

CHAPTER 3

RESTORING COMMUNICATION IN PROBLEMATIC INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM - A PASTORAL STUDY

META-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of the meta-theoretical study is to obtain a perspective from research findings made by the human sciences on the family, the various relationships found in the family system and on the various problematic familial relationships operative within it. This perspective is necessary for an integrated and holistic approach to family therapy from a theological perspective.

A holistic approach to family therapy can be obtained by studying human scientific research findings on the family. Due to its scientific nature, human scientific research is systematic in its undertakings and logically sets out its findings. This enables any practical theologian to integrate scientific findings from the human sciences with his own counselling model or at least start to create a model with a solid contextual base that reflects interaction with the factual situations and complexities faced by the family system in the current climate of Western society.

Scientific enquiry in the human scientific research field also focuses on details of the problems members of the family may experience in interpersonal communication. The Bible-centred counsellor needs information on the psychological and sociological factors that manifest in problematic interpersonal communication and therapeutical methodology proposed by human sciences to address these problems, in order to imbed his theological approach in a holistic, well-balanced theoretical framework.

At this stage of the study the focus will be on the meta-theoretical framework to obtain an as broad as possible view on all the factors involved in restoring communication in problematic interpersonal relationships in the family system. This meta-theoretical information is also needed in order to clearly distinguish the challenges that a Christian approach to counselling problematic interpersonal relationships in the family system will have to face in the reality of a society that is becoming increasingly secularized.

Tan (2003:224) states that delayed marriages, reduced birth rates, smaller, nucleated, households and more families with elderly members have become common especially in the world's major cities. These changes in the family structure have a definite impact on the dynamics of family relationships (Tan, 2003:224). According to secular scholarship the post-modern family take many forms which include family structures, like same-sex relationships and single parent configurations. These families must according to secular

views be able to cope with the strains of modern living without really questioning modern living itself or, to put it differently, a secular therapist will rather attempt to work with modern ways of living than try to alter his client's way of life.

3.2 Basic orientation to the way in which the problem field of problematic interpersonal communication in the family system is addressed by research from the human sciences.

Yoo (2007:39) states that the family is traditionally defined as consisting in a heterosexual marriage, ideally occurring once in a life-time (ending with the death of a spouse) in which children are born and raised. Yoo (2007:62) and Goddard (2006:1) assert that the family is the basic social unit of society. Secular society is very much focused on the liberalizing and inclusiveness of family members in decisions made and the process of making those decisions as opposed to a hierarchical structure supposedly proposed by mainstream traditions of Christian doctrine. Wives and children have an equal say in family matters, as opposed to the perceived inequality they have seemingly endured in Christian families.

Family values are defined as a traditional set of social standards **defined by the family** (emphasis added by Omar Fourie) and a history of customs that provide the emotional and physical basis for raising a family (Duffy, 2006:1). The values that a family develops, then, according to Duffy (2006:1) are traditionally the foundation for how children learn, grow and function in the world and how the family will behave towards each other.

Duffy (2006:1) further states that (due to constantly shifting patterns in family values) family members might have differing values and often assumptions are made about what family members hold as their values. Because of these assumptions misunderstandings and miscommunication can occur.

3.2.1 Communication in the Family

The role of effective communication as a major characteristic of strong families is stressed in research from the human sciences; the characteristic of effective communication is undeniably important in helping families through times of crisis or problem situations (Jolly, 2009:1). On the other hand in unhealthy families communication is often confused, contradictory, evasive and unclear (Skynner, 1993:182), if communication exists at all.

3.2.2 Conflict in the Family

When there are people together and they function as normal individuals there is bound to be conflict. This is also in the case of families. Conflict and conflict management is an important topic in research from the human sciences regarding communication in interpersonal relationships in the family structure. Rinaldi and Howe (2003:445) expect a wide range in frequency and styles of conflict in the family, even in families that are intact and not under severe stress. According to Allen (2005:1) most people have a difficult relationship with at least one person in their family. Conflict between individuals occurs when a certain point of view and actions in a particular situation differs from the next person. Though conflict is a natural occurrence, it is how conflict is handled which is important. Conflict can either be handled badly which means that the result of conflict is

negative or it can be handled in such a manner that all parties involved leave the conflict situation having experienced or received something positive out of it.

