

**PASTORAL CARE FOR MARRIED COUPLES DURING CRISIS PERIODS USING
EFFECTIVE CBT METHODS BY AARON BECK, THE VALUE-SEMANTIC
ORIENTATION OF CLASSICAL BIBLICAL COUNSELING BY JAY ADAMS, AND
LOGOTHERAPY BY VIKTOR FRANKL**

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Abstract. The article focuses on pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods, integrating effective cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) methods, the value-semantic orientation of classical biblical counseling, and logotherapy. The aim of the study is to demonstrate how pastoral support helps couples overcome crises by strengthening spiritual connections, replacing destructive behavioral patterns with constructive ones, and restoring harmony in relationships through the creation and discovery of new meanings. The research employed general scientific research methods, including analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization. The findings indicate that pastoral care is a critical element in supporting married couples through crises, helping preserve the marital bond, which serves not only as the foundation of family life but also as a source of grace, elevating natural love to the level of supernatural love. In moments of crisis, it is crucial to support and deepen this connection, guiding couples to find new meaning in shared life, maintain faith, and resolve internal conflicts. Effective pastoral methods include CBT, which helps couples recognize and replace destructive thought patterns that often lead to conflicts with more realistic and constructive beliefs. This approach reduces anxiety, improves communication, and strengthens emotional connections between partners. Additionally, biblical counseling emphasizes spiritual growth, moral values, and relationship restoration through deepened faith, highlighting the importance of spiritual unity in marriage. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy complements the latter approach by encouraging couples to find meaning even in the most challenging circumstances, emphasizing the spiritual dimension of shared life and the pursuit of deeper understanding. Together, these approaches form a comprehensive support system for families during crises, providing not only psychological stability but also spiritual renewal, as well as promoting long-term marital strength and personal growth for each partner. The practical significance of the study lies in the development of a comprehensive pastoral care methodology aimed at harmonizing family relationships during crisis periods.

Keywords: pastoral care, crisis situations, family counseling, spiritual support, logotherapy.

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Introduction

Between 2019 and 2023, divorce statistics in the United States reveal alarming signs of destabilization in marital and family relationships, despite a general long-term trend toward decline. In particular, 827,261 divorces were recorded in 2019, while in 2020 the number dropped sharply to 630,505, partially due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, from 2021 to 2023, a gradual increase was observed: in 2021 – 689,308 divorces; in 2022 – 989,518 (14.56 divorces per 1,000 married women); and in 2023 – 992,677 (14.4 per 1,000) [4]. These data are accompanied by a notable complication in the causes of divorce. Experts point to the growing prevalence of mental health disorders, emotional instability, and significant transformations in core values under the influence of mass culture and media. These include the popularization of the “childfree” ideology, the normalization of non-binary identities, consumerist orientation, early sexual activity, and delayed transition into psychological maturity.

In the context of these shifts, two important conclusions can be drawn:

There is an objective need to develop an institution of specially trained Christian counselors with relevant higher education who are capable of providing both psychological and spiritual support to married couples. Such professionals could serve as effective intermediaries between believing families, church leadership, and the public mental healthcare system.

There is an urgent need to develop an integrated model of counseling for Christian families that combines evidence-based psychological methods with a theologically grounded value system. This approach would not only offer effective solutions for overcoming marital crises but also help preserve spiritual identity and Christian values in an increasingly secularized society.

Spiritual guidance for families in crisis is critically important as it helps couples not only maintain emotional stability but also strengthen the spiritual bond that serves as a foundation for overcoming life’s challenges. When couples face crises, it is essential not only to address immediate conflicts but also to explore the spiritual and psychological foundations of their relationships. This approach helps break destructive behavioral patterns, often learned in one’s family of origin, fostering new, healthier forms of interaction based on mutual respect, compassion, and love. Such guidance aims to deepen the understanding of the sacred nature of marriage, helping couples not only survive crises but use them as opportunities for spiritual growth.

Literature Review

The topic of pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods by means of effective cognitive behavioral therapy methods remains unexplored in doctrinal literature. Therefore, this study relied primarily on related works covering key aspects such as psychotherapy, pastoral guidance, and religious approaches to family crisis intervention. Significant contributions to the development of therapeutic methods for overcoming crises have been made by Aaron Beck, who pioneered cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), widely used to reduce anxiety, depression, and improve mutual understanding between couples [2, 6]. Viktor Frankl, the renowned founder of logotherapy, proposed a model based on finding meaning in life, which is also valuable in the context of family crises resolution [4, 11]. His approach emphasizes the importance of personal values and a sense of purpose in relationships, helping couples overcome life challenges. After all, if a person finds an answer to the question “For what purpose?”, they will inevitably find an answer to the question “How?” sooner or later.

