Vita

JOHN C. VAN EPP, Ph.D.

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BRIEF BIO

- John Van Epp, PhD is the author of *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk*, published by McGraw-Hill and *Christianity Today's* Top Pick for Singles; *Becoming Better Together: the RAM plan for growing together when life is pulling you apart; Endgame: The Church's Strategic Move to Save Faith and Family in America* (see Publication section for additional publications).

- The combination of his twenty-five years of clinical experience in a private practice with his experience as a visiting professor and an adjunct professor where he taught marriage and family coursework and reviewed extensive research in premarital, marital and family relations, have paved the way for his programs, *PICK (How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk) Couple LINKS, Our Home Runs, Home Run Dads, Home Run Parents, R&R (Ready & Resilient) for the Fight*, and *Relationship Counseling/Coaching with the RAM* to be taught to more than a million worldwide, and to be used by all branches of the military, non-profit and community organizations, high schools and universities, social agencies, juvenile and correctional facilities, churches and faith-based organizations, and in all fifty states, ten countries and by more than 35,000 instructors certified by Dr. Van Epp.

- Van Epp has been a contractor for the Henry Jackson Foundation and worked with the staff at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in the Laboratory of Suicidality Department. He is considered a subject matter expert (SME) on spirituality, psychology, resiliency, and suicidality, and has contributed to the development of a suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention manual for Chaplains with Special Operations.

- Van Epp and his innovative Relationship Attachment Model, books and relationship programs were awarded the Smart Marriage Impact Award in 2008, the National Association of Relationship & Marriage Education Impact Award (2018), and have been featured in The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Psychology Today, O Magazine, and Cosmopolitan; and he has appeared on the CBS Early Show, Good Morning America, Fox News, and Focus on the Family.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. May, 1995	**The University of Akron**, Akron, OH Counseling Psychology
M.A. May, 1987	**Ashland Theological Seminary**, Ashland, OH Church History
M.A. May, 1986	**Ashland Theological Seminary**, Ashland, OH Pastoral Psychology and Counseling
B.S. May, 1980	**Cairn University**, Langhorne, PA Pastoral and Biblical Studies

PROFESSIONAL/ WORK EXPERIENCE

CURRENT POSITION

Founder/ President LoveThinks, LLC (formerly Lifechangers, DBA) 1989-present

- Responsibilities include: counseling/coaching, teaching, training instructors and grantees (e.g. SRAE, HMRE) in pycho-educational relationship programs, conducting seminars and workshops, speaking engagements, program development, writing, and serving as a consultant for grantees with conducting research, program development and research projects.

PREVIOUS POSITIONS

Visiting Professor (SME), 2004-2015
Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course (CH_BOLC), Ft. Jackson, SC

- Pastoral Counseling/Coaching with the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM)
- PICK Instructor Certification Training for Youth and Unmarried Individuals
- Couple LINKS Instructor Certification Training for Committed/Married Couples
- Our Home Runs Instructor Certification Training for Families

Adjunct Professor, 2007-2009
University of Akron, Akron, Ohio

- Healthy Dating: How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk or Jerkette

Visiting Professor (SME), 2007-2015
Chaplain Captain's Career Course (C4), Ft. Jackson, SC

- PICK Instructor Certification Training for Youth and Unmarried Individuals
- Couple LINKS Instructor Certification Training for Committed/Married Couples
- Ready and Resilient (R&R) for the Fight Spiritual Fitness Course

Clinical Counselor, 1989-2010
Lifechangers Private Practice, Medina, Ohio

Clinical Counselor, 1986-1989
Emerge Ministries, Akron, Ohio

Founding Minister, 1981-1987
Medina Community Church, Medina, Ohio

Associate Minister, 1980-1981
Weymouth Community Church, Medina, Ohio

Youth Minister, 1979-1980
Bristol Baptist Church, Bristol PA

RESEARCH

The Impact of a Relationship Education Program on Single U.S. Army Soldiers,
July 2004 - November 2005
The Department of Human Development and Family Science, The Ohio State University

- This evaluation of the PICK [***P**remarital **I**nterpersonal **C**hoices & **K**nowledge*] a Partner, relationship education program, delivered to Army soldiers examined changes in knowledge and attitudes about relationship development and marriage as a result of participation in the program. At the conclusion of the program, participants demonstrated an increase in their understanding of the crucial areas to explore and discuss in a premarital relationship, and, overall, exhibited more favorable attitudes and beliefs about marriage and mate selection.

