

PASTORAL RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS OF DELAYED MARRIAGE AMONG
CHURCH MEMBERS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The researcher was motivated to carry out a research on delayed marriage by his observations regarding young people who groan about their experiences during their meetings which are becoming worrisome. Also the excuses given by various individual for not getting married at the right time are quite appealing, varying from economic, social, religious, spiritual and even physical factors among others. The motivation for this research work was the story of a sister to my friend who was of age to be married and had completed her post graduate studies as well but no suitor was forth coming despite her readiness for marriage , the family was greatly upset with this problem but with no obvious solution in sight. With this example and many more ladies and men within the society suffering in silence, the research decided to carry out this study using the various denominations as our case study. In arriving at a logical conclusion, the research depended heavily on field study, using questionnaires administered among pastors, church leaders and Christian workers of various denominations who are members of Christian Association of Nigeria in Kwara State; hence the research is descriptive in nature. A total of two hundred (200) copies of questionnaire were distributed and one hundred and eighty (180) were returned having been duly answered. The sample populations were essentially pastors from all denominations under the auspices of Christian Association of Nigeria, Kwara State branch; however the respondents were randomly selected. An analytical processing of data collected from the field revealed that late marriage is a growing trend in churches and society due to several reasons, ranging from economic to psychological and it could lead to several harmful experiences such as: sexual frustration, prolong days of strife, and labour, emotional and psychological depression, social rejection, economic non-productivity, reduced fertility period for women among others. It is the recommendation of the researcher that the pastors and their churches should seek ways of helping to create a condition of living that would enable the young adults to get married at the right age of readiness. Pastors, Christian counselors and parents should encourage youths to see marriage as a means by which further educational and career or professional attainments can be achieved rather than an end to such pursuits. Expensive marriage ceremonies and heavy bride prices should also be discouraged through proper teachings in local churches.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be drawn up that marriage institution is too vital to be delayed unnecessarily. Although there is no specific age that can be fixed as the most appropriate age for going into marriage, however, several factors as earlier discussed need to be put into consideration. Marrying later than necessary is obviously of great adverse effects on social, mental emotional, economic and spiritual life of the individual, the church and the society at large.

This research suggests 20-30yrs of age as the most appropriate age for men and ladies. However it is noteworthy to mention that factors that contribute to delayed marriage can be minimized or outrightly eliminated. Such factors as poor economic condition, delayed educational maturity, expensive marriage ceremonies, parental restrictions, loose sexuality and cultural bias with proper planning, sound teachings in the church of God, fervent prayer and re-orientation of the youths and the society at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of late marriage is a trend that is beginning to be a source of worry to the church of God and the society at large, yet without looking keenly into it and the way out of it. Parents and elders in the community would reprimand youths especially boys who want to get married at a time they consider too early.

1. The researcher is of the opinion that the individual should be given some level of freedom to express their need for marriage before any conclusion of whether they are early or not could be drawn.
2. Also we cannot continue to use economic ability or buoyancy to measure readiness for marriage especially in a society of a never improving economy. Rather, the church and the society should seek ways of helping individual through various empowerment schemes so as to be able to meet their needs with a view to avoiding too much delay so that we don't destroy more than we intend to build.
3. Parents have a role to play as well in order to check-mate the high incidence of delayed marriages in our churches and the society. Parents need to move closer to their children give them counsel when and where necessary, correct them in love and teach them in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ. This will enable these young adults to know what is good for their lives and they will not be a victim of wrong teachings that are all over the society due to the influence western education.
4. People also commonly mention the need for maturity at all levels as a mark of readiness for example, there is the need to bear in mind however, that despite the value of some level of maturity, marriage is not an end itself but a means to an end. Marriage is therefore in itself a process of growth and maturity, a learning institute. There are levels of maturity that will never be attained to until one enters into marriage. Rather than blame marriage problems in

immaturity, blame it on the unwillingness of those involved to learn and their ability to see marriage as a process.³⁹

5. Marriage does not terminate goal pursuits rather it should be seen to enhance it, therefore, the fact that a particular aspiration has not been achieved should not necessarily delay marriage since it can still be achieved even in marriage. Therefore, counselors, pastors, church leaders Christian workers and parents should encourage the youths to see marriage as a means by which further educational, carrier and professional attainments can be achieved especially when it is consciously planned, that is, not entered into accidentally through pregnancy.
6. Also, parents, pastors and even the government should ensure better education for all people of different tribes about bride price and expensive marriage ceremonies. This unnecessarily set a limit to how much of the marriage benefits that can be valuable to the society early enough while keep waiting even in their thirties struggling to gather exorbitant resources to institute marriage. However, it is expedient on the government to see the economic development of the country as a priority for the benefit of the family and the society in turn.
7. The priorities of the church and indeed all pastors should include the following amongst others, thorough teaching on relationship at home and explanation on the biblical pre-requisite for marriage. The church and the pastors should not shy away from the contemporary realities e.g. economic western influences, dating, sex education and its implication but explain such with insight of the Holy Spirit in order to remove any ambiguity on such realities or parameters.

³⁹ H, Norman, Wright, *So you're Getting Married*. The Keys to Building a story lasting Relationship. n.p, Ma. Christian Publication, 2000, 8-28.

8. One wonders what the consequences will be like, if the average marriageable age continues to rise and it gets to fifty (50yrs) years, if this trend continues unchecked, the society will suffer for lack of responsible and adequate manpower and also there will be equal increase in the number of children outside wedlock. Then the question of delayed marriage is a serious one as shown in chapter 5, it is imperative that all hands must be on deck to do the needful so as to address this problem urgently. The pastors, theologians, church leaders and the church as a whole must rise up to tackle the problem. It will be disastrous to just wish the problem away.
9. Finally, pastors of various denominations should know this problem is real and they should not turn their face away from their parishioners who are suffering in silence, they must be available to help them so that the battle can be won together in faith by going through all programmes as suggested in chapter 4 of the research work.
10. Researchers, writers and counselors are encouraged to do more researches about delayed marriage in Nigeria since there are very limited resources on the subject.