashamed and don't want to tell anyone about it . . . he never felt like he blamed Satan for this.

***Questioned the power of God.*** In the interview, Ethan mentioned experiencing “just prior . . . to the divorce in that phase of things coming apart, a sense of being in praying that God would get me off the hook. I want off the hook. Get me out of this.” Despite Ethan's tragedy, his sister Lucy saw him as determined to serve God:

The only thing I remember about that was his absolute determination to serve God no matter what. That I remember as a strong . . . theme all the way through . . . like, I mean, I know with depression comes a darkness, you feel God is not very palpable. Where you can't really feel him. But it was kind of that underlying determination, that no matter what this looks like, I am going to do the right thing, as though he slay me yet will I will trust him. And this is what I heard all the way through, like the recurring theme. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

Brian, Ethan's CR mentor, reiterated in the interview that after Ethan entered CR, his way of processing the events in his life changed:

Well, trying to recall, I don't know. I can imagine that he felt like, "God, you can do anything, and I am praying and praying and I am trying and trying," but again, he moved from that kind of mentality to take a responsibility for his behavior, and then realized he can't control his wife and needs to allow her to make her own decisions and take responsibility for her behavior.

***Pathway to China.*** Ethan shared in the journal:

I was given the opportunity to help begin a Christian Step Program ministry in Beijing, China in a large ex-patriot church. These church members are not permanent residents of Beijing and will soon return to their homelands. It is literally the opportunity to sow the seed of Christian Step Program and recovery in lives who will then scatter across the globe taking the joy of recovery with them. Who know what great things God will do in and through those lives!

We also trained Mandarin speaking Step Study leaders who are able to take Christian Step Program out of the ex-pat community and begin to engage local Chinese. Other international congregations around China have expressed interest in beginning their own CR ministries. The possibilities for Christian Step Program in both these areas are truly incredible.

It's a great privilege and one I never would have believed possible. But it's not the greatest privilege. I have had the opportunity to encourage many who know my story to find their own road to recovery in Christian Step Program. I have had the opportunity to work with a Christian residential drug and alcohol recovery program and encourage participants and graduates to seek out Christian Step Program when they go home and

make it their support system. I have been able to bring the principles I learned in Christian Step Program to my work with Federal inmates.

This study accumulated data from Ethan and the five corroborators' interviews, Ethan's journal, and observational field notes. Coding the research data triggered six emergent themes that threaded through Ethan's narrative: hidden sin, despair, confession and repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and responding to the altruistic pull factor. The next section expands on the six themes.

**Emergent themes.** The questions that guided this research dealt with the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance in Ethan's divorce adjustment. Interviews, journals, and observational field notes told his story. Upon coding the interviews, journals, and observational field notes, themes emerged that aligned with the chronological timeline of Ethan's narrative. Table 2 displays the themes generated from the verbatim coding. All the words and phrases in the verbatim coding came from the interviews, Ethan's journal, and the observation field notes.

Table 2

*Themes and Verbatim Coding*

Theme	Verbatim Coding
Private sin	pornography, found out, admission, struggling with addiction, feeling guilty, regrets hundreds of times, committing adultery, private sin
Depression	life would be worse, clinical depression, despair, suffering in silence, extremely agitated, emotional rejection, betrayal, pain, bullied, broken, basement, shot gun, suicide, emotional rejection, betrayal pain, hell
Confession Repentance	repent, come clean, humble admit, no longer hide, incredibly repentant, transparent, confession, apologize, admission, repentance, honest, share, knows about failure, disappointed God, regret a hundred times
Forgiveness	forgiveness not hard, ask for forgiveness, forgive in heart,
Reconciliation	reconciliation, attempt to reconcile, hope reconciled,
Call of God Altruistic pull factor	still hope, purpose and meaning, call to teach, still have a purpose, best years, greater at the end than the beginning, doors opening, teach at seminary, we need you

The themes started with a private sin of addiction to pornography. Ethan wrote in his journal that exposure to the sin of pornography at a young age followed him into marriage: “Sadly, I carried my habit into my marriage. Like many I believed that once my needs were met in an appropriate way the urge for pornography would magically disappear. I couldn’t have been more wrong.” The addiction that plagued Ethan led to living a life of fear that he would be found out. Ethan wrote, “I lived in constant fear that others would find out what I was doing.”

Eventually, Ethan’s hidden sin was exposed, and all the ramifications that followed the exposure led to the next theme: a life of isolation, depression and despair. Ethan wrote, “The next weeks were spent in the depths of depression to a degree that I had never known and hope

to never pass through again. It was the closest thing to hell I can imagine.” After an attempted suicide, Ethan wrote, “In that moment I felt the presence of God and His calm assurance that if I would walk through this He would walk with me.”

Ethan’s confession and repentance, the third theme of the narrative, was conveyed to his family. Lucy, Ethan’s sister, described the moment in the interview: “He had a family meeting ... it was gut-wrenching. And he wept and apologized to all of us.” After the confession, Lucy stated in the interview that not only did the family members forgive him, the fourth theme, but the family never held it against him. “Every member . . . forgave him of that sin as he confessed so ... and no one has ever held it against him.” Peter, Ethan’s son, said, “He was incredibly embarrassed, ashamed. For me and my wife forgiveness was not hard.” This was not the case for some to whom Ethan had confessed and repented. Ethan’s siblings, children, and mother forgave him and granted him reconciliation, the fifth theme. Unfortunately, his wife did not. Ethan wrote in his journal, “After four years of struggling to rebuild our broken life and marriage my wife filed for and was granted divorce.”