PICK Program, Couples LINKS, Home Run Courses: Grantees

The evidenced-based programs PICK [***P**remarital **I**nterpersonal **C**hoices & **K**nowledge*] a Partner Program (Van Epp, 1996). the Couple LINKS (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge & Skill) (Van Epp, 2004), and Home Run Dads (Van Epp, 2010) have been utilized by many federal and state grant recipients. All grantee organizations collect data and run statistics on

program effectiveness. Responsibilities include: Training and certifying educators, designing inventories and research designs to evaluate programs, providing technical assistance and consultation to grantees. Some of the regions of these grantees:

- Grand Rapids, MI
- Dayton, OH
- Dalton, GA
- Sacramento, CA
- Los Angeles, CA
- Richmond, VA
- Fargo, ND
- Knoxville, TN
- Utah statewide
- Springfield, MO
- Chattanooga, TN
- Fort Worth, TX
- Tallahassee, FL
- Chicago, IL
- Evansville, IN
- Atlanta, GA

PUBLICATIONS

Curricula

- PICK (Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge) a Partner (aka How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk[ette]) (1996).
  - Instructor Certification Course
  - Adult 5-lesson Participant Workbook
  - Adult Military 5-lesson Participant Workbook
  - Young Adult 5-lesson Participant Workbook
  - Young Adult 10-lesson Participant Workbook
  - C-PICK Bible Study Workbook (faith-based)
  - How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette) Parent Manual
  - Head Meets Heart (online course version of PICK)
  - RAM Series for Singles (video-based small discussion group version of PICK)
- Couple LINKS (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge & Skills (2000)
  - LINKS Instructor Certification Course
  - The Marriage LINKS Educational Program on DVD
  - Couples 5-lesson Participant Workbook
  - Couples 5-lesson Military Participant Workbook

  - C-LINKS Study Workbook (faith-based)
  - Rock Solid Marriage (online course version of LINKS)
  - Rock Solid Marriage Ready (online marriage preparation course-combo of PICK & LINKS)
  - RAM Series for couples (video-based small discussion group version of LINKS)
- Our Home Runs (Families stepping up to the plate)
  - Our Home Runs Instructor Certification Course
  - Our Home Runs Participant Playbook
- Home Run Parents (and Home Run Dads)
  - Home Run Parents/Dads Instructor Certification Course
  - Home Run Parents or Dads Participant Playbooks
- Ready & Resilient (R&R) for the Fight: *Spiritual Fitness Training.*
  - R&R Instructor Certification Course
  - R&R workbook (military version)
- Counseling/Coaching with the RAM
    - An 8-hour course for teaching counseling skills and assessment
- RAM Churchwide 6-week Series (license to use the RAM materials for church)
    - Adult Singles Study (video-discussion course based on the PICK Program)
    - Married Couples Study (video-discussion course based on the LINKS Program)
    - Elementary & Youth video-based curricula
    - Six sermon messages based on RAM

Books

- Ripley, J.S., Sells, J., and Chandler, D.J. *Ministering to Families in Crisis.* "Assessment of Families in Churches" chapter by Ripley, J.S., Van Epp, J., and De Gance, J.P. InterVarsity Press: 2025 Publication.
- Van Epp, J.C. and DeGance, J.P. (2021). *Endgame: The Church's Strategic Move to Save Faith and Family in America.* Trinity Press.
- Van Epp, J.C. with contributions from Cutlip, M.C. (2017*). Becoming Better Together: the RAM plan for growing together when life is pulling you apart.* Trinity Press.

- Van Epp, J.C. (2006). *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk: the foolproof way to follow your heart without losing your mind.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Ponzetti, James (editor) (2016). *Evidenced-based approaches to relationship and marriage education.* "Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) programs: PICK and LINKS" (chapter 15). Routledge Publishers.
- Chimsky-Lustig, Mark (editor). (2010). The Healthy Imbalanced Marriage, in *Creating a Marriage You'll Love.* Sellers Publishing.
- Alexander, Susanne (editor). (2010). Compatibility and Friendship; Follow Your Heart Without Losing Your Mind; Check Out the Family, in *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips and Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now.* Barringer Publishing.