3.2.3 Constructive and Destructive Conflict

As mentioned a distinguishing factor in conflict is that it can be either constructive or destructive (Rinaldi and Howe, 2003:442).

In many families conflict tend to be very destructive. In some families it can be destructive to the point where individuals (or even whole families) may be divided and cease to function effectively as a coherent whole.

Rinaldi and Howe (2003:442) define constructive conflict as a process of negotiation, collaboration (and/or brainstorming) in order to gain a mutually satisfying goal for opposing one's partner. Destructive conflict is defined as both parties feeling dissatisfied with the outcome of the conflict when it terminates and which may have terminated because of coercion, physical and/or verbal threats, that may escalate beyond the immediate source of the conflict to other arguable topics (Rinaldi and Howe, 2003:442).

Rinaldi and Howe (2003: 442) mention previous studies of theirs and other researchers (Chapman and McBride, 1992; Easterbrooks et al., 1994; Katz et al., 1999, Rinaldi and Howe, 1998) which started to recognize the positive methods of dealing with conflict in family relationships such as communicative conflict, perspective-taking, moral reasoning and justification.

3.3 The secularization of the marriage institution and its implications for addressing problematic inter-personal communication in the family system

Doherty (2001:3) states that institutional marriage is the primary system of marriage in human history and is still the primary one in much of the world today. Doherty (2001:3) also adds that an institutional marriage is based on solid commitment, duty, raising children, economics and stability.

Sollee (1996:5) states that partners work out ways of relating, whether these ways are skilled or unskilled, effective or ineffective, uplifting or destructive and these become the patterns, habits and rituals of the marriage.

Umberson *et al.* (2005:488) asserts that the marital relationship is not static, but follows a developmental trajectory over time, with ups and downs, gains and losses. Umberson *et al.* (2005:500) further states that the tendency is for the quality of the marital relationship to decrease over time.

Today's marriage institution is much more complicated than at any stage in the past (Barnard, 1982:2). No more can men dominate their wives as in the days of authoritarian marriages (Barnard, 1982:3) and so set the rules and general tone for the marriage and no longer do wives feel that they have to necessarily be subservient to their husbands. This gives rise to many different perspectives on just how modern marriages should look and how they should be run.

Society will thrive or decline by the quality and endurance of the marriage as social institution (Doherty, 2001:12); fraying marital bonds lead inevitably, to fraying social bonds in the wider society (Doherty, 2001:12).

Marital quality has been viewed by sociologists as an important feature of the adult life course and moreover with both marital and physical health (Umberson *et al.* 2005:487).

3.3.1 Partnership Marriage

A tendency today is for marriages to function as equal partnerships rather than one partner (usually the wife) submitting to her husband. This arrangement causes the task of making the marriage work and run smoothly to be vastly more intricate and complex (Barnard, 1982:3). It requires no less than 100% participation from both marriage partners. Decision-making for instance is more difficult because both parties have a more or less equal say about a particular issue. The potential for conflict is obvious and therefore adequate handling of conflict becomes essential. In a partnership marriage good and clear communication is vital to make decision making easier and in so doing reducing the potential for conflict.

The partnership marriage has a natural feel to it, for it ascribes to the tendencies of modern society. This is so because it makes claims to more equality between husbands and wives and this seems to correlate to modern day notions of equality for woman in general.

