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Editorial Note

Undoubtedly, the human family is one of the most threatened units of our individual and communal existence. Many have argued that the family's failure or success reflects the order in the development of society. This unvarnished truth and the consequences of ignoring it account for establishing a journal devoted exclusively to family life - *International Journal of Family Life and Societal Development*. This journal, conceived as a means and avenue to express concern and interrogate pressing family issues and proffer solutions, is not a confessional one; it takes discursive and practical approaches to issues on family life from interdisciplinary perspectives.

In this maiden volume, Stephen Ayankeye argues that there is a nexus between family integration and societal development. Inversely, a disintegrated family will lead to the underdevelopment of society. He further argues that there are factors that engender family integration but that those factors are now being challenged. He recommends ways of ensuring that the challenges are tackled. Benson Igboin interrogates the effects of social media on family life. He argues that society is dynamic, and globalisation has ambivalent impacts on family life. While it is now practically impossible to insulate family life from social media, he concludes that reasonable and responsible deployment of social media will enhance family unity and connectedness. Sharon Slater's article examines the integration of family and the family's protection in Nigeria and Africa. Slater argues that the assault on children and families in Nigeria is propelled by the global sexual revolution, to which many parents in Africa have not given sufficient attention. She notes that this revolution should be viewed from a human rights perspective to challenge its causes and effects on African families, particularly young people. She thus recommends that parents and the African government have critical roles to play in safeguarding the sexual health of their children.

On his own, Elijah Adeyinka examines the effects of postmodernism on the African family system. He points out that postmodernism's tilt

towards relativism adversely impacts family life. In order to stem the tide of postmodernism's inroad into the family, he suggests that family life should be guided strictly by enduring biblical principles. Oluwakemi Amuda's article intervenes by highlighting the critical role of effective communication within the family. She argues that when there is adequate and mutual communication in the family, faith is developed, which results in the development of the whole person. For Abosede Ayinde, violence against the female gender in the family and society has remained unabated. Ayinde notes that contemporary society has been unable to arrest violence against the female gender. She also examines the biblical basis of violence against the female gender and recommends ways to ameliorate it. John Oladapo echoes the argument that the challenges of the modern family system directly link with societal development. He argues that the African family system is being critically neglected, and the consequences are dire and visible. He, therefore, recommends the need to pay urgent attention to those values that sustained the family system before modernity unleashed its forces on it. Princess and Raphael Idialu reaffirm the argument that effective communication in the family has a way of dispelling and resolving conflict. They examine effective communication skills to demonstrate that family health will be maintained and sustained when emplaced. Foluke Odesola articulates that parenting is critical to the healthy growth and development of the child. Effective parenting, she argues, leads to arresting juvenile delinquency. As a result, she recommends that effective parenting is a sine qua non for guiding the child through the challenges that the teenage period of development poses.

Ogbeni Sylvester examines the role of education in the development of the family. Although education costs are high and hardly affordable, he argues that education is essential to the family and society. He suggests ways through which parents could navigate the challenges the cost of education has posed in contemporary society. Michael Otun introduces the ethical and religious dilemma many Christian couples face in deciding whether or not to resort to IVF in

their quest to procreate. He argues that the decision is not easy because of many interpretations of scriptures and pressures that are brought to bear on couples. He thus concludes that couples should weigh the moral implications of IVF before taking their final decision. Finally, Andrew Itakorode Olanrewaju examines the causes and effects of drug abuse among youth. He argues that despite concerted efforts to discourage the youth from engaging in substance abuse, the reality on the ground shows an increase in the number of those involved. He recommends that parents and government should intensify efforts towards ensuring that the youth are dissuaded from abusing drugs because of their harmful effects on them and society.