Peer-reviewed journal articles on Love Thinks Courses

- Turner, J.J. Stapley, S., Bradford, K., Higginbotham, B.J. Fatherhood Education with Latino Fathers: A Mixed-Method (2023). Evaluation *Journal of Latinos and Education.* 2023, Vol. 22, No. 2, 842–854.
- Turner, J.J. Bradford, K., Higginbotham, B.J. Addressing Determinants of Paternal Subjective Well-Being Through Fatherhood Education (2022). *Journal of Men's Studies.* Vol. 30 (1) 97-110.
- Crapo, J.S., Bradford, K., & Higginbotham, B.J. (2019). Preliminary Evaluation of the Couple LINKS Program. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy.*
- Bradford, K., Spuhler, B., Higginbotham, B., Laxman, D., Morgan, C.N. (2019). "I Don't Want to Make the Same Mistakes": Relationship Education Among Low-Income Single Adults. *Family Relations-NCFR.*
- Miller, J.A., Crapo, J.S., Higginbotham, B.J. (2019). Relationship Beliefs Patterns Among Relationship Participants at Different Venues. *Family Relations-NCFR.*
- Bradford, K., Stewart, J. Pfister, R, & Higginbotham, B. (2016). Avoid falling for a jerk(ette): effectiveness of the premarital interpersonal choices and knowledge program among emerging adults. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.*
- Cutlip, Morgan (2013). *A qualitative examination of the relationship attachment model (RAM) with married individuals.* Dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy.
- Van Epp, M.C., Futris, T.G., Van Epp, J.C., & Campbell, K. (2006). The Impact of the P.I.C.K. a Partner Relationship Education Program on Single Army Soldiers. *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal. Vol 36, 4, June 2008.*
- Futris, T.G., Van Epp, M.C., & Van Epp, J.C. (2005). *The Effectiveness of a Premarital Education Program on Single U.S. Soldiers: Premarital Interpersonal Choices and*

Knowledge (P.I.C.K.) Program. Final Report Prepared for Deputy under Secretary of the Army, Operations Research.

Journal articles in preparation for publication

- Van Epp, J.C. and Cutlip, M.C. *The Relationship Attachment Model: An integrated theory of attachment.*

MILITARY GRANTS AND CONTRACTS (the following are a few of over fifty contracts)

- Van Epp, J.C. & Futris, T.G. (2004). The Impact of a Premarital Education Program on Single U.S. Army Soldiers. Funded through the Department of Defense.
- Van Epp, J.C. (2005). Contract to Train and Certify 400 Chaplains as PICK Instructors. Funded through the Chief of Chaplains Office.
- Van Epp, J.C. (2006). Contract to Train and Certify 300 Chaplains as PICK Instructors. Funded through the Chief of Chaplains Office.
- Van Epp, J.C. (2007). Contract to Train and Certify 300 Chaplains as PICK and LINKS instructors. Funded through the Chief of Chaplains Office.
- Van Epp, J.C. (2005-present). Contract to Train and Certify Chaplains at the Chaplains School, Fort Jackson in PICK and LINKS. Funded through the Chief of Chaplains Office.
- Van Epp, J.C. (2007-present). Contract to Train and Certify Chaplains in 6-12 Strong Bonds Trainings per year in PICK and LINKS. Funded through the Chief of Chaplains Office.

PRESS AND RECOGNITIONS (partial list)

- **Essence "Jerk Alert: Is he a clown or a keeper?"**
  June, 2003
- **The Wall Street Journal "Check mate: Tutors teach smart dating"**
  May, 2005
- **Time Magazine**
  January 16, 2006
- **The Associated Press "The Army's New Rules of Engagement"**
  February 4, 2006
- **Fox News Interview**
  February 5, 2006
- **O Magazine**
  February, 2006
- **The O'Reilly Factor**