3.3.2 A changing role for the Husband / Father

According to Brandth and Kvande (1998:293) research on men and masculinity in gender studies is a topic of growing interest. In sociological research the study of fathers has been an important area of focus during the last fifteen years. The general attitude or inclinations of husband's and men are under pressure to change (Visagie, 2005: 15). Husband's are expected to be sensitive to the needs of wives and men in general are supposed to be sensitive and in touch with how they are feeling and more importantly able to express those feelings towards their partners. This sensitivity is a change from the past pervasive aloofness of men; the strong silent type, which were expected to show little emotion. Post-modern secular society views men as equal partners to women and as such they should take equal responsibility for the household. Women are no longer the keepers of the home and the man the provider. All roles that were once delineated have become meshed and the marriage is based on negotiated settlements; men must accept their wives in the work force and also accept that household chores must be shared (Visagie, 2005: 17). These changes are permeating through marriages, families and the society at large. McGraw (2002:55) does not agree, though, with this current trend and states that men and women are different and are different for a reason. He further states that there is a specific division of labour between men and women where men were required to do labour that does not lend it well to emotionality or sensitivity (McGraw, 2002:55). McGraw (2002:55) goes further by stating that men are not as sensitive or emotional as women because they are not supposed to be and to try to force these traits and characteristics into the personality of a man is foolhardy.

A partnership marriage thus requires an equal effort in a relationship from both partners. Secular society claims that this is in juxtaposition especially to Christian doctrine, which according to them, and as a result of misinterpretations of Scripture, created a husband that dictated rather than democratically participated in decision making and is authoritarian rather than explanatory. The husband is no longer head of the household. This statement is common in various segments of our society and no doubt many would like to see the lifting of man's traditional authority in the home take place in every home. This lifting of the authority of the husband would add to and underscore the liberation of women in general and in particular the home. Men are now equal partners in a partnership marriage - equal to their wives in every aspect of their lives.

Fatherhood according to Brandth and Kvande (1998:295) is (in the social-constructivist paradigm) constantly being shaped and re-shaped according to cultural context, work and family relations. Fathers are responsible to be a visible figure for their children. They must share fully in the development of their children, listen more, and spend enough time with their children. This includes as a matter of fact being caring and sensitive to (especially) the emotional needs of their children alongside the logical task of providing for their physical needs (cf. Visagie, 2005: 45).

The authority of fathers over their children has also become a matter of focus as regards the make-up of fatherly authority and especially how that authority operates in the child-father interaction. Fathers cannot just spank children and leave them devoid of counsel. Post-modern/secular society has moved away from corporal punishment to more humane forms and necessitates ample counselling on the reasons for the punishment as an imperative.

3.3.3 The implications of this changing role of the husband for problematic developments in interpersonal relationships in the family system

Brandth and Kvande (1998:294) state that in research which studies men from a gender perspective one aim has been to study changes in masculinity. This is done specifically to ascertain which values, other than the traditional strength and power values which have conventionally characterized the relationship between men and women, can now be identified as masculine ideals.

In developing this interest in other values which can now be pin-pointed as masculine ideals, Connell (1987), Kimmel (1987), Segal (1988), and Blom (1994), according to Brandth and Kvande (1998:294) have called for a masculine concept of care for children. The changing nature and meaning of fatherhood and the conduct and interaction of fathers with their children are two of the many central focal points of contemporary research on fathers (Marsiglio, 1993, in Brandth and Kvande, 1998:294).

Further, according to Brandth and Kvande (1998:293), fathers shape their own form of masculine caring for children differently from mothers' interaction with children, importantly, though, both fathers and mothers take part in the process of reproducing masculinity as the norm by giving masculine care a higher status.

According to Ang (2006:79) the contribution of the father to the development of a child has often been assumed to be subordinate to that of the mother, but the developmental input a father makes is of vital importance. Ang (2006:90) makes the express statement that fathers do matter (note: Ang (2006) studied the Asian context) and further states that the findings provide evidence that focusing primarily on mothers and the mother-child relational outcomes to the exclusion of fathers, may be outmoded in clinical child research and practice (cf. Phares, 1996) and in excluding fathers researchers clinicians may miss out on the important contributions that fathers make. When considering problematic relations in the family system and resolving those problems, the father/husband should be fully included.