Once the divorce was finalized, Ethan’s journey took an unexpected turn. Ethan followed the call of God, the sixth theme. The call or the altruistic pull took him on a pathway of evangelism to China. Ethan described it in his interview: “Saying yes to China changed everything. ‘Obey God or not obey God,’ that was the choice . . . there is always a choice. It sets a completely different direction in life.” Ethan started a Christian Step Program group and headed a theological school at a church in China. Ethan admitted that these steps of life prepared him for China. “God put [me] through this grinder to get [me] to that place ... because that’s what [I] needed,” he said.

## Summary of the Findings

After transcribing all the interviews and using the questions to organize the answers logically, manual verbatim coding occurred. This verbatim coding generated the six themes of hidden sin, despair, confession and repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the altruistic pull factor or the call of God. The coding eliminated the parts of the interviews that proved irrelevant to the questions, and gave support to other questions. Utilizing the questions analytically gave credence to the coding of Ethan's journals, the observation field notes, and the researcher's reflexive journal. These steps sustained truthfulness with rich and thick description of the episodes in Ethan's story.

Thus, it can be stated that Ethan's narrative was an account of the spiritual appraisals:

- sacred loss/desecration
- spiritual struggles
- spiritual coping
- search for significance

After four decades of marriage, the single act of being caught viewing pornography sent his life into a tailspin of false accusations, church discipline, and countless hours of counseling and therapy. The outcomes were the loss of a career and the death of a marriage. The hopelessness Ethan encountered sent him into a life of isolation and eventually to the basement of his house pointing a shotgun to his head. But then he was overcome by an amazing sense of the peace that passes all understanding; Ethan wrote, "In that moment I felt the presence of God and His calm assurance that if I would walk through this he would walk with me; that he wasn't done with me, and I shouldn't give up on myself."

Ethan's spiritual struggle led to adaptive spiritual coping through the repentance and forgiveness of his family, the support of Christian Step Program, and the intervention of strangers. Two significant strangers inspired by God revealed a prophetic word to Ethan about his future. These prophetic occurrences were underscored in the verbatim coding via Ethan's journal and voiced by several of the corroborators. "He is not to be afraid of the future, and his ministry will be greater at the end of his life than in the beginning," as Lucy and Peter said.

After the divorce, during the adjustment period, Ethan searched for significant pathways and leaned on God while responding to the altruistic pull factor to go to China. The pursuit of Ethan's daily life episodes, the analysis of narrative, and the compiling of those episodes, the narrative analysis, chronicled the whole story. The tragic events that encompassed Ethan's narrative carried him to a point where deeper digging into spirituality brought him awareness of an overt divine means that contributed to a positive divorce adjustment.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The episodes in Ethan's narrative articulated a complex chronological story. The story started with the discovery of a pornography addiction and ended in a move to China. The narrative demonstrated how spiritual appraisal and the search for significance influenced the course of Ethan's divorce adjustment. Ethan's semistructured interviews and journal entries, the five corroborators' semistructured interviews, and the observation field notes provided rich and thick description as well as trustworthiness in the development of the data.

The spiritual appraisals of sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggles, and spiritual coping led Ethan on a complicated pathway through divorce adjustment. The influence of spiritual appraisal contributed to the influence of the search for significance, which opened the door for

this single non-initiator of a grey divorce to respond to the altruistic pull factor or the call of God to move to China.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### Introduction

This narrative inquiry started with the understanding that there was paucity in the literature showing a need to hear how a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China described the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance on his divorce adjustment. This discussion and conclusion chapter includes the narrative results and provides an analytical discussion on the link to the literature, the limitations, the implications for practice, and further research. These are the two research questions that guided the line of inquiry for this narrative study:

RQ1: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of spiritual appraisal on his divorce adjustment?

RQ2: How does a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China describe the influence of search for significance on his divorce adjustment?

Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) reported that over the past 20 years, divorce momentum increased dramatically for those age 50 and older. The term *gray divorce* was coined to mean later in life divorce (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Makidon, 2013). Quinney and Fouts (2004) established the fact that in the 21st century, society has become more tolerant of divorce as a societal solution to marriage unhappiness. Recent statistics in the United States highlight the acceptability of divorce: 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages, and 74% of third marriages end in divorce (Banschick, 2012; Wevorce, 2017).

Ethan's narrative gave voice to a non-initiator of a gray divorce who remained single and moved to China as part of his divorce adjustment. Ethan's response to the altruistic pull factor

during his divorce adjustment demonstrated the influence that spiritual appraisal and search for significance had on him. Empirical research constructed a foundation of three spiritual appraisals connected to divorce adjustment: sacred loss/desecration, spiritual struggle, and spiritual coping (Krumrei et al., 2011a; Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Steiner et al., 2015; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). Pargament (2010) identified the “search for significance” (p. 270) as one of the key components for the Christian non-initiator to embrace as the individual commits to living in China.