Benson Ohihon Igboin
Editor-in-Chief

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR DISPELLING CONFLICTS IN MARRIAGE

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Abstract

Human communication is one characteristic that distinguishes humans from other species among God's creation. It is incontrovertible that the effectiveness of this communication is imperative for marital bliss. A significant percentage of marital challenges and divorces globally are traced to ineffective communication in marital relationships. This paper highlights the concept of effective communication, some principles of effective communication in marriage, the signs of conflicts in marriage and the ways to dispel these conflicts through effective communication. The descriptive research method was adopted for this work. A secondary source was used to elicit information from the works of scholars in the field of communication and its impacts on marriage relationships. Library search was the tool used to gather information—myriads of causes of marriage conflicts and equally ways to dispel conflicts. The study, therefore, recommends that couples listen to one another and communicate effectively for a sustained and blissful marital relationship.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict, Dispelling, Conflicts, Marriage.

Introduction

Communication is an essential tool in human interaction, cooperation, and advancement. There are as many definitions of communication as there are scholars, but these researchers agree with

Borisoff (1992), who expounds on Myers & Myers' view of communication. Deborah Borisoff posits that communication is an exceptional interface between or among people who share the same language and those who share the same understanding of the symbols of interaction. This could also be expressed symbolically. It can be deduced from this definition of communication that there must be an established pattern through symbols that the parties interacting mutually understand. When we relate this to communication in marriage, it goes without saying that couples need to study each other to establish their communication pattern and to know what each person is saying through words, clues, actions and hints.

Effective communication is the ability for someone to transmit his or her ideas, concepts, knowledge and information to a target audience and for such a target to be able to decode and act effectively on the message they have received, thereby achieving the intent in the best possible way, (Shuchi Sharma and Rachna Sharma, 2014). In the secular and the Church today, effective communication has become imperative; big corporations and organisations spend vast resources on effective communication training because communication becomes irrelevant when it is ineffective. Some have opined that effective communication is the foundation on which blissful marriage is built (Jo Ann Atkins, 2021). However, this is elusive due to its fluidity because couples are different from one to another. Nevertheless, as one of the formidable foundations on which a blissful marriage can be built, effective communication is crucial for a happy marriage.

Biblical Basis for Effective Communication in Marriage

Numerous statements in the Scriptures prove that God supports effective communication in marriage and all social spheres of human interactions. For instance, Proverbs 18:21 states that death and life are in the power of the tongue, those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21 shows that words are seeds with repercussions, and the tongue can inflict death and give life to a situation. Death, in this case, could be stagnancy in life in terms of progress. The importance

of careful listening in communication is also spelt out in James 1:19 that everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry. James 1:19 attests to the wisdom in learning to listen without judging or being too eager to jump in, as also corroborated in Proverbs 18:2, stating that a fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion. Apart from good listening, the Bible maintains that people reply to someone angry softly to dispel tension. This is stated in Proverbs 15:1 that a soft answer turns away wrath. It is also pointed out in Proverbs 29:20 thus: “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

Again, truthfulness in communication is a desirable and mandatory trait that can engender trust among couples and help them understand one another. As 1 Peter 3:10 puts it, whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Married couples would therefore do well to heed the advice in Proverbs 17:14 that the beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out. As presented by the author of these passages, the import of this is that the tongue, which is the tool for communication, must be appropriately used to avoid unnecessary conflict in marriages.

Signs and Causes of Conflicts in Marriage

The best time to nip conflicts in the bud is when there are signs of possible conflicts in a relationship. A lack of crisis is not necessarily a sign of a healthy marriage as sometimes some couples adopt the “elephant in the room” stance, which means avoiding confrontation of issues because of fear of worsening the relationship. According to Marcus & Ashley Kusi (2015), some signs of conflict may be a spouse withdrawing from asking the partner to meet a need that he/she used to meet and preferring to go to other people to meet those needs and the spouse trying to adjust to the conflict situation rather than dealing with it. Also, a spouse may be more easily irritated and seem to overreact over issues that may have been hitherto overlooked, or there may be frequent criticisms and arguments

between spouses; when marriage becomes unduly without sexual intimacy with spouses avoiding spending time together, or keeping secrets from each other (Stritof, 2020). One of the root causes of conflicts in many relationships is that one or both spouses take for granted the vast benefits they enjoy from their partners because of love (Cloud and Townsend, 1999).