Phares, Sherece and Kamboukos (2009:1) refer to (McBride, *et al.* 2002 and Lewis and Lamb, 2003) who assert that in comparison to a mother's involvement with children, there is evidence to suggest that the father's involvement with children is more closely associated with pre-school children's temperament (McBride, *et al.* 2002) and to adult children's functioning (Lewis and Lamb, 2003). Ang (2006: 81, 82) mention Barnett, Marshall and Pleck (1992) who found that sons who reported a positive relationship with both the mother and father had relatively low levels of psychological distress. On this level the involvement of the father with his children is instrumental in the alleviation or control of the problematic parent – child relationship dynamic.

3.3.4 A changing role for the Wife / Mother

Women in modern times are expected to be everything to everyone in the family, all the time and moreover to be perfect at whatever role expectancy there that might be for her. Women must follow a career and excel at it; after work they must take care of their family's needs and even during the day she has to be available to attend to whatever crops-up. After this comes being attractive and sensual to her husband as wife at night.

This is a tall order and yet women succeed at this, but there is a dark side to this exhausting effort to succeed at everything. The negatives are often burnout, stress, hypertension, and substance abuse.

Women as a **partner in a marriage** (emphasis added by Omar Fourie) do not in modern times play the role of what was deemed in the past to be a subservient role to their husbands. For the most part they claim an equal partnership or even dominate their husbands in certain marriages. As women feel more and more liberated and freethinking, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept the roles that previous generations of women had to accept and had to fulfil. Benjamin (2001:183) states that employed women no longer accept their positions in the household as inevitable. Wives are no longer willing to say 'yes' and keep quiet; they are no longer willing to stay silent about matters which they feel they can give a valuable opinion to.

Wives feel that men should be sensitive enough to tend to their needs and perceptive enough to know what she requires of him to fulfil her needs in their relationship, and what his responsibilities are in the home. Equality in a marriage also means that authority is shared. It could mean that women take the final decision on a matter, or even vetoes her husband on a matter she feels strongly about.

As mentioned secular society expects from women to take care of the home and be successful in the corporate arena. Immense pressure, then, is placed on women to perform above and beyond what is normally required from their male peers. This immense pressure must take its toll. It can be seen in wrecked marriages and failed relationships with children.

3.3.5 The implications of this changing role of the wife for problematic developments in interpersonal relationships in the family system

According to Benjamin (2001:183) a significant majority of women are interested in changing the division of labour in the family and are working towards changing it.

Belch and Willis (2001:120) state that wives have gained substantial influence in all of the decision making stages in the household and that the husband has also lost influence in all stages of the decision making process. Belch and Willis (2001:120) further notes that the woman has gained independence and importance in almost every area of the family decision making process.

3.3.6 Secular Parenting

Secular parenting is stated as contemporary forms of parenting prevalent in Western culture. According to Orbuch *et al.* (2005:171) the parent-child relationship begins early on in children's lives and is critical for their long-term adjustment and success. Guillaume's (2006:9) concept of parenting is that both parents provide a secure base from which a child or adolescent can venture into the outside world and that upon return to the home the child will know as certain that he will be welcomed, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted when distressed and reassured if frightened. A high quality parent-child relationship is regarded as a type of strength of paramount importance, which can help children during difficult times (Orbuch *et al.* (2005:172).

Parents are required to place the welfare of their children at the top of their list of priorities, even above that of their own. This is radically different to the type of parenting apparent even a hundred years ago, when children were the firm appendages of their parents and not their main focus. This attitude towards parenting resulted in much neglect and indifference of the needs of children.

According to Rinaldi and Howe (2003:453) parents frequently try to exert control over their children to attempt to get them to comply with their requests/orders. A parent-child relationship is, thus, not characterized by an equitable power structure (Rinaldi and Howe, 2003:453). There has been a lot of controversy about the amount of authority parents should use (Skynner 1993:182), but parents are in a less potent vantage point in many respects regarding the socially accepted standards for using authority when raising their children. Historically speaking parents had a lot more dictatorial power when it

came to the regulating of their children's behaviour. Extreme liberalism does not allow parents to discipline their children through corporal punishment.

3.3.6.1 Communication between parents and children

Huizinga et al. (2005:1959) state that there is a relationship between problematic communication with parents and child functioning. Children are (basically) showed by their parents how to communicate properly by setting the example for them through the interactions of their parents with each other and with others. Good parent-child communication is just as important as good communication in the marital or any other social relationship.