This narrative chronicled several episodes in Ethan’s experience, starting with the discovery of a hidden sin and moving to the loss of a job, the death of a marriage, and finally the call of God. Ethan, his friends and family members, and his Christian Step Program mentor told the story in semistructured interviews guided by questions that targeted the spiritual appraisals and search for significance. The trustworthiness of Ethan’s narrative was verified through journals kept by Ethan, observational field notes, and a reflexive journal kept by the researcher. The verbatim coding of the open-ended semistructured interviews and Ethan’s journal generated six themes that followed the chronological timeline of the narrative. These six emergent themes are:

1. The **hidden sin** that plagued Ethan since he was 12 years was pornography.
2. The **despair** Ethan suffered due to getting caught viewing pornography and all the ramifications that resulted because of the exposure sent him to the basement of his house where he pointed a shotgun at his head.
3. Ethan **confessed** his addiction and **repented** to his family and the organization that he worked for as a district leader and minister.

4. **Forgiveness and reconciliation** were granted to Ethan from some of his family members and friends. However, the organizational district leadership that Ethan worked for would say they forgave him but the evidence of reconciliation was not evident to Ethan, or Peter as they poignantly stated in their interviews.

5. **Altruistic pull factor** led Ethan to China.

All this contributed to the authentication of the theory that spiritual appraisal and search for significance contributed significantly to Ethan's divorce adjustment.

The framework of this research hung upon the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010). This foundation set the premise that threaded through the participant's life story: knowing and understanding spiritual appraisal and the search for significance as part of sacrificially serving God in China. The episodes of Ethan's narrative revealed the effects of spiritual coping, spiritual struggle, and sacred loss and desecration on the episodes that led up to his divorce. Ethan's narrative also revealed the pathway he followed toward the search for significance that eventually led to China.

### **Summary of the Results**

Ethan's story focused on spiritual appraisal of an unwanted divorce, his journey through the divorce adjustment or refinement period, and his search for significance by leaning on God (Pargament, 2010). By exploring his account of spiritual coping, spiritual struggle, and spiritual loss/desecration, this study discovered the influence of spiritual appraisal on Ethan's divorce adjustment. After four decades of marriage, as recorded in Ethan's journal, the act of being caught in the private sin of pornography sent his life into a tailspin of confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and responding to the call of God.

One temporal outcome of Ethan's story was the loss of his religious leadership career. A. Wang (2017) suggested that "religious people, institutions, or conflicts around the beliefs of a religious institution" (p. 39) could contribute to an individual's spiritual struggle. Ethan's denomination prevented him from ever holding a leadership position in the local church. The second temporal outcome of Ethan's story was the death of his marriage, as he described in his interview. A. Wang (2017) stated that the church views divorce in a negative light, especially because marriage is discouraged in the Bible. The loss of his job and marriage filled Ethan with hopelessness; in his journal he wrote about going to the basement of his house and pointing a shotgun to his head.

Overcome by the sense that God was intervening, Ethan put away the gun and started a slow journey through the process of recovery, which his Christian Step Program mentor described. The transparency of his confession and repentance of his private sin to family, friends, and colleagues led some of them, such as his sister Lucy, to forgive him and pursue reconciliation of their relationship with him. The next chronological step in Ethan's story was entering the Christian Step Program program to work toward crucial healing. Ethan's Christian Step Program mentor, Brian, said in his interview, "I know [Ethan] found healing and he found support."

A pivotal moment in Ethan's story focuses on the divorce proceedings. He wrote in his journal, "Unfortunately after four years of struggling to re-build our broken life and marriage my wife filed for and was granted divorce." According to DeMaris (2013), one of the top reasons for divorce is marital unhappiness. Ethan's wife was not happy in their marriage. In her interview, Ethan's sister Lucy used words like "narcissist" and "erratic" to describe the initiator of the divorce. Lucy also said:

I approached her [the initiator] from a standpoint [of] I don't think this is best for you because you have no extended family, because our family has loved and embraced you ...

I think this is a decision you will deeply regret.

Brooks (2016) warned the gray divorce population that when they divorce, money put away for retirement "is cut in half" (para. 8). Ethan's journal mentioned that he tried to reason with his wife about the finances. He added in his interview that his wife did not listen and pursued the divorce, only to realize her financial destitution later. Grounded on Brooks (2016) cautioning about retirement investment, Ethan's wife did not count the cost of divorce and according to Peter's interview she regretted it later.

The narrative shifted when Ethan, now a single individual, moved to China and embraced what Pargament (2010) identified as the search for significance pathway. During that time, the initiator attempted reconciliation: Ethan said in his interview, "We had this back story of working on reconciliation while I was in China. She was invited several times and refused to come." According to Pargament (2010), observational studies have shown that during the most difficult events in one's life, faith often helps with coping, as well as the altruistic pull factor to move to a foreign country.

Recently, Simonič and Klobučar (2017) published an article recognizing the positive significance spirituality provided to a traumatic experience of divorce. Simonič and Klobučar (2017) noted, "Religion or spirituality can be a powerful source of help for an individual coping with stressful situations brought up by divorce" (p. 1644). The positive adjustment to the new life brought on by an unwanted divorce is of great significance (Simonič and Klobučar, 2017). In the interview, Ethan said that he was not going to leave China, even though that meant no reconciliation.

Ethan started a Christian Step Program group and became the administrator of the educational center at the international church in Beijing, where this researcher connected with him. Ethan demonstrated a commitment to the altruistic pull factor or call of God; in his interview he reported that he not only served one term in Beijing, but went back to serve a second term. Field observations showed that Ethan was highly respected for the work he did in the Equipping Center. Ethan introduced the opportunity to allow individuals to audit Biblically based academic classes taught by PhD teachers while other students took the classes for college credits. According to Simonič and Klobučar (2017), acceptance of a change in life after divorce can result from a “deeper inner transformation” due to a relationship with Christ that offers “genuine affirmation, acceptance, value, and dignity” (p. 1651). Ethan stated in his interview, “I press toward the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ.”