Also, instead of talking with the spouse, engaging in branching-offs, like telling it to colleagues, friends, parents and even children, becomes a habit (Cloud and Townsend, 1999). Some researchers (Asadi, Sadeghi, Taghdisi, & Zamani-Alavijeh, 2016) aver that certain aspects of marital life that should bring couples together, if not properly managed, could ironically end up being sources of a rift. Some of such issues could centre on an ideal number of children to have, time management and distribution, money-spending (managing finances - frugality versus prodigality), levels and ways of socialising, and sexual expectations (sexpectation) that border on frequency, type and style of sex, often varying at different phases and different ages as couples live together.

Principles of Effective Communication in Marriage

Principles are ways, methods, or keys adopted in carrying out specific tasks. They are pointers and “directors” in the execution of tasks (Idialu, 2015). When these principles are followed, fruitful results are expected. Communication can constantly be improved so that it can metamorphose from bad to good and from good to excellent (Marcus and Ashley Kusi, 2015). A prime principle for effective marriage communication is to avoid giving vague and unclear messages. In addition, honesty and sensitivity to each other are principles many have neglected to their detriment. The use of positive statements and humour are principles one must not neglect in a fruitful marital relationship. A couple must learn how to commend and appreciate each other with kind and positive words instead of using maligning words on each other. Also, the occasional presentation of gift items oils the wheel of marriage. These principles will help couples communicate effectively.

Effective Communication for Resolution of Marital Conflicts

Couples must take Romans 12:18 seriously, “If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” This clear biblical injunction is sometimes more difficult to obey in marriage relationships where couples relate daily and see/confront each other's weaknesses. Occasional disagreements in a marriage relationship are most likely occurrences. 'Respectful disagreement' may even be necessary, according to Emerson (2004) and Kapur (2020). Battling the issue by dropping subtle hints or by adopting the avoidance syndrome, also referred to as “elephant in the room or stonewalling” attitude, with the belief that the spouse will understand the hints and know what the problem is, is not an effective way of communication for resolution of marital conflict.

When there is a problem between spouses in a marriage, each should take responsibility for their behaviour and reflect on the events that caused the rift and what a spouse is saying. This may spur the other spouse to admit their faults and apologise and move toward resolution. Continuation and steadfastness in correcting inappropriate behaviour, whether or not the other person responds in like manner, is an effective communication strategy that will eventually win over the other spouse

If a spouse is stonewalling (refusing to cooperate or discuss), the other spouse should ask open-ended questions to draw the stonewalling partner into dialogue to probe the cause(s) of the problems in the relationship. The use of body language that encourages conflict resolution is necessary in relationships because when a spouse senses criticism through comments or mannerisms of the partner, the natural inclination is to self-protect by resorting to defensiveness. Hence, the defensiveness will escalate the blame game, and not much will be achieved in attaining the desirable peaceful and loving relationship that should be the natural tone in a Christian marriage. Constantly finding faults with every other person without finding faults with oneself is one of the fruits of the fallen nature (Genesis 3:11-13). When a spouse takes responsibility without being under attack, it goes a long way towards deflating the conflict.

Marriage conflict resolution begins with a spouse thinking of his/her contribution to the conflict. As it is stated in 1 Corinthians 11:28, Christians are also supposed always to examine themselves. Again, Proverbs 14:29 reveals that he that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalts folly. Effective communication to resolve conflicts requires the discipline and patience to temporarily put aside preconceived notions to be able to listen carefully to the concerns of a spouse.

Proper communication involves using lingual and para-lingual cues (using the right words accompanied by apt body language). Abercrombie (1968) rightly states that we speak with our vocal organs but converse with our entire bodies, emphasising that 55 percent of the meaning of what people say is derived from body gestures, postures and physical clues, and 38 percent from the tone and inflexions of the words. Meta-communication, a code that interprets the words humans tend to express into what they actually mean, refers to non-linguistic elements in conversation that tell powerful visual stories.