If parent-child communication is problematic it may also be a cause of conflict and disharmony in the family. When bad communication is the case, parents are not able to effectively communicate their wishes/instructions to their children, which can cause frustration not only to parents, but also to children. Good clear communication by parents make their children feel confident that whatever the family does face it will be dealt with in a clear and concise manner.

3.3.6.2 Communicational Conflict between parents and children

Rinaldi and Howe (2003:453) state that lack of concordance between parents and children may contribute to further conflict. This means parents may believe they are acting appropriately towards their children, whilst their children's perception of this appropriate action towards them is that it is unfair. Parents today cannot just order children and tell them what to do and punish them by corporal punishment when they refuse to do so.

Children have, today, according to modern Western custom the freedom to interact on a more equal footing when it comes to conflict with their parents. Conflict between parents and children should be resolved with as little psychological trauma to the child as possible, which often leaves the parent(s) in a position of impotence to direct the raising of their children. Children can express what they want, think and feel freely, without necessarily venerating their parents or fear excessive punishment from them, which includes corporal punishment. Children are also expected to be more independent and cut the ties between them and their parents at earlier stages.

As mentioned there has been a lot of controversy about the amount of authority parents should use (Skynner (1993:182). Parents that have a healthy relationship with their children should have no problem in taking an authoritative role and using their authority when required. These parents are able to share their power easily and amicably (Skynner, 1993:182). Destructive parenting would suggest that parents are not able to exercise their authority consistently; using their authority either too excessively or using too little of it. Parents also struggle to share their authority so that both the parents and the children know where they stand.

Children in contemporary society are faced with challenges their parents and their parent's parents would not have been able to conceive of in their growing-up years. Added to this children grow up with influences and solicitations and invitations that would have been equally unimaginable to previous generations. To these the secular world has responded by extreme liberalism and unparalleled freedom of actions and movement for their children. The study will focus on these and other parental-child interaction problems

- specifically zooming in on suggestions for restoring communication in these interpersonal relations - in Chapter 5.

3.3.7 The place of Children in secularized family life

The child's developmental task, according to Guillaume (2006:10), is to balance the need for security and dependence with his need to move toward independence and that without the guidance and encouragement of the parents the child will find it difficult to face the uncertainties and risks inherent on the road to independence. Children in modern times are, unfortunately, encouraged to live their lives more in accordance with the idea that the individual, hence themselves, are of paramount importance. This individualism encourages them to be critical, even rebellious and outspoken and act in a manner that might be acceptable to them, but is not in accordance to what society traditionally expects of them: a morally sensitive, socially responsible way of living.

3.3.7.1 Son / Boy

Having a son born into a family is in modern Western culture not seen as an advantage over having a girl born into the family; as opposed to ancient Middle Eastern cultures which, for various reasons, viewed a boy as more important (Malina, 2001:72; Schoeman 2004:72).

The boy in modern society is seen as equal to a daughter or girl. This viewpoint, however, does not necessarily apply to modern but non-Western countries, where a boy is still valued much higher than a girl and where there are, therefore, unequal opportunities for education and careers.

3.3.7.2 Daughter / Girl

A girl born into the family is in modern western culture seen as equal to, and just as desirable as a boy. A daughter is also given the same opportunities as boys with the same education and (nearly) the same career opportunities.

It is an open question whether a girl is treated or at least viewed in the same light as a boy. Do people still treat girls with kid gloves and are they more protected against bad or negative influences? Indeed it would be an interesting subject for further research whether this behaviour of sheltering a girl is still prevalent in current Western culture?

3.3.7.3 The implications of this changing role and place of children for problematic developments in interpersonal relationships in the family system

Huizinga *et al.* (2005:1959) state that problematic communication is almost consistently related to Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms in both sons and daughters. According to Huizinga *et al.* (2005:1956) it is well known that a stressful life event can cause psychosocial problems in children. Afifi and Amato (2006:222) state that research on divorce - a stressful life event - has found that adolescents' feelings of being caught between parents are linked to internalizing problems and weak parent-child relationships.