A separate direction is represented in the works of Jay Adams, who emphasized biblical values in resolving family conflicts, developing the concept of “nouthetic” counseling – a practice focused on spiritual restoration and behavioral changes through spiritual guidance

[7]. These approaches are essential for supporting married couples in crisis, as they integrate psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions of care.

The study also drew on pastoral recommendations and the teachings of church leaders, including Pope Francis, who frequently highlights the importance of mercy and mutual support in marital relationships [9], as well as research on the specifics of pastoral care, such as the works of Á. Pérez López [8] and Y. Jacob [5].

The issue of pastoral care for married couples in crisis remains insufficiently studied due to the complex nature of such crises, which involve both psychological and spiritual dimensions. While specific aspects of family therapy, such as cognitive behavioral approaches [2, 6], logotherapy [4, 11], and biblical counseling [7], have been thoroughly examined, there is a lack of integrated models that combine these approaches within the context of pastoral support. Additionally, there is a need for more developed methods to adapt widely accepted therapeutic techniques to the spiritual needs of religious couples in crisis. Addressing these gaps requires a systematic approach that combines psychological, moral, and spiritual aspects, taking into account the unique challenges faced by each couple in crisis.

The article also incorporates previously studied materials from the publication “Pastoral Care for Christian Youth in Preparation for Marriage Using Effective CBT Methods (Aaron Beck) and the Value-Semantic Orientation of Classical Biblical Counseling (Jay Adams),” which was explored by the author of the present study [12].

The study employed general scientific methods, including analysis, synthesis, grouping, systematization, comparison, and generalization, which enabled a critical evaluation of existing theoretical findings and empirical data. Critical analysis methods were also used to identify gaps in existing approaches while grouping methods helped structure the collected information into thematic blocks. The foundation of this study is based on the observational method, which was tested and validated through the practical experience of a successful integration of cognitive-behavioral therapy and classical biblical counseling. This integration was implemented in 2011 as part of a premarital course for Christian youth developed and conducted by Ekaterina and Ruslan Fakhрутдинов. This systematic approach allowed for the identification of the main directions of pastoral support, including psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions. Such a comprehensive approach made it possible to create a unified perspective on resolving marital crises.

Purpose of the Article

The aim of the study is to demonstrate how pastoral support helps couples overcome crises by strengthening spiritual connections, replacing destructive behavioral patterns with constructive ones, and restoring harmony in relationships through the creation and discovery of new meanings.

Research Results

Pastoral care, or soul care, is a form of spiritual support aimed at assisting individuals in their spiritual, emotional, and social growth. Its purpose is to guide and strengthen faith in times of crisis, helping people overcome challenges and maintain inner peace. According to Á. Pérez-López [8], pastoral care is particularly important for married couples as it focuses on the marital bond, or *vinculum*, which serves as the primary source of grace until the death of one of the spouses. In line with the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the marital bond forms the foundation for the growth of marital love. It not only deepens mutual commitment but also helps couples overcome difficulties and challenges that inevitably arise in family life [8].

Marital spirituality, as described by Á. Pérez-López, is a distinct form of spirituality that differs from other states of Christian life in its attachment to the marital bond. It is a spirituality rooted in love (*caritas*) and centered on the marital bond as the foundation for expressing this unique form of love. The spiritual life of every Christian is centered on love,

but within marriage, this love takes on a special dimension, requiring ongoing effort and commitment to nurture and strengthen it [8].

Pope Francis [9] also emphasizes the importance of this spirituality, highlighting that the marital bond must be continually renewed and strengthened through prayer to the Holy Spirit. He notes that no effort to sustain marital love can succeed without the supernatural grace given in the sacrament of marriage. This calls for daily effort, constant cooperation with grace, and a willingness to transform love in every new life situation [9].

