

Marriage and Family: The Blessings of Faithfulness and the Pains of Betrayal

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Introduction

There are three important institutions that God ordained to bring order to the society. These are the family, the Church and the state. The family is the building block of society; destroy the family and you destroy society (we shall see this illustrated later in this article).

We have had such dysfunctional models of partners or couples in the previous generations that it is urgent to acknowledge the deep failure of marital relationships. We need to join efforts with the new generation and construct solid partnerships among couples in order that they may experience stable, meaningful and satisfying marriages. These types of marriages will lower the risk of multiple sexual and concurrent partnerships, thereby, lowering many social, political, and economical problems, including HIV.

Lest We Forget

God makes it very clear that the relationship between him and humans is a two-way affair. He calls us to be faithful to him and to each other by keeping his commandments. On his part, God grants us access to himself through the finished work of Christ on the cross. The Holy Spirit is our enabler, giving us the means to be faithful.

Perils of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Mathematical modeling has demonstrated that HIV will spread more rapidly in populations where long-term multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships are common¹. Moreover, modeling suggests that even small reductions in the amount of concurrent sexual partnerships could have a large impact on reducing HIV transmission.

People need to know that true intimacy is the fruit of committed stable relationships, and this can only be possible when two people make a free choice to build oneness – the ‘togetherness’ that makes marital happiness. Social constructs or religious teachings that reproduce dominance–submission relationships deeply erode the possibility of establishing that true oneness.

Faithfulness and love are the fruits of free choices of commitment to each other between husband and wife that are devoid of fear and intimidation. But this can only be possible where true love reigns. For, “There is no fear where love exists. Rather, perfect love banishes fear, for fear involves punishment, and the person who lives in fear has not been perfected in love.” (1 John 4:18)

Marriage: Biblical Mandate

The home is the first institution that was created by God and is exhibited by Adam and Eve. Later we see Jesus performing his first miracle at a wedding in a home in the Cana of Galilee

¹ USAID AIDSTAR-One. (2009). *Secret lovers kill: Case study series*

(John 2: 1-11). The home also is the foundation for the husband- wife relationship. It is the primary institution for training and development of values, character, and faithfulness. Marriage is the foundation upon which a home is built. A Ghanaian proverb captures the importance of a home by saying that, “*The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.*”

The woman is specially suited to work alongside her husband. The first man and husband, Adam, was utterly delighted by the woman. He said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). ‘Woman’ was so named because she was taken from man. There is a similarity between the two genders but with significant differences despite what the modern society is trying to convince us. These similarities and differences are both seen in the Hebrew words for man and woman. The Hebrew word for wife adds one letter to the end of the word for man. This is also reflected in the English words for man and woman too. Add a ‘Wo’ to man and we get ‘woman.’ Or add a ‘Fe’ to male and we get female.

Faithfulness

If any term catches the essence of mankind's character at the end of the age, it is "faithlessness." Man seems to have a *'faithless-tropism'*! In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, the apostle Paul describes the spirit of people at the end of the age:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

Faithfulness, though, is about commitment. It hinges upon what we value as important. We have a powerful tendency to be faithful to what we think is truly important, be it a family name, friendship, employer, school, or soccer team. Doesn't marriage require a similar faithfulness from each spouse? Without it, is it any wonder that there is so much adultery and divorce all around us?

The Hebrew word for "faithfulness" is *emunah*, which Strong's Concordance says literally means "firmness", figuratively means "security", and morally means "fidelity". According to the Webster's New World Dictionary, being *Faithful* is "maintaining allegiance; constant; loyal; marked by a strong sense of duty or responsibility; conscientious; accurate; reliable; exact."

God calls upon the Church to succeed where Israel failed. Yet currently the Church of God is badly divided and so widely scattered that it can almost be called shattered. Faith in God corresponds to God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness should awaken faith in us, so we can respond in submissive obedience. If he is worth trusting, then we should trust him fully, because faithfulness brings blessings at individual, family, and societal levels.