Afifi and Amato (2006:222) show in their research how children that have parents in high conflict marriages were more prone than other children to feelings of being caught between parents. **These feelings of being caught between parents are associated with**

lower levels of subjective well being and poorer quality parent-child relationships (emphasis added by Omar Fourie).

Even into adulthood children with parents whose marriages are in conflict and (yet) do not divorce, may be unable to escape from their parents' marital problems even into adulthood (Afifi & Amato, 2006: 222). Huizinga *et al.* (2005:1959) substantiate that there is a relationship between problem communication with parents and child functioning and have discovered in their study that communication problems have a greater impact on child functioning than lack of openness.

3.4. Secularized means of addressing and resolving communication conflicts in the family system

Communication in the marriage centres on the redressing of perceived bad communication under the traditional male dominated patterns of communication. Husbands – in their traditional role - are perceived as bad communicators and should now in modern times work at being good communicators and listeners.

Effective communication is not just about talking, but includes listening, non-verbal expressions and silence (Jolly, 2009:1). Jolly (2009:1) further states that communication can be through silence, but the intended message might not be accurately received.

In times of crisis old communication methods in the family system might break down or not work as well.

According to Sollee (1996:6) researchers find that conflict is normal and predictable in every marriage. Marital conflict can be linked, according to Rinaldi and Howe (2003:452) to perceptions and levels of parent-child and sibling conflict, "lending support to the argument that the impact of marital conflict on the family system is key".

3.4.1 Constructive and Destructive Conflict

According to Rinaldi and Howe (2003:442), Deutch (1973) was the first theorist to distinguish between constructive and destructive conflict.

Constructive conflict can be described as a process of negotiation (and collaboration and brainstorming) to obtain a mutually satisfying goal for opposing the other partner (Rinaldi and Howe, 2003: 442).

Destructive conflict ends with both partners feeling dissatisfied with the outcome, which may have ended because of intimidation and verbal or physical threats that may have escalated beyond the immediate issue at hand (Rinaldi and Howe, 2003:442).

In Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:20), Braiker and Kelley (1979) describe conflict as being typified by incompatible goals between the involved parties and Oetzel, Ting-Toomey (2003:608) in Matsunga and Imahori (2009:20) describe conflict as an intense disagreement between two parties that involves incompatible goals, needs and/or viewpoints. Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:20) further state that such incompatibility and the

intense nature of conflict makes it difficult for individuals to act according to their ideal ways of family interaction. This variance with their ideal ways of family communication puts a very definite negative turn on conflict.

Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:24) speculates that due to the fact that individuals hold different family communication standards an individual might experience a conflict situation in another way, even the same stressor might impact individuals to varying degrees.

Infidelity in the marital relationship is seen in a very serious light by society. Infidelity comprises a number of congruent factors that are necessarily present when a partner is unfaithful. **These elements include the telling of lies and keeping secrets, living a secret existence separate from the usual closed marital life** (emphasis added by Omar Fourie). When a partner is unfaithful it severs the bond of trust that there was in the relationship; trust that is very difficult or nearly impossible to restore. This is the case because the partner that was unfaithful has lied before about his/her whereabouts and activities and the partner that was wounded cannot be with the unfaithful partner all the time to guard against any further infidelities.

Importantly Phares, Sherece and Kamboukos (2009:2) state that across the developmental lifespan, the exposure of children to inter-parental conflict is linked to higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems. Phares, Sherece and Kamboukos (2009:2) further state that assessing the connections between inter-parental conflict and parental involvement with their adolescent children and adolescent emotional/behavioural problems is important.

3.4.2. The nature of interpersonal communication in the family system and proposed therapeutical intervention in resolving conflict

Guillaume (2006:1) states that our behavioural patterns, whether they are effective or not, are learned. Guillaume (2006:1) further states learned behavioural patterns do not develop in isolation, but as a result of our interactions with others (for instance with members of a family system). People learn to act and respond in a particular context and that within that context our behavioural patterns make sense (Guillaume, 2006:