Religious literature presents various approaches to understanding the significance of the sacrament of marriage. The main principles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Biblical foundations for understanding the sacrament of marriage

Stage of Development	Main Content
Biblical foundations	Marriage is viewed as a sacred union between a man and a woman. In 1 Timothy 4:1–3, Saint Paul condemns views that deny the sacred reality of marriage, defending it against Manichaeism influences. Marriage becomes a visible sign of an invisible reality that conveys grace, emphasizing the indissoluble nature of the marital commitment, even in cases of infidelity or separation.
Early Church teaching	The Council of Trent formally defined marriage as a visible sign that conveys grace and condemned views denying its sacramental nature. This highlighted the unbreakable nature of marital bonds, laying the foundation for further theological development of the marital covenant.
Development of the theology of the marital bond	In <i>Arcanum Divinae</i> (Leo XIII), marriage is described as a sacrament that elevates natural marital love to the level of grace, transforming it into spiritual love (<i>caritas</i>). <i>Casti Connubii</i> (Pius XI) expands this idea, emphasizing the need for spouses to cooperate in realizing this grace, otherwise it remains a “buried talent.”
Second Vatican Council	The document <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (GS 48) acknowledges that Christian marriage is a special sacrament that empowers couples to fulfill their duties. <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (LG) emphasizes that the marital bond is a participation in the spousal love of Christ for the Church, raising it to the level of a sacred vocation.
Modern understanding of marital <i>caritas</i>	Pope John Paul II, in <i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , views the marital bond as <i>res et sacramentum</i> , the first and immediate effect of the sacrament of marriage. He describes it as a memorial, actualization, and prophecy of Christ’s sacrifice, inviting spouses to a life of love that forgives, redeems, and prepares them for union with Christ.
Sacramentality and moral responsibility	Marriage not only sanctifies the couple but also imposes moral obligations, inviting them to active participation in salvation. This includes the struggle against the consequences of sin and the pursuit of the original unity between man and woman.

Note: Systematized based on the research of Pérez López, Á. [8]

Marital love, according to Thomas Aquinas, has a unique nature that goes far beyond mere attachment or passion. It involves a conscious choice to desire the true good for one’s partner, even when this requires personal sacrifice or moving beyond one’s own interests. Such kind of love is based on mutual goodwill, transforming ordinary human relationships into a spiritual bond with a deeper meaning. Aquinas emphasizes that true marital love is not

just sympathy or a desire to satisfy one's own needs. It includes the ability to see one's spouse not only as a partner but also as a companion with whom one shares a common life, aspirations, and goals. This is especially important in times of crisis, when emotional difficulties can lead to alienation or loss of intimacy. In such moments, marital love is expressed not only through patience or forgiveness but also through an active willingness to work on restoring mutual trust and support. Such love requires not just coexistence, but genuine understanding and compassion, allowing partners to see each other as more than just objects of their own emotional or physical needs [1].

Moreover, Aquinas highlights that marital love also has a spiritual dimension, which finds its highest expression in the relationship with God. This is not merely a human passion but a profound spiritual unity that manifests through shared prayer, common values, and a commitment to live according to God's design. In this sense, marital love is not only a form of earthly happiness but also a path to holiness transforming every aspect of married life into a reflection of God's love [1].

Counseling work with young couples during the first three critical years of marriage is a vital stage in the formation of healthy, strong, and spiritually mature marital relationships in the early phase of family development. First, such preventive pastoral care helps to avoid the entrenchment of destructive behavioral patterns adopted by newlyweds from their families of origin. Young couples often unconsciously repeat their parents' behavioral scenarios, using dysfunctional conflict resolution methods, incorrect cognitive assumptions, and deep-seated fears based on previous negative experiences. In such cases, cognitive restructuring is necessary to replace destructive thought patterns with healthier models of behavior based on biblical values and deeper life meanings. This approach helps overcome the influence of generational scripts and limitations, develop the ability to recognize cause-and-effect relationships, rely on common sense, and form ethical principles for family interaction.

Second, many couples do not understand the nature of family crises as inherent stages of family development and often perceive them as the end of the relationship. In the modern information space, there is a widespread promotion of easy partner changes and divorces as universal solutions to problems. This creates a false perception of marriage as something unstable and short-lived. Therefore, it is essential to teach young couples to understand the nature of crises, form adaptive role models, develop conflict resolution skills, and maintain emotional stability even in difficult moments.

Third, a successful marriage requires specific practical interaction skills, such as the ability to assess situations rationally, respect personal boundaries, show compassionate understanding of a partner's weaknesses, find compromises, and build healthy communication models. This includes developing the ability to be humble, accept different possible outcomes, and adapt to change. Such skills can be effectively developed through CBT, biblical principles, and logotherapy, which help form a deep spiritual foundation for married life.

Pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods is an important aspect of pastoral ministry that includes supporting couples in overcoming psychological, emotional, and spiritual challenges. One of the most widely used and effective approaches in this context is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), developed by Aaron Beck in the 1960s [12]. As noted by S. P. Chand, D. P. Kuckel, and M. R. Huecker, Beck, while studying mental disorders, observed that his patients with depression often expressed thoughts that did not correspond to reality and exhibited characteristic "cognitive distortions" in their thinking. This led him to understand depression not only as a mood disorder but also as a cognitive disorder reflected in distorted thinking, emotional reactions, and behavior [2].

Based on these observations, Beck developed a cognitive model that became the foundation for CBT. As noted by J. R. Keefe and his colleagues, this model includes three main

components: automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and core beliefs, which form the basis of our perception of reality. Automatic thoughts are immediate, unplanned interpretations of events that directly influence a person's emotional state. For example, if one spouse does not answer a phone call, the other may automatically think, "They are ignoring me" or "Something happened," which can cause anxiety or irritation. Cognitive distortions, such as dichotomous thinking, magnification, or minimization, contribute to the formation of negative thinking patterns that deepen crisis situations. Core beliefs, in turn, are deeply held assumptions that influence our reactions and may include fundamental views about oneself and the world, such as "I am unlovable" or "The world is a dangerous place" [6].

Thus, CBT not only helps couples recognize and correct destructive thinking patterns but also promotes the formation of more positive and realistic beliefs, strengthening their relationships and helping them overcome crises. This makes CBT an extremely effective tool for pastoral care for married couples as it allows them not only to change behavioral patterns but also to gain a deeper understanding of each other's emotional needs, creating a stronger bond even in challenging times [6].

Pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods is a critical component of pastoral ministry aimed at supporting couples in difficult life circumstances. One of the approaches used in this context is CBT, which is based on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behavior, emphasizing the role of automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and core beliefs in shaping emotional responses and behavioral patterns. Using CBT in pastoral care allows couples to recognize and change negative thinking patterns, improving relationships and overcoming crises [7].

On the other hand, biblical counseling, based on the principles outlined by Jay Adams in his work 'Competent to Counsel' (1970), emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture for addressing life's challenges. This approach involves mentorship, correction, and instruction based on biblical truths, aiming at spiritual growth and the restoration of marital relationships. According to research by Y. K. Jacob, pastoral counseling plays a key role in providing support to couples, helping them gain a deeper understanding of the nature of marriage and strengthen their faith, which contributes to overcoming life's challenges successfully [5].

Thus, integrating CBT methods with biblical counseling in pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods allows for a combination of psychological tools and spiritual principles, promoting comprehensive restoration and strengthening of marital bonds [7].

Pastoral care for married couples in crisis by means of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy is an approach that focuses on the search for meaning as the primary source of psychological resilience and spiritual renewal. According to Frankl, logotherapy is a spiritually oriented form of psychotherapy based on the premise that the primary motivating force in human life is the will to meaning, not merely the pursuit of pleasure or power, as suggested by Freud and Adler [4]. Frankl argued that, even in the most challenging circumstances, a person can find meaning in their existence, which makes them spiritually invincible even when physical or psychological conditions are limiting [4].

As P. T. P. Wong emphasizes, logotherapy is built on three fundamental principles: freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life. Freedom of will is considered the fundamental basis for conscious choice in one's life path and the acceptance of responsibility for one's decisions. This means that people are not passive victims of their circumstances but are capable of changing their attitudes toward life, even in difficult situations. The will to meaning refers to the primary motivational force of human behavior, emphasizing that the pursuit of meaning provides a deeper and more stable foundation for existence than the pursuit of power or pleasure. Finally, the meaning of life is understood as an internal, unique

aspect for each person found within the depths of their spiritual dimension, beyond mere physical or psychological well-being [11].

Logotherapy also emphasizes the spiritual dimension of human existence. As Frankl writes, this spiritual aspect includes such internal resources as love, the will to meaning, life purpose, hope, dignity, creativity, conscience, and the ability to make choices. This noetic dimension is a kind of "first aid kit" in logotherapy, which helps people overcome life crises by revealing their hidden resources [4].

The main therapeutic techniques of logotherapy that can be effectively applied in pastoral care for married couples include paradoxical intention and dereflection. Paradoxical intention involves encouraging couples to imagine the worst possible scenario to such an exaggerated and absurd extent that it loses its threat and even becomes humorous. This technique is based on the human capacity for self-distancing, which reduces the impact of negative emotions [4]. Dereflection, on the other hand, focuses on shifting attention away from an unsolvable problem to more meaningful and positive aspects of life. This technique uses the human self-transcendence ability, moving beyond personal problems and concentrating on higher goals, such as spiritual growth, family harmony, or achieving important shared objectives [4].