### **Discussion of the Results**

The data acquired from interviews of Ethan and the five other participants, Ethan’s extensive journal writings, observations, and the reflexive journal provided the chronological timeline of Ethan’s story. Once the data were coded, themes developed that aligned with the sequence of events in Ethan’s narrative. The themes generated from the data were private sin, confession and repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the call of God.

According to Ethan’s journal entries, the private sin of pornography had plagued his life since childhood and stayed with him throughout his marriage. The discovery of this sin besieged him spiritually and caused him to struggle emotionally and physically. At one point, Ethan wrote that he “begged God to ‘get me off the hook.’” The unraveling of Ethan’s world after the exposure of his addiction drew him into coping with life spiritually, which was the framework of this study, as researched by Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010). This spiritual

walk guided Ethan to confess and repent of his sin to family, friends, and colleagues, as his son Peter described:

Confessed essentially to me with tears and apologized and asked for forgiveness . . . One of [the] things that I remembered him saying at that point was that this was no longer a matter [of] forgiveness, this was about his soul. This scenario was . . . about the Lord keeping him and allowing him to be found out. So that there can be repentance and restoration.

After Ethan was transparent with these people, they reconciled with him and developed a closer bond. In his interview, Peter stated:

I talk about watching my father go walk through this having a greater respect and a greater love and a greater admiration. There's a genuine love for a man who is imperfect and yet has and I believe this has chosen to walk through these circumstances to the best of his ability.

Unfortunately, the one person who did not grant Ethan forgiveness was his wife, the initiator of the divorce. Brian said in his interview that there was no difference between pornography and infidelity in the eyes of Ethan's wife. However, Tuttle and Davis (2015) specified that even if a long-term married couple experienced unfaithfulness in the marriage, through the commitment of God, infidelity could be forgiven.

Ultimately, Ethan experienced the desecration of his career and the loss of his marriage. This loss/desecration, defined by Hawley and Mahoney (2013) as losing something considered a testimony to God, profoundly affected Ethan. He realized that in order for God to get him on the pathway to search for significance—a phrase used to refer to religion and the leading to religious pathways—everything in his life needed transformation (Pargament, 1997, 2010). Ethan wrote in

his journal, “This was not about my career or reputation. It was about my soul. I had been given His grace and patience but if I continued I was putting my life and my eternity at risk.”

Pargament (2010) listed several different pathways to significance:

- Knowing God via studying the Bible.
- The pathway of acting or participation in church worship and ceremonial traditions.
- The pathway of relating to others through evangelism.
- The pathway of experiencing via privately thinking and talking to God.

Another of these pathways could be regular church attendance that provides support from pastoral counseling (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999). Ethan responded to all the pathways. However, it was the pathway of relating to others through evangelism that changed the direction of his life. He responded to the call of God and moved to China. Ethan said in his interview that China was a God-given opportunity: “It gives me a chance to do something meaningful eternally.”

This research study based on the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010) focused primarily on spiritual appraisal and search for significance in the life of a faith-based non-initiator of a gray divorce. Based on the work of Oberholster et al. (2013), the research went a step further to examine how the altruistic pull factor affected this individual. Future research could examine the narrative of a younger faith-based non-initiator’s spiritual appraisal, search for significance, and response to the altruistic pull factor to move to a foreign country.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

This study focused primarily on Ethan, the non-initiator in a gray divorce who wanted his marriage to continue (Neumann, 2011; H. Wang & Amato, 2000). *Gray divorce* is a term

identifying Ethan's age category, those 50 or older (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Gold, 2016; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Makidon, 2013). The main factor that contributed to Ethan's divorce was his wife's mounting dissatisfaction in the marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003; Barta & Kiene, 2005; DeMaris, 2013; Previti & Amato, 2004). Ethan said in his interview that his private sin gave his wife the outlet she needed to end the marriage through a divorce.

Ethan wanted the marriage to survive. His son Peter described him as adamant against the divorce: "[Ethan] did not want to have a divorce. That stuck in my mind over and over." Ethan described in his interview how much he worked at sustaining the marriage: "We were struggling in marriage . . . we need to get counsel, we need to do something, this isn't working. Her answer was always the same . . . you have a problem with the marriage." After the exposure of the sin, Ethan wrote, he went to counseling, put blocks on all media devices, and continued his relationship with an accountability partner. Nothing Ethan did could stop the eventual outcome of divorce. Ethan wrote that he eventually leaned on his faith to get through the divorce and subsequent adjustment. As stated before, individuals who lean on their faith during times of trial cope better (Pargament, 2010). That is why this narrative inquiry explored spiritual appraisal, defined as the approach individuals construe as significant in maintaining resiliency during a catastrophic event and the eventual outcome (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004; Lazarus, 2006).

Krumrei et al. (2009) identified three spiritual mechanisms or appraisals that may affect divorce adjustment: "sacred loss/desecration . . . adaptive spiritual coping . . . spiritual struggles" (p. 373). Hawley and Mahoney (2013) described sacred loss as losing something considered a testimony to God and desecration as a violation of something blessed by God, such as a marriage vow. The discovery of Ethan's private sin led to the death of his marriage. Krumrei et al. (2009) noted that the first appraisal, sacred loss/desecration, and the third appraisal, spiritual struggle,

led to a higher incidence of hopelessness. Ethan described his attempt at suicide and how God intervened at the pivotal moment:

Better to end this way than face the years of shame, self-hatred and misery that lay ahead . . . In that moment I felt the presence of God and His calm assurance that if I would walk through this He would walk with me; that He wasn't done with me and I shouldn't give up on myself.