It is unwise to flood his/her spouse with a rush of past wrongs, bringing one complaint after the other rather than concentrating on the issue at hand. Words should be chosen with care and consideration to connote respect, wholeness and a willingness to heal rather than to tear further apart because a wounded heart could take longer to heal than physical wounds.

Conscious learning and mastery of attentive listening will help couples to be empathetic and open-minded. Marcus and Ashley Kusi (2015) strongly advise against using certain expressions by married people to avoid or make conflict resolution easy. Some avoidable expressions are, “You are the one” “You are always....” “You never” Such statements show nagging, often hyperbolic, and reveal a deep dissatisfaction that puts the other spouse on the defensive, leading to long arguments that push the couple further apart. Instead of the expression 'never' one could say, “I feel....” Putting on a bad attitude, like having a sour face for the more significant part of the day,

and reacting to negative buttons pressed instead of responding to them are examples of paralanguage that should be avoided in relating with a spouse. When we react to experiences or the poor attitude of a spouse, we tend to give back negative energy in a multiplied form, but when we respond to negative buttons that are pressed, we tend to find out why such buttons are being pressed and communicate positively to ensure that such roots of conflicts are quickly pulled out of the relationship.

Couples who wish to pursue peace, as Hebrews 12:14 teaches, should forget ego protection and preservation or sweeping things under the carpet for fear of roughening the hornet's nest. They should lovingly and tactfully address issues when they occur, as trying to resolve multiple problems instead of dealing with them one at a time stretches patience and will make couples forfeit the opportunity of resolving the issues bothering them. If spouses quickly get grumpy, there could be deeper problems other than the superficial ones that can be immediately noted. It will be wise to find out the root cause of such adverse reactions for more lasting solutions. The overreactive partner may be fatigued, pass through some stress at his/her workplace, or battle anxiety or grief. Once the real cause of the hypersensitivity is established, resolving the problem will be a walkover for the couple.

It should be stated, however, that couples may not quickly get to the root of their problems unless they practise empathetic listening and pay attention to body language to mirror grey areas. When the facts have been identified, the couple may brainstorm and agree on a possible solution and how to execute it and check if it works. As Christians have been admonished in Ephesians 4:15, couples need to discuss telling the truth in love with their spouses. If a spouse does not feel safe discussing with the partner, it will be difficult to lend a listening ear, let alone listen empathetically.

Timing is an essential aspect in communication contexts or settings. Choosing appropriate communication timing involves considering the environmental context, psychological context, and social, historical and cultural contexts of communication. This means that

the couple needs to consider where to discuss (not confronting the spouse in public or when there are people that need not be involved in the matter), the best mood, and what and how the partner is likely to respond bearing in mind factors like physical and psychological fatigue and different pressures (Idialu, 2015).

One way to avoid marriage conflicts is to be obedient to instructions. It is stated in Ephesians 4:29 let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying may minister grace unto the hearers. Couples should remember Eph. 4:29 to curb negative language by communicating positive traits about the marriage and the spouse to them for positive deposits in their relational bank in line with the spouse's love language, which could be words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service, and receiving gifts.

Couples should communicate their genuine appreciation to their spouses for good deeds hitherto taken for granted, such as an appreciation for food well cooked, payment of bills, a good round of sex, and a positive surprise. Avoid unhealthy responses to conflicts, like tendencies to lash out when angry, get withdrawn, seek to punish, or be resentful. A spouse's unhealthy responses should be lovingly pointed to the spouse who instinctively does this. Couples should take note of deal breakers in their marriages and table them for discussion to find lasting solutions. Setting expectations in various aspects of interaction may be the best way to avoid or end misunderstandings (Emerson, 2004).