February 14, 2006

- **Salon.com "Singles going steady"**
  March 7, 2006
- **Psychology Today "Love isn't blind"**
  April, 2006
- **Expanded Books Video Campaign**
  September 26, 2006
- **Lavalife Magazine "How to avoid dating a jerk"**
  September 26, 2006
- **The New York Post**
  October 22, 2006
- **CNBC "The business of saving marriages"**
  October 26, 2006
- **The Wall Street Journal "Therapists advise couples confessing temptation"** October 26, 2006
- **Wedding Bee**
  October 26, 2006
- **AOL Love and Sex Coach**
  October 5, 2006
- **WCBQ-WHNC-AM Dr. Alvin Augustus Jones Interview**
  October 19, 2006
- **New York Daily News**
  November 2, 2006
- **OK! Weekly**
  November 8, 2006
- **Catherine Crier Live**
  November 9, 2006
- **CBS The Early Show**
  November 11, 2006
- **Cosmopolitan**
  December issue, 2006
- **International Radio Tour of 200+ stations**
  December 2006
- **eDiets**
  December 2006
- **Smart Marriage Impact Award**
  July 2008
- **Cosmopolitan**
  June, 2008; August, 2008; April, 2009; June 2009; October, 2009

- **Best 2008 Research Article Award**
  Family Consumer Sciences Research Journal
- **Men's Health**
  Sept. 2009
- **Inside Romance Success with Kevin Decker**
  March 2009
- **Life & Faith with Mike Powers**
  October 2009
- **Focus on the Family Weekend Magazine**
  February 2010 (Four weekly broadcasts over course of the month)
- **American Association of Christian Counselors**, radio interviews by Tim Clinton
  2012, 2013
- **Cosmopolitan** March 2014
- **Institute for Family Studies, (2021) A New Book Outlines a Game Plan for Church-led 'Marriage Renaissance',** December 16, 2021.
- **Newsweek, Can Our Nation's Churches Save Marriage- and the Family?** October 11, 2021.
- **Christianity Daily, *The Next Great Awakening Will Come Through Churches' Efforts To Fix Broken Families, Marriages***. October 5, 2021
- **Christan Post, *Churches' key to advancing 'next Great Awakening' by fixing broken families, marriage experts say,*** October 1, 2021.

DIVERSE POPULATIONS SERVED

Military

- The United States military (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) has been utilizing curricula that have been written by Dr. Van Epp for over twenty years. These curricula include a course for helping singles with romantic relationships and the selection of partners: *Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge (PICK),* also titled, *How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk (or Jerkette).* A second course for helping married couples maintain resilient and close, satisfactory relationships is *Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge & Skills (LINKS).* A third course for helping families maintain resilient and close, strong relationships is *Our Home Runs.* A fourth course helping individuals, couples and families with developing and deepening a spirituality that increases resiliency is *Ultimate Spiritual Resiliency & Relationships (R&R).* Military personnel certified by Dr. Van Epp and his organization, Love Thinks, LLC have taught more than half a million service men and women in his programs over the past twenty years.

- The Army Chief of Chaplains specifically identified Dr. Van Epp's programs as an integral component of the Strong Bonds Initiative in their current Memorandum of Instruction since 2003.

- The Air Force Chief of Chaplains specifically identified Dr. Van Epp's programs as an integral component of their Strong Bonds Initiative in 2020.

- Family Advocacy Programs in all branches of the military have had Dr. Van Epp train and certify Family Advocacy Managers in Love Thinks programs. For instance, the Air Force has had Dr. Van Epp train and certify over 150 personnel so that every Air Force Base has PICK and LINKS certified instructors to conduct relationship workshops for service men and women.

- Family Readiness Programs in all branches of the military have also utilized Dr. Van Epp's programs and have trained staff to facilitate the PICK, LINKS and Our Home Runs Programs since 2004.

- Since 2003, Dr. Van Epp has conducted Chaplain training events with his courses in the Army Strong Bonds Program (previously called, *Building Strong and Ready Families*). Between the years 2003 and 2005 he conducted over thirty training events for Chaplains. Since 2005, Dr. Van Epp has taught his programs in at least six to ten trainings of Army Active Duty, Reserves, and National Guard Chaplains and their Assistants each year in the Strong Bonds Program. In addition, for the last two years he has trained over 120 ANG Chaplains and Chaplain Assistants in his programs in their annual Strong Bonds Training Event.

- Dr. Van Epp is the only trainer who has conducted the train-the-trainer events for his programs. With over three thousand Chaplains trained as trainers by Dr. Van Epp, ninety-eight percent of Chaplains assigned to Dr. Van Epp the highest ratings for his trainings conducted on these programs.