Ethan never lost sight of the significance of his faith. Peter commented in his interview on how Ethan's faith stood the test of time: "There are moments I think back and I grieved . . . for [Ethan]. But again I found that he was able to walk through with grace, which is profound." Hence, the second appraisal described by Krumrei et al. (2009), adaptive spiritual coping, contributed to Ethan's ability to move through the divorce process with more positive outcomes. Lucy identified this in her interview: "The only thing I remember . . . was his absolute determination to serve God no matter what."

Krumrei et al. (2011b) added another spiritual appraisal that negatively affected divorce adjustment, "demonization" (p. 90), which coincides with spiritual struggle, the third appraisal, and identifies the evil spiritual world as a force that perpetuates divorce. In his interview, Ethan said that it was the "devil's business" and reported that he "did recognize there is a spiritual factor at work here. The spirit of accusations." Yet he took responsibility for his actions concerning his private sin and pursued forgiveness.

Tsang and McCullough (2003) noted that a canonical belief does not guarantee justice, but well-being can be a by-product of mature faith. Linking the maturity factor of faith and the close relationship to God with the concept of forgiveness equipped Ethan to create a pathway of positive post-divorce adjustment. He wrote in his journal about the day he confessed, repented,

and pursued forgiveness from his family: “I confessed my sin to my children, my siblings, my extended family and most painfully to my 88-year-old mother and asked for their forgiveness.” After the steps of confession and repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation were granted to Ethan. The last theme, the call of God, initiated as part of the search for significance, brought Ethan to a pathway of evangelism in China.

The pathway of evangelism is one aspect of the search for significance, which can lead to a positive divorce adjustment experience (Pargament, 2010; Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Tsang & McCullough, 2003). Oberholster et al. (2013) defined the call of God as an appeal by God to a Christian individual that may result in an altruistic response to global opportunities. Ethan described in his interview how he reacted to God’s call:

I was literally homeless. I was living in a borrowed house. My stuff in storage. I had no job, I had no place to go, I had . . . a stack of rejection letters from churches . . . In [denomination] it’s one thing to be disciplined, but . . . to be disciplined and divorced, it is a nail on your coffin . . . and it was right in the midst when [David] came to me and said, “Have you ever thought about China?” So it was the one open door that I had to continue in ministry, and I viewed that as God’s hand. It was completely out of the blue . . . literally.

This research study was based on the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2011a, 2009) and Pargament (2010) on the unrecognized importance of religion in managing stress. A survey created by Pargament et al. (2011) was used to generate an interview guide to learn the whole story of how spiritual appraisal and search for significance affected Ethan’s divorce adjustment. Five individuals were solicited to corroborate Ethan’s story, and data were drawn from his

journal, observation field notes, and the researcher's reflexive journal. Ethan's voice gave credence to the influence that God had on Ethan's changed life.

What should be noted in Ethan's interview was his response to the negative question in the interview guide that targeted the idea of God's punishment. Ethan made it clear in the interview that God was not punishing rather God was disciplining Ethan for his hidden sin. "My perspective on God is that God most often disciplines he doesn't punish his children." Ethan likens his discipline to the story of the potter in the bible.

It's a pretty violent business. You throw the clay stretching, pulling and then . . . put the pot in the kiln and you fire it. But I really took it as a process in which God was being merciful to me. Discipline whom the Lord loves he chastens.

Ethan poignantly stated that there is a difference between God's discipline and God's punishment. "Don't confuse God's discipline for God's punishment." From Ethan's perspective, God did not punish him, God disciplined Ethan. Ethan cited Hebrews 12 in his interview to prove his point on love and punishment.

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.

Pargament's (2010) Brief RCOPE survey statements were used to create the questions in this narrative interview guide. Pargament used the word punish but did not use the word discipline. Ethan's interview illuminated the need to differentiate between punishment and discipline. The clarification is important since Krumrei et al. (2011a) stated that the majority of Americans claim to hold Christian beliefs. These Christian beliefs consequently hold to the terminology of the canonical book of Christianity.

Ethan's narrative corroborated the findings in the literature on the evidence that the influence of the three spiritual appraisals and the search for significance supported the outcome of Ethan's story. The trials that Ethan faced with the loss of a job and desecration of his marriage were at times overwhelming; yet he continued to walk with God through the refinement fire. Even though the spark that ignited the divorce started with the revelation that Ethan was addicted to pornography, forgiveness in a faith-based marriage should have been granted according to the literature. Yet it was not, which challenges the concept that the practice of American Christianity embraces the teachings of the Bible.

### **Limitations**

The limitation of a narrative inquiry is that the narrator describes life episodes to a researcher, and each filters the told story through the lenses of cultural instincts, background knowledge, and religious perceptions (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). Due to this limitation, the researcher was required to interview four to five corroborators who were connected to Ethan's story. Five people participated in semistructured interviews and answered the same open-ended questions as Ethan to corroborate his story. The researcher was also required to document observational field notes and keep a reflexive journal. These additional data sources contributed to the rich and thick description of Ethan's narrative.