Faithfulness enriches the individuals in a marriage by bringing about feelings of contentment. Both spouses experience holistic growth as the intensity of their fellowship increases. They are also able to treat each other as equal partners, devoid of gender biases and related encumbrances. And together as a team, their couple power also improves.

At the family level, faithfulness builds and reinforces trust in the institution of marriage and also creates a favorable environment for parenting. With improved commitment, there is great fulfillment and productivity not just at home, but also in the society. Such a family serves as a model in the society, encouraging other couples planning to get married and giving hope to marriages that are hurting.

Betrayal

Betrayal undermines three basic human needs which are at the core of our individual being. These are: security- the need to be loved; significance – the need to make an impact in society; and self-worth – the need to be valued. All these are compromised, even destroyed, by betrayal. Betrayal is the opposite of faithfulness. It is a force that may generate many destructive emotions such as hate, desire to revenge, mistrust, defensiveness, hostility, adversarial spirit, rivalry, loneliness, and powerlessness.

Betrayal has a negative impact on children. I know a medical student who has suffered a lot because her once loving father moved out to live with another woman. She and her two sibling sisters have faced pain, and cried much – as has their mum – on account of the ‘betrayal’ by their dad (and her husband). Through God’s grace, I was able to link her up with a Good Samaritan stationed abroad who has now picked up paying her school fees and tuition. This is the second year that she is receiving this kind of support. But as I write, the father no longer stays at home. Their mum is struggling to raise support for the other two sisters. This is an example of the pain that betrayal brings. But how do we deal with betrayal?

Betrayal indeed brings emotional pain. But we can deal with it effectively.

The aggrieved spouse needs to face his or her own feelings and understand that anger is normal. They should not ignore this feeling. It is advisable that they write down their thoughts and feelings in a private journal. They should also seek professional counseling. During this time, it is also important that they take care of themselves by eating healthy meals, drinking plenty of water, exercising in fresh air as well as getting regular sleep. Laughter is also important, as it is medicine to the bones. The spouses should also verbalize or communicate their thoughts and feelings without holding anything back. This helps to let go.

Betrayal erodes trust; however, one should not lose trust and confidence in oneself and in one’s decisions. After experiencing betrayal, it is also natural to be wary and cautious of others. But one should not push others away and mistrust everyone. One should remember that without mutual trust between a husband and a wife, a marriage is unsustainable. Once the spouses decide to work on their marriage, then they need to make a decision to trust again.

Letting go of anger is not easy, but holding a grudge hurts the bearer more than it hurts the one the grudge targets. One must be willing to let go of the bad feelings and to start a clean, new sheet in the relationship. Just as Jesus has forgiven us, we too must forgive others. In addition, one needs to grieve. Just as with anger, it is acceptable and even necessary to go through this process of grief over loss of trust and the sense of being betrayed. As one does this, it is also critical that one asks oneself honest questions, without blaming oneself. Grieving helps to bring closure to the pain.

Sticking Together – What it Takes

I have a few thoughts for consideration for spouses who have experienced betrayal yet have decided to work on their marriage. Forgiveness is an important beginning. If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us our trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15). As they reflect on the factors that led to the betrayal, each spouse has the responsibility of ‘fireproofing’ the marriage by keeping away anything that has the potential of breaking the marriage. The spouses need to acknowledge that marriage is a covenant and not a contract, and that it involves hard work of faithfully ‘stewarding’ each other, complementing each other, and not competing against each other (Genesis 2: 18). The spouses should also understand and strive to practice the five languages of love² which are - words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch.

Families are the building blocks of society. Therefore, strong and stable families will extend into the society. The formation of values, friendships, and character begin in the home. Parents should treat their children as gifts from God and bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). And indeed in all these things, they should also have a resolute faith in God, because without faith, it impossible to please God (Hebrews 11: 6).