- Dr. Van Epp has had extensive experience with training military professionals, having conducted classes and trainings in the Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course for the training of Army Chaplains since 2004. His teaching and writing skills have been so esteemed that he was contracted to design a Professional Counseling Course based on his innovative Relationship Attachment Model which is presently used in the doctrine of the Chaplain's professional training.

- All Chaplain Graduates between 2004-2015 have been certified in one or more of Dr. Van Epp's programs. Between 2010-2015, graduating Army Chaplains were certified in three programs (*PICK*, *LINKS* and *Our Home Runs*) and received an additional professional counseling course written and taught by Dr. Van Epp (Relationship Counseling with the RAM).

- The Chaplain's Captain Career Course has included the *PICK* and *LINKS* courses written and taught by Dr. Van Epp between 206-2011. And from 2011-2015, Chaplains have been trained and certified in the *Ultimate Spiritual Resiliency & Relationships (R&R)* course so that they can conduct spiritual resiliency courses in their work with soldiers.

- The Air National Guard has coordinated training events over the last three years in order to have Dr. Van Epp train and certify over 150 Chaplains in the *Ultimate Spiritual Resiliency & Relationships (R&R)* course so that they can conduct spiritual resiliency courses in their work with airmen.

- All Love Thinks courses have been empirically evaluated with military audiences and found to significantly change attitudes, skills, intentions, and behaviors in ways that positively improve close relationship and increase personal resiliency.

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Proponents and Grant Recipients

Since 2001, organizations and educational settings have taught youth the PICK program that uses the evidence-based Relationship Attachment Model to explain how sexuality is inseparable from the relationship bonds of trust, reliance, commitment and knowledge of a partner. This program has been taught in public high schools to over 100,000 youth and has been shown to be effective in those settings as well as with high-risk youth.

Marriage & Family Proponents and Grant Recipients

Over fifty organizations serving a county or counties and/or their entire state with an emphasis on reaching communities and/or low-income populations, partnering with existing social, educational and faith-based organizations in their areas to improve dating relationships, marriage and family relationships, and lower divorce rates have utilized Dr. Van Epp's programs. For instance, the extension office of the State of Utah has had Dr. Van Epp train and certify over fifty instructors in PICK and LINKS to teach these programs in adult education classes, colleges and universities, public high schools, jails, and agency settings throughout the state of Utah.

Incarcerated Youth and Adults

Numerous prison initiatives designed to improve relationship practices, partner selection, and/or marriages with incarcerated youth and/or adults, particularly those involved in re-entry programs have utilized the PICK and LINKS programs. Research collected on participants have shown increased relationship knowledge, improved relationship skills, increased relationship satisfaction and greater partner-choice confidence.

Faith-based Organizations and Churches

All of the Love Thinks programs have both Community and Christian versions. The community version is based on existing research from behavioral and social sciences. The Christian versions include all of the program information from the secular versions but are integrated with Biblical principles and passages. The 6-week *RAM Series Churchwide Relationship Experience* has been engaged by churches across the country by over 200,000 church members.

Divorced and Single-Again Adults

Dr. Van Epp has conducted workshops, trainings and keynotes at such conferences as the National Conference for the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics; Beginning Experience (BE); the International Conference for the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics; and the Edith Stein Conference. His PICK program has been used since 1998 in numerous divorce recovery classes.

Sexual Harrassment/Assault Response & Prevention (SHARP), and Sexual Harrassment and Assault Prevention and Education (SHAPE)

Dr. Van Epp has trained and certified numerous Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) in the PICK program. For instance, the Defense Language Institute in Presidio, CA has utilized Dr. Van Epp and his PICK program in their overall mission to reduce sexual harassment and assault and cultivate healthy relationship practices among service members.

WEBSITES

www.LoveThinks.com
Love Thinks, LLC primary company site and resource platform for the certified instructors of the Love Thinks instructor-led courses.

www.MyLoveThinks.com
Love Thinks site for end-users to access relationship resources, blogs, online flagship courses, and a Love Thinks membership.

www.RAMseries.com
Love Thinks site for churches and the faith community to license the churchwide, 6-week RAM Series.