McMullen and Braithwaite (2013) drew attention to three more limitations on narrative research. The first was the assumption that the narrator's story stands as truth rather than viewing the story through the "social and cultural context" (p. 102) of the episodes. To get as close to trustworthiness as possible, five corroborators participated in semistructured interviews utilizing open-ended questions designed to target the three spiritual appraisals to support Ethan's narrative

inquiry. Ethan's journal, consisting of over 50 typewritten pages, was also made available to the researcher. These steps were taken to ensure that the study provided thick and rich description.

The second limitation was locating a participant willing to divulge life episodes in a comprehensible study rather than as a statistical number. This narrative inquirer heard Ethan preach a testimonial sermon on a Sunday morning at an international church in China. Once Ethan agreed to participate in the study, the researcher/participant relationship took shape.

The third limitation was the balance between the process of proving a theory and forfeiting the lucid quality of the narrator's story. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) noted, "by highlighting restorying narrative, researchers can see how an illustrative data set . . . was applied" (p. 329). In this narrative inquiry, the data presented included a timeline of events restoried chronologically, which "provided a causal link among ideas" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 330) and logically developed the episodes in Ethan's story.

Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) understood that the limitations of beginning researchers are due in part to their lack of cognizant "epistemological stances and their theoretical frameworks" (p. 149). Hence, the more research one performs, the better one understands the best qualitative methodology to unpack a story. Before narrative inquiry was chosen for this study, the plan was to use a case study methodology. Unfortunately, not enough participants were available in China to explore the data. Also, Simonič and Klobučar (2017) did not think quantitative research could encapsulate the essence of religion as it was "actually lived" (p. 1648). The narrative inquiry method included the researcher/participant relationship, which provided the lived experience.

## **Implications of the Results for Practice and Policy**

This study was designed to address the gap in the literature regarding the voice of a non-initiator of gray divorce working as a single expatriate in China. Ethan and the five corroborators, through interviews and Ethan's journal entries, voiced the influence of spiritual appraisal and the search for significance on Ethan's divorce adjustment. The foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2011a, 2009) and Pargament (2010) provided the footing and attributes to explore spiritual appraisal, divorce adjustment, and the search for significance for this expatriate, single non-initiator.

Ethan's narrative started when he was caught in the act of violating his marriage, which gave his wife grounds to pursue a divorce. Ethan's marriage had lasted almost four decades, and the couple made a commitment to God not only to stay married, but also to serve God. Ethan's infidelity, according to Tuttle and Davis (2015), should have been forgiven. Ethan's wife, who initiated the divorce, did not grant forgiveness. Yet, Ethan followed the track of forgiveness, pursued adaptive spiritual coping, and in his search for significance, responded to the altruistic pull to China.

McNelis and Segrin (2019) recently wrote an article identifying predictors to relationship incompatibility and found, "dysfunctional communication was significantly and consistently associated with insecure attachment" (p. 1). Ethan stated in his interview, "Getting married is not the problem . . . having a good marriage is." Lucy, Ethan's sister, described the beginning of her brother's marriage, "He knew she was broken. He never saw the signs of it till the night before the wedding. And then the honeymoon was a disaster." Peter stated in his interview, "My mom's Italian; she grew up in an abusive home where her father was . . . a pedophile. I don't know how

to say it any other way.” Peter identified his mother as “violent verbal” and stated that his parents were “polar opposites.” Lucy used words like “narcissist, erratic” to describe Ethan’s wife.

The high probability of divorce occurs when the characteristics of an individual obstructs the ability to maintain a healthy relationship. These obstructive characteristics such as “criticism and contempt” (McNelis & Segrin 2019, p. 13) not only forecast a route to divorce but these traits prohibit bonds between relationships in the future. Paul said in his interview that his mother no longer held a position of spiritual guide in his life. He also stated, “My mom is essentially a hermit who has isolated herself and has relationships with her TV.”

McNelis and Segrin (2019) ended the article warning that “dysfunction relational communication patterns and insecure attachment styles might pose a risk of divorce and barrier to repartnering after divorce” (p. 12). Ethan, a part of the gray divorce population was not interested in repartnering or serial marriages. In the interview Ethan said that he was “pretty broken, damaged and that’s not something you want to dump in someone else’s lap.” Based on these accounts, the wife’s dysfunctional behavior appears to corroborate McNelis and Segrin’s warning that dysfunctional relationships and insecure attachment styles risk the possibility of divorce.

Krumrei et al. (2009) defined adaptive spiritual coping as the seeking of comfort and support from a church body, pastors, and other relationships. Ellison et al. (1999) stated that one pathway in the search for significance was regular church attendance that provided support from pastoral counseling. Ethan sought out pastoral counseling and joined a Christian Step Program group located in a local church, a group of men with whom Ethan bonded and developed close relationships. Ethan wrote in the journal, “Without a doubt the most significant part of my recovery was Brian, that group of men . . . I frankly don’t know where I’d be. I don’t know if I’d

still be alive.” This study is significant in that it provided a greater understanding of Ethan’s divorce adjustment and response to the altruistic pull factor that led him to start a Christian Step Program group in China. The results may be useful to pastors, counselors, and other non-initiators of divorce who seek to understand what occurs when an individual experiences a gray divorce and then moves to China to serve God as a single individual in the aftermath.