Favourable compromise is a way of communicating to a spouse that they are valued. When there seems to be a deadlock on the way forward on an issue because each spouse is convinced about his/her way of how things should be or go, both can take turns activating their preferred solutions. In all of this, the couple must joyfully work towards the emotional resolution of their issues. For instance, no spouse should accept too many responsibilities from others for fear of hurting them while giving insufficient attention, communication and intimacy to the spouse they feel will understand.

Granted that getting involved in platonic friendships, work, and church activities should give spouses a sense of fulfilment that should make their marital relationship more robust, such involvement should not lead to negligence of the spouse, thus pushing life out of the marital relationship. There are times when getting too involved in things outside the relationship could be a symptom that the busy spouse is trying to cover up or cope with certain things that are not right in the relationship. These may be hurts or feelings of being neglected. It could be that the busy one feels the spouse is no longer attracted to him/her, so they expend their energy on other things that will take their minds off the marital problems.

While couples grapple with issues in their marital relationships, there is often the temptation to tell it to a third and neutral party. This may not solve the problem(s), but to have one to pour one's heart to, a kind of shoulder to cry. Such spouses must be careful during this vulnerable period and be discerning enough to avoid those who magnify the problem by making the other spouse appear worse than they were original. Going to the third party should be a last resort; if need be, the person should be a Godly person that each party respects, which may be called in to smoothen things, not to be a 'gossip-listener' to one of the spouses and an escalator of the problem.

Perhaps, one of the most salient facts that couples should realise in their efforts towards dispelling conflicts is that there is no winner/loser in arguments put forward to resolve relational problems in marriage. A 'victorious partner' cannot be happy in his/her victory when the other is sad at 'losing' (Asadi, Sadeghi, Taghdisi & Zamani-Alavijeh, 2016). Therefore, it should be acknowledged that both spouses lose or win together. With this in mind, the needlessness of defensiveness in the presentation of each spouse's stance becomes obvious. Couples should eschew vengefulness as it only leads to bitterness and unhappiness, not forgetting that they are to be tender-hearted and forgiving of one another (Ephesians 4:32).

Couples should realise that without God in the equation of effective communication for preventing and dispelling conflicts, the 'flesh' nature of humans, with its self-centredness, will not lead to pursuing peaceful and loving interaction. Couples need the Holy Spirit's intervention to direct or re-direct affairs in order to resolve the issues because not only does He know the spouses more aptly than they know each other, but He also knows exactly what should be done in all situations, and He mercifully prompts willing and yielded hearts to do that which can lead to healthy resolutions.

Advantages of Effective Communication in Marital Relationships

Effective communication helps couples achieve success on many fronts, attain extraordinary heights, and positively influence people they encounter and society. A paper by Portland Community College, Continuous Learning for Individuals, and Management Business - CLIMB (2019) emphasises that it helps to direct their focus on salient issues, to ensure emotional stability and to understand each person's point of view better. Effective communication helps couples to understand the motives behind their speeches, actions and reactions. Establishing clarity of purpose prevents clashes or helps quick resolution of conflicts. When communication is effective, it builds trust that leads to bonding, further generating the will to deepen communication levels. It prevents potential conflicts, thereby dispelling clashes of interests in relationships. Proper communication will also help foster unity and peace, enabling couples to achieve great goals in life (Szczena & Przybyla-Basista, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The first step in ensuring effective communication in dispelling marital conflicts is turning to God to heal heart wounds. The place of prayer in positively changing things is, therefore, incontrovertible. Even if one of the spouses does not seem enthusiastic about involving God's Holy Spirit for intervention, the other spouse should lift the offending spouse in prayer for God to touch his/her heart. Moreover,

couples should choose happiness over being right. They should lower exaggerated expectations from the spouses. Every spouse should realise that no spouse can love them as profoundly and unconditionally as God does because of man's imperfection. When spouses plunge into God's love and wallow in it, they are so filled and satisfied with that love that it makes it easy for each spouse not to be too demanding on the other for depths of love that they cannot supply as humans. It will also help couples see the trivialities of the things that irritate them about their spouses.

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