The core techniques of cognitive-behavioral therapy that can complement pastoral work with married couples include cognitive restructuring, Socratic questioning, thought journaling, and the stop-thought technique. Cognitive restructuring helps individuals identify irrational or exaggerated thoughts and replace them with more balanced, evidence-based interpretations of events. Socratic questioning involves a guided dialogue where individuals are encouraged to critically examine the validity of their beliefs and assumptions. The automatic thought journal is a structured tool where couples record distressing thoughts, associated emotions, and alternative responses, promoting emotional awareness and cognitive flexibility. The stop-thought technique teaches individuals to consciously interrupt spirals of negative thinking, replacing them with grounding or constructive thoughts. These methods are practical, widely applicable, and can be adapted for use in values-based Christian counseling [4].

Consider several case studies demonstrating the effectiveness of an integrated pastoral counseling approach that combines cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), logotherapy, and classical biblical soul care.

A young couple experienced recurring conflicts due to pathological jealousy. CBT tools such as cognitive restructuring and an automatic thought journal helped identify and replace cognitive distortions like "mind reading" and "catastrophizing." Logotherapy emphasized personal responsibility and the value of trust within the covenant of marriage. Biblical counseling incorporated 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, with additional spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and reflection on the story of Hosea to reinforce forgiveness and emotional healing.

Another couple faced emotional strain after the birth of two children in quick succession, exacerbated by work and church obligations. CBT interventions included mood monitoring and reframing negative beliefs ("I do everything alone"). Logotherapy helped them rediscover meaning in shared sacrifice. Biblical principles from Ephesians 5:21 on mutual submission guided them in restoring unity. The couple also engaged in prayer and regular reading of the story of Priscilla and Aquila as a model of balance between ministry, family, and partnership.

A young family struggled to establish independence from their parental homes. Through CBT journaling and value clarification, they worked through guilt-related beliefs and practiced boundary-setting. Logotherapy supported their exploration of family identity and long-term meaning. Genesis 2:24 ("a man shall leave his father and mother...") served as the theological foundation, supplemented by prayer and study of the story of Ruth to understand the formation of new covenantal bonds.

An immigrant couple experienced cultural disorientation and social isolation. CBT techniques helped address anxiety and intrusive thoughts, while logotherapeutic tools like dereflection and goal setting gave new meaning to their transitional experience. Biblical counseling drew on the story of Abraham's journey as a narrative of faith and trust in unfamiliar territory. Spiritual support included pastoral guidance, prayer for strength, and Scripture reading, which reinforced their resilience and marital unity.

For couples experiencing crises, these techniques can become essential tools for restoring emotional closeness and mutual support. This approach allows couples to restore faith in themselves and each other, strengthening their bond even in the most challenging life situations [4].

Conclusion

Pastoral care for married couples during crisis periods is a critical component of pastoral ministry aimed at supporting couples in difficult life situations. It focuses on strengthening spiritual connections, overcoming emotional difficulties, and restoring inner harmony in relationships. The marital bond holds particular significance as it serves not only as the foundation of family life but also as a source of grace, elevating natural love to the level of supernatural love. In such moments of crisis, it is crucial to maintain and deepen this connection, helping couples find new meaning in their shared lives, preserve their faith, and overcome internal conflicts.

Effective methods of pastoral care include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), the value-semantic orientation of classical biblical counseling, and logotherapy. CBT helps couples identify and replace destructive thinking patterns that can lead to conflict with more realistic and constructive beliefs. This reduces anxiety, improves communication, and strengthens emotional connections. Biblical counseling, on the other hand, emphasizes spiritual growth, moral values, and relationship restoration through deepened faith, highlighting the importance of spiritual unity in marriage. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy complements this approach by encouraging couples to find meaning even in the most challenging circumstances, emphasizing the spiritual dimension of shared life and the pursuit of deeper understanding. It also teaches individuals to actively create new meanings on a daily basis—through productive work, creative expression, and the cultivation of values.

Thus, combining these approaches creates a comprehensive support system for married couples in times of crisis, providing not only psychological stability but also spiritual renewal, promoting the strengthening of marital bonds in the long-term perspective and personal growth for each partner.

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