### **Implications for Theory**

The framework of this research stemmed from the foundational work of Krumrei et al. (2009, 2011a) and Pargament (2010), which emphasized the act of coping spiritually through a crisis such as divorce. Pargament (2010) emphasized the impact of spiritual appraisal on divorce adjustment. Spiritual appraisal increased the positive connection between spiritual growth and the adjustment outcome (Pargament, 2010). This was evident in the outcome of Ethan’s divorce adjustment. Ethan coped spiritually through his marriage crisis. This spiritual coping pulled him closer to and dependent on the assurance that God will never forsake Ethan, which led to a positive divorce adjustment, which mirrored the literature research.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This narrative chronologically documented Ethan’s experiences: the discovery of a hidden sin, the loss of a job, the desecration of a marriage, and finally the response to the altruistic pull factor to move to China. Ethan, his friends and family, and his Christian Step Program mentor told the story in semistructured interviews guided by questions that targeted the spiritual appraisals and search for significance. To verify the trustworthiness of Ethan’s narrative, the researcher used Ethan’s journal, observational field notes, and a reflexive journal kept by the researcher. All this contributed to the authentication of the theory that spiritual appraisal and search for significance contributed significantly to Ethan’s divorce adjustment.

The raw data generated from the interviews, journals, and field notes are “tempered by some limitations” (DeMaris et al., 2010, p. 1274). This study told the story of one individual’s experience with divorce adjustment, corroborated by his family, friends, and mentor. Ethan’s extensive involvement in church and spirituality had an influence on his perception of the episodes in his life. The outcome of this study does not necessarily reflect the outcomes of similar stories of divorce adjustment among non-initiators of gray divorce outside the church.

The participant population of this study was confined to Ethan and his friends and family members, with the exception of the Christian Step Program mentor. It would be significant to replicate the same study utilizing the interview questions, the Data Analysis Procedure Flow Chart, and the narrative methodology demonstrated in this study in different parts of the United States with a more culturally diverse population from different denominations. In addition, a deeper understanding of the role the initiator played in the episodes of the divorce timeline would significantly enhance the outcome and add diverse data to the research. More stories need to be told and more voices need to be heard to develop an impression of how spiritual appraisal and the search for significance affect divorce adjustment.

This study investigated Ethan’s narrative and examined the episodes in the chronological timeline of Ethan’s divorce. Much of the emphasis was on Ethan’s story and how the influence of spiritual appraisal and search for significance had on his divorce adjustment.

## **Conclusion**

This narrative study chronologically documented Ethan’s experiences: the discovery of the hidden sin of pornography, the loss of his career, the death of an almost 40-year marriage, and finally the altruistic pull factor to follow the call of God. Ethan and the other participants told the story in semistructured interviews guided by questions that targeted the spiritual

appraisals and search for significance. Other data to support the trustworthiness of Ethan's narrative were taken from Ethan's journals, observational field notes, and a reflexive journal kept by the researcher. The verbatim coding of the open-ended semistructured interviews and Ethan's journal generated six themes that followed the chronological timeline of the narrative. All this contributed to the authentication of the theory that spiritual appraisal and search for significance contributed significantly to Ethan's divorce adjustment.

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## **Appendix A: Questions Created From the Brief RCOPE**

(Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011, p. 57)

### ***Positive Coping Question Items***

1. Could you please describe the episodes in the divorce process when you experienced a “stronger connection with God”? (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 57)
2. Could you describe episodes when you pursued God’s love and care?
3. Could you describe the episodes when you requested help from God in letting go of anger?
4. In what episodes of the divorce adjustment did you try to put plans into action together with God?
5. During what episodes in the divorce did you experience God building you up? What happened?
6. During what episodes in the divorce process did you ask forgiveness for your offenses? Could you describe the sin and how did forgiveness transpire?
7. Could you describe the episodes when you let go of the distressing thoughts about the divorce and focused on God’s healing power?

### ***Negative Coping Question Items***

8. Could please describe episodes in the divorce when you pondered whether God had forsaken you?
9. Could you describe episodes during the divorce when you felt God was disciplining you for a lack of spiritual commitment?
10. During the divorce episodes, was there a time when you speculated what you did to receive God’s punishment?