Note that it is important for us to remember that among the root causes of people straying from their marriage partners is unfulfilled sexual need. It is what usually leads men to seek for ‘sexual fulfillment’ outside of marriage. This results into multiple sexual partnerships leading to the myriad of other effects of betrayal.

Because it is usually hard to get adults to change their behavior, I am proposing that we begin to train children early. So, begin with behavior formation, that is, molding children towards a deeper understanding of the beauty of sexuality. The training should include developing the children’s knowledge, right attitudes, skills, and power to fully appreciate their sexuality. A good example of such training is an interesting model called **ROPES**.³ This is a nine-month course that is offered at All Saints Cathedral, Nairobi, for boys and girls aged 13 years to prepare them for adulthood. It is a Christian alternative to traditional ‘Rites of Passage’ ceremonies. Since time immemorial, societies worldwide have initiated their young. In the journey of life, times of significant transition come when the roles and responsibilities one is called to assume are changed irrevocably. The most fundamental of these transitions is when one stops being a child and crosses over into adulthood. In the past, communities had rites to mark this passage, to teach

² Chapman, G. (2004). *The five love languages: how to express heartfelt commitment to your mate*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing.

³ **ROPES**® stands for Rites Of Passage ExperienceS and is a ministry of Tanari Trust, a faith-based non-profit organization. The mission of ROPES is to assist the Church community to set up Christ centered rites that mark the transitional points of one’s advance through life. This is done through creating challenging yet affirming programs and training Church workers to run these programs in their respective churches. The ROPES program has existed since 1997 and as of 2004, more that 300 children have successfully graduated with a counselor to graduate ration of 1:6

values and roles expected in the new status, and to affirm the initiates' new place in the community.

Modern society lacks this structure, and that human need for initiation is rarely met. Little wonder then that many young people do destructive things to prove that they are adults. ROPES ministry seeks to meet this need by offering Christ-centered rites within the church community.

Case Studies

Two families who were studied for a period of time illustrate the well being of a society as their histories are contrasted in the following case study⁴.

In the first family of Mr. and Mrs. Juke, 1026 descendants were studied. Out of these, there were 300 "premature" deaths; 100 sent to prison – 13 years each; 190 became public prostitutes; 100 became drunkards and alcoholics while not much is reported about 336. Altogether, the family cost the New York State six million US Dollars.

In Mr. and Mrs. J. Edwards' family, 729 descendants were studied. Out of these, 300 became preachers of the gospel; 65 became college professors; 13 became university presidents; 60 authors of 'good' books; 3 U.S. congressmen; 1 Vice President of the U.S.A; while not much is said about 217. There is no record of any cost to the New York State

These are perfect examples of how influential a family is to the society.

Way Forward

Marriage is for Love (Richard Strauss). However, can love be recaptured once lost? Yes! But, it takes human effort and divine enabling. There are three dimensions of love in marriage, namely, *Eros, Philia and Agape*.

Eros is sexual love. This is the kind of love that seeks sensual expression, lingering touch, deep kiss, candles and music. However, Eros diminishes with time, hence the importance of the other kinds of love - Philia and Agape.

Philia is the friendship or companionship love. It is characterized by showing concern and care for the other person, enjoying each other's company, reminiscing of past struggles, going shopping together, and sharing breakfast without the morning paper!

Agape is God's love for us. This is the highest form of love and is unlimited. It is self giving love, no matter what or who. Andres Nygren says that Agape Love has three aspects: it is spontaneous and unmotivated, indifferent to value and creative.

Conclusion

⁴ LaHaye, B. & LaHaye T. (1978). *The Christian family*.

An ideal marriage is one in which both partners allow the Lord to meet their basic personal needs – i.e. security, significance, and self-worth - and are free to live not for themselves but for the Lord and for each other. Until that goal is reached, marriage problems can never be fully and finally resolved!⁵

⁵ Selwayn, H. (2005). *Marriage as God intended: Life journey* (Rev. ed.). Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Communication Ltd.