

## **Communication Difficulties in Extended Families: Biblical View**

By

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### **Abstract**

The problem of extended family has raised dust in this present time. The difficulties behind communication in extended families are so much that we have series of problems in our homes. This has brought about broken homes, and social evils, child abuse to mention but a few. Human beings hold families as the most beautiful gifts on earth. Every individual's first point of encounter with the world is the family. The extended family plays a greater role in the development of a person as all family members try to support one another in whatever way they can. But the problem is so severe that the researcher decided to enumerate the problems and suggest ways out of the problems.

### **Introduction**

Africans value relations of the same kin very well. They are caring and continue to care even to the unending generations. However, there is a problem that sometimes, there seems to be communication gap due to inability to reach so vase members of the extended family.

In some cases, when women from different cultural backgrounds begin to join a known peaceful family through marriage, there are possibilities of bringing in differing bloods or character traits into such a peaceful family thereby, setting in crisis in a once peaceful family. Sometimes strange woman may like to thwart or disorganize the united family with her deceptive charms. But then, sometimes financial problem may bring communication difficulties, because one who has been given may not have the money always to do so.

Suspicion may bring about communication difficulties and what gives rise to suspicion most times, is lack of trust and that is when some members of the family start to show signs of being unfaithful. Unfaithfulness therefore, may also bring about communication difficulties in extended families. As the adage goes, when you marry someone, you marry their family. Your partner's extended family members automatically become your family members. This automatically feeds frustration which one needs to handle with care through nice communication skills.

### **What is Communication?**

Communication can be defined as the act of transferring information from one place to another. It can be defined as the exchange of conversation, ideas, and feelings between two or more people. It is meant to be two-sided and stimulating. In marriage, it is meant to be a medium of sharing thoughts, feelings, ideas etc; between a man and his wife, the nuclear family and extended family members, for a healthy relationship to prosper.

The desired goal of any communication process is to decode what the encoder means. The tone of our voice can give clues

to our mood or emotional state, while hand signals or gestures can add to a spoken message.

One of the most significant purposes of communication is to solve problems and build relationships. In families, communication is the greatest factor in solving problems in those relationships.

The story of the Tower of Babel, as written in the book of Genesis chapter 11, showed the power of communication. In a state of rebellion against God, the people attempted to build a tower that would get to heaven. God knew that communication was fundamental to their ability to get anything done and so, God then released confusion in their midst and disorganized them from achieving their aim.

### **Effective Communications Skills in Extended Family**

**For effective communication in the family, you have to know the communication skills. Such skills are:**

**Be a good listener:** Effective communication is not about talking but more about listening. Listening well means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding the emotions the speaker is trying to send across. By communicating in this way, you will also experience a process that lowers stress and supports physical and emotional well-being. If the person you are talking to is calm, for example, listening in an engaged way will help to calm you, too. Similarly, if the person is agitated, you can help calm them by listening in an attentive way and make the person feel understood. Take time to think about what you want to say before you say it. Make sure your words, tone and body language reflect what you mean.

**Show interest in the interests of members of immediate and extended family:** This principle is found in the Bible and it is written thus: “we who are strong ought to bear with the fallings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up” **(Romans 15:1-2 NIV)**. By doing so, you create an avenue of open doors for communication. Remember, there are a lot of “rights”, depending on who you are talking to, so avoid getting caught up in right versus, ‘wrong and instead learn to respect each other’s differences.

**Listen with your entire being:** When we listen, we need to do it on purpose, intelligently with our entire being. By this the researcher meant high concentration. You know how frustrating it can be when you are trying to speak and someone cuts you off in the middle of your sentence. Allowing others to speak until they have finished without interrupting is a great rule for everyone to follow.

**Give full attention to members of your family:** It is important that we give our full attention to members of our family when they are talking to us. Giving them full attention will make them feel belonged and loved. When someone is speaking to you, give them your attention. Avoid thinking about what you are going to say next. Focus on what is being said, what your family member might be feeling and how you can be of help.

**Watch for opportunities to praise, honour, and reverence members of your family:** By so doing, family problems will reduce as each person sees himself as worth being a member of the family highly cherished.

**Plan times and settings just to communicate:** Set time aside for communication with your immediate family and extended

family. This will prevent causing them to feel more and more like an object and rejected instead of like most important people in your life. Too many families do not sit down and have meals together. Make efforts to have family meals as often as you can. This is one of the best opportunities you will have to communicate.

**Ask Questions:** Going through the Bible, one will notice that Jesus is the greatest communicator who ever lived. He not only taught and answered questions, but asked questions. We need to ask questions about our immediate and extended families. Such questions as, “How are you doing today? Did you go to school today? Did you read your Bible today? How do you feel about such and such? Do you know that you are important? Questions open doors for communication, and they do not only help us learn more about each other, but help us gather information about each other and be of help to each other.

### **Definition of Extended Family**

Extended family refers to all those we are related to beyond the nuclear family. Extended families often include multiple generations. It is simply a family unit that extends past the nuclear family to include other relatives such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

An extended family can also be called a complex family or multi-generational family. This type of family unit has multiple generations and additional relatives other than just the parents and their children living in the same household and taking on responsibilities for that household.

In most cultures, the “core” of the family is the nuclear family, the parents and their children, while additional relatives are

considered “extended”. The key characteristic of the extended family is that there are multiple adults in the family that are not parents of the children, though they may also have parent-like roles and share in the responsibilities for providing for the whole family, either by contributing financially or in other ways.

### **Why Extended Families Exist and Its Benefits**

**The reasons for extended families existence vary, and some factors are:**

- **Cultural:** For example, it may be considered inappropriate for adult children to leave their parents’ home until they have children of their own. Some families may have several adult children still residing at home, providing parent-like role models to younger siblings. Increase sharing of cultural and cross-generational family values. Culturally, the adults act as role models for younger family members.
- **Economic:** With more adults living as part of the same family unit, the entire family may be in a better financial situation with more individuals contributing to living costs. Some family members may be able to provide care for younger children in this arrangement, eliminating child costs as well. There shall be greater financial security with multiple working adults being responsible for helping and supporting one another both emotionally and financially. There is greater security for family members to feel connected and

belonging due to sharing a wider pool of members to serve as resources during a crisis.

- **Health:** When an elder family member needs regular care, it is common for that individual to move in with his children or other relatives. This can be an alternative to nursing home care or assisted living facilities.
- **Divorce:** After a divorce, the now-divorce parents may return to their parents' home, often bringing their children along. This may be a temporary arrangement or could be a long-term living situation, often depending on finances, career charges, child care, and other factors. Sometimes a widow or widower may find refuge in the extended family shield.

### **Extended Family Problems and Solutions**

The family is a great blessing; however, there are some extended family issues which can cause a lot of discomfort. Here are some solutions to common family problems.

### **Family Feuds/Landed properties**

One issue which often causes trouble to the extended family is family feuds/landed properties. Several issues may trigger a feud among extended family members. Notable among them is the sharing of the wealth of a dead grandparent, especially if the dead grandparent had many children. Such extended family issues can best be solved by a neutral family head. In African families, there are family heads and these people are expected to mediate impartially in any such family issue. If it turns out

that the family head has aligned himself to one faction, it is advisable that the family calls upon a friend or priest who is honest and very well-respected by the family members to mediate between the feuding groups.

### **Conflicts between demands of extended and nuclear families**

Another problem that can gravely disturb the family is the upsetting conflict between the demands of the extended family and those of the nuclear family which sometimes can never be solved. Extended family members always try to help one another in times of need. However, it gets extremely unpleasant when family members are not allowed to willingly help, but rather pressured to do so. It is good to help especially when the family member demonstrates genuine need for the help. However, members must also come to terms with the fact that relatives with spouses and children have additional responsibilities and cannot always help in time of need.

Anytime one finds himself entangled in a situation where he has very limited recourses and a family member keeps asking him for assistance while, at the same time his nuclear family demands that help, he has to explain the issue to the extended family member with the greatest sense of honesty. He must also, lovingly assure the family member of his readiness and willingness to help if things turn better. He should not help the relative at the expense of his nuclear family, unless failure to help the relative would result in extremely serious problems. Conflict arises as a result of compiled or unease tension. We can call it transfer aggression. One may not be disposed to attend to a question or a problem of a family member and may be forced or compelled to do so. In an attempt to do it grudgingly, there may be conflict. This conflict or



disagreement may linger and may lead to serious problem. When there is conflict in the family, communication will be affected, hence there will be hide and seek going on

### **Unexpected house guests**

Some family members who travel from one city to the city where a relation lives might decide to stay in the relation's home. Courtesy demands they let the relation know they intend to stay in his house before they even embark on the journey. Uninvited relatives may be very uncomfortable for the nuclear family, especially if the husband and wife do not have adequate space in their house. It is important that the couples explain to family members who do that. Explain that having relatives stay without being told beforehand can be very uncomfortable to the family. Gently insist that next time you get informed before any such visit.

### **Intrusion into your marriage**

Another extended family problem which can pose a great discomfort is the problem associated with intrusion of relatives in one's marriage. For instance, in most African marriages, when a couple does not have children after a number of years, the family of the man usually tends to attack the woman for "her inability to give them a child". Such an intrusion can be extremely disturbing. Due to too much communication gap, external bodies, unfriendly friends of the family members may be coming to give one advice or the other. They may bridge the gap between the family members making the communication gap wide.

The man should gently be firm in making it clear to the family members where the line is drawn. Certain delicate issues in the

marriage must be kept only between the husband and the wife. Do not invite family members into the marriage indiscriminately. Be extremely careful and selective about whom you invite to help solve problems in your marriage. You must make it clear to family members that you will not accept any intrusion into your marriage. Marriage is supposed to unite the families of the couple. Therefore, the doors and windows of the marriage should be opened to all family members. However, be careful not to allow this union of families to metamorphose into an intrusion.

### **Poverty**

This is as a result of some family members who are richer than others and may not like to help them. They may consciously block the communication so as not to be disturbed. The poor among them will be feeling inferior to go closer to the rich ones who may not be willing to help them. This helps to create communication gap in the family. In this case, the rich should help the poor not only in financial aspect but also in making them feel secure and attending to their daily needs. Poverty can make them bring shame to the family which may be a stigma for generations to come

### **Infidelity**

In a family where one partner cheats on the other, there is tendency that the other person may likely go his or her way by isolation, the partner may not know his or her where about and this can create communication gap because none could get information about the other. It can result to permanent separation and this affects extended family members who will now come in to give unhealthy advice. It is now mandatory for the couples to keep the bible command that we should not

pollute our marital bed. Fidelity matters a lot in extended family and it breeds healthy relationship.

### **Reasons Why Family Communication Is Important**

#### **To reach understanding:**

When you are able to communicate with family members, you will be able to share what you believe and learn what others feel is right. Even when you may not agree with them, you begin to understand more about the reasons why they do what they do or say what they say. You could even appreciate for them for that.

#### **To solve a problem**

Many issues among family members arise because of miscommunication. Coming together to talk about a particular problem can open the lines of communication so you can find solutions to what is negatively affecting both of you.

#### **To end gossip**

Family members love to talk about one another, and sometimes the details of topics become misconstrued. By the time it is passed down the grapevine, facts are no longer facts. Going to the family member people are being gossiping about to ask about the situation is a great way to open communication so that no one gets the wrong impression of the situation.

#### **To encourage support**

A family system helps one of its members during the good and the bad times. When a family communicates well, everyone understands what loved ones need, making them better able to

provide support. Even if nothing can be done about the situation, just providing a listening ear can make all the difference and will go a long way making such a family member feel recognized.

### **To provide insight on situations**

Family members often disagree about their personal problems. Sometimes it is good to have a family member share another perspective of a situation. This enables the person dealing with the issue to make an informed decision about what troubles him. Problem occurs when the different perspective offends the family member, especially when it dramatically goes against what he or she believes in. If this happens, it is your loved one's decision to take what you have said into account.

### **To form tighter bonds**

Trusting family members by communicating with them will foster the love you share and tighten your bonds. Many families grow apart because the individual members each became wrapped up in their individual lives, and they forget to come to home base to talk about the world around them. When problems do come up, if you have established a strong communicative base with your family, it is a safe place to seek shelter.

### **Biblical View on How to Listen and Handle Our Teenagers in Extended Family**

To be 'swift about hearing' means being attentive not only to what your teenagers says but also to how he or she says it. Tone of voice and body language gives clues about how a young one

feels. Asking questions is also important. “Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (**Proverbs 20:5 KJV**). Insight and discernment are especially needed when you are drawing your teenagers out on sensitive topics.

A barrier to communication arises when parents and elders of the extended family react emotionally and negatively to what their teenager tells them. Christian would like to protect their teenagers this “last days” that are full of fraught with dangers-spiritual and otherwise (**2Timothy 3:1-5**). Therefore, what parents see as protective may seem excessive to their younger ones.

It is not always easy to keep quiet when you see a teenager doing or tell you something distressing. You should not express your opinion quickly, but it is important to listen carefully before responding. In the Bible, in the book of Proverbs, King Solomon wrote: “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is a folly and shame unto him”. (**Proverbs 18:13 KJV**) If you stay calm, you will hear more and your teenager will keep talking. You have to get the complete picture before you are in a position to help. As loving parent or elder, use your ears to gain understanding and your tongue to heal.

Children and or Teenagers too need to be ‘slow in speaking’, not objecting to what their parents and elders say, for they have the God-given responsibility to train them.”Train up a child in a way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (**Proverbs 22:6 KJV**). Parents may have experienced situations like the ones that Teenagers are now experiencing. Moreover, they must have regretted the mistakes they made when they were young and earnestly want to protect you from making similar ones. Therefore, view your parents as allies, not

adversaries, as advisers, not antagonists. “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels” (**Proverbs 1:5 KJV**) “Honour your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and mayest live long on earth” (**Ephesians 6:2.3 KJV**). “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (**Ephesians 6:4 KJV**).

### **Jesus Correction of His Disciples as a Model in Dealing with Family Issues**

Considering the example of Jesus feeling at the last evening meal he had with his apostles, and Jesus knew that within hours he would die a slow and painful death, but because He wanted to bring sanctification of his Father’s name and the Salvation of the human family, He chose to depend on his faithfulness. Yet, at that very meal, there arose a heated dispute among (the apostles) over which one of them seemed to be greatest, Jesus did not express bitterness toward them. Instead, he calmly reasoned with them. Jesus reminded them that they should be with him during trying times. Although Satan was demanding to sift them as wheat, Jesus expressed confidence that they would prove faithful. (See **Luke 22:24-32**).

### **Family Communication God’s Way**

#### **Make peace in your home**

Conflict is a normal part of any home. What will set your family apart is how you respond to each other when circumstances occur. According to **Ephesians 4:1-3**, apply the practical principles regarding the attitudes we need to adopt to promote a spirit of unity in our homes. Such principle as: lowliness,

meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing one another in love. Strengthen your family members with words and action. Express and extend your care to them. (**Ephesians 4:16, 25**)

### **Speak the truth in love**

Speak the truth and be honest even when that involves taking a risk. To speak in love is to communicate the truth in kind and gentle terms. Often it has less to do with what you say than with how you say it. Mind how you confront a problem. You can lovingly express to others how their actions affect your life. Examine your motives and attitudes as you speak the truth. Remember, you can be a catalyst for growth in their lives.

### **Evaluate your communications**

Evaluate those positive and negative patterns of communications you learnt from your parent's home. As you evaluate the communication pattern you would like to use in your home, the model in **Ephesians 4:17, 21-24**; which establishes how you should communicate. Put off your old self and be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self.

### **Be angry and do not sin**

Anger is a God-given emotion. Sometimes it is even the most appropriate emotion you can have in a family conflict. But righteous anger concentrate on the wrong being done. Its goal is to write the wrong constructively, not to punish the person. "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (**Ephesians 4:26 KJV**). Let your anger be expressed in light of your commitment to build up one another

### **Build each other up with edifying words**

Be slow in releasing words on people. Once your words are said, they can never be taken back. Do not use frightening words: consider both the right words and the right timing, especially when speaking words of correction. Learn to be intentional about building up others; model encouragement and affirmation to your children and people around you. “Let not corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (**Ephesians 4:29 KJV**).

### **Be kind and easily forgive**

You can make your home heaven on earth when you follow the instructions in Ephesians 4; 31 32. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (**Ephesians 4:31-32 KJV**) When you are tempted to treat each other harshly, consider God’s model of forgiveness and choose instead to be tender toward each other.

### **What to bear in mind while dealing with family members**

When dealing with family members’ issues, bear in mind what is written in the bible



Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For whoever would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good, let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ **1Peter 3:8-17** (NIV)

## **Conclusion**

There are so many frustrations in homes and families because of failure to adequately communicate. Once communication has shut down, it is often painful and difficult to get it started again. When it does start up, it will often begin with conflict that causes people to run away instead of staying with it. Anytime there is a problem, the solution is not less communication, the solution is more communication.

It has been said that communication is to a relationship what blood is to the body. As the blood flows through the body, carrying out impurities and bringing fresh calls and life, so communication regularly carries out the impurities of a relationship and causes the whole relationship to be fresh and new and alive. Communication is something we do every day, yet, it is still one of the most difficult areas in a relationship to navigate. If we practice and pass on healthy communication riles to our children, it will be easier for them to have successful relationships.

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