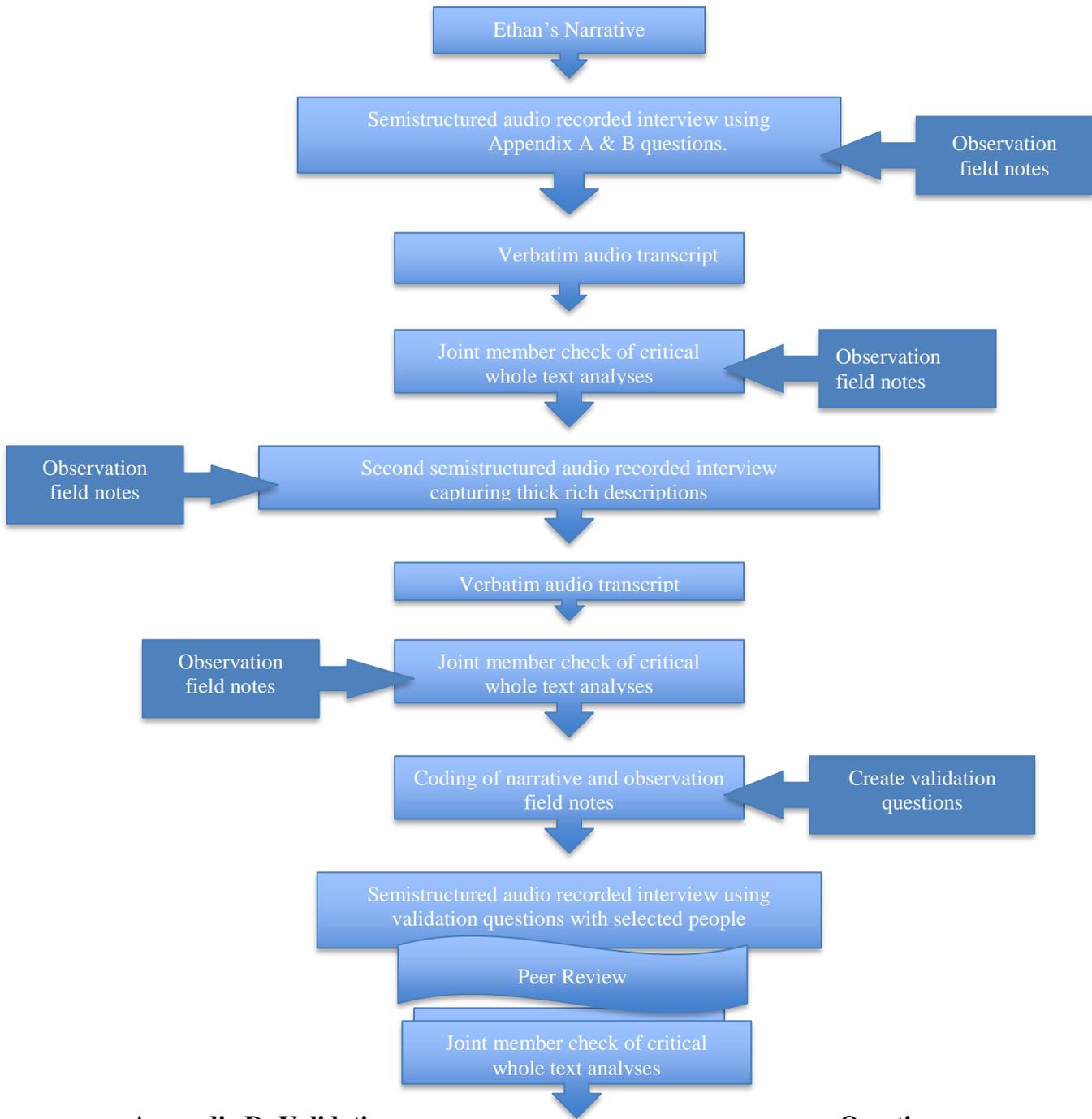
11. Could you describe an experience when you questioned God's *love* for you?
12. During the divorce could you describe a situation or episode when you questioned if your church had forsaken you?
13. Could you describe a time during the divorce when you decided that Satan created this life episode?
14. During any part in the episodes of the divorce could you describe a time when you questioned the power of God?

## **Appendix B: Questions Generated From the Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale**

(Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005, p. 65)

1. During the divorce, could you describe how it felt to lose something that was deemed of sacred importance?
2. Could you describe what it felt like to lose something that once gave you a sense of spiritual fulfillment?
3. Could you describe the experience of losing something that was given to you by God?
4. Could you describe the feeling of disconnect to God because of the divorce?
5. Describe the experience of losing something you thought God wanted you to obtain?
6. Describe the spiritual violation you experienced due to the divorce.
7. How did the divorce damage the relationship you had with God?
8. What blessing did you lose due to the consequence of divorce?
9. What immoral act against something you spiritually value occurred?
10. What most important sacred belief was destroyed because of the divorce?

### Appendix C: Data Analysis Procedure Flow Chart



**Appendix D: Validation**

**Questions**

*Positive Coping Question Items*

1. Could you describe your recollection of certain episodes in Ethan's divorce when he experienced a "stronger connection with God" (2011, p. 57)?
2. Could you describe the episodes when you pursued "God's love and care" (2011, p. 57)?
3. Could you describe the episodes when you requested help from God and "letting go of anger" (2011, p. 57)?
4. Could you describe the episodes in the divorce when Ethan "tried to put plans into action together with God" (2011, p. 57)?
5. Could you describe the episodes in the divorce that Ethan experienced God building him up? What happened?
6. Could you describe the episodes in the divorce process that Ethan asked for forgiveness for his offenses? Could you describe Ethan's sin and how the forgiveness transpired?
7. Could you describe the episodes when Ethan let go of the distressing thoughts about the divorce and focused on God's healing power?

***Negative Coping Question Items***

8. Could please describe episodes in the divorce when Ethan pondered whether God had forsaken him?
9. Could you describe episodes during the divorce when Ethan felt God was punishing him for a lack of spiritual commitment?
10. During the divorce episodes, was there a time when Ethan speculated what he did to receive God's punishment?
11. Could you describe an experience when Ethan questioned God's *love* for him?

12. During the divorce could you describe a situation or episode when Ethan questioned if his church had forsaken him?
13. Could you describe a time during the divorce when Ethan expressed the thought that Satan created this life episode?
14. During any part in the episodes of the divorce could you describe a time when Ethan questioned the power of God?

## Appendix E: Structured Observational Field Notes Form

(Delabrer, 2017)

Identity:	Date:	Time:	Place:
Categories of Notes	Rote description	Analysis	Reflection
Details of what happens at site			
Sensory impression			
Specific words, phrases, language			
Questions for future investigation.			

## Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### Explanations:

#### *What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### *What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

**Statement of Original Work (Continued)**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

*Karen R. Weber-Robinson*

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Digital Signature

Karen R. Weber-Robinson

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Name (Typed)

May 23, 2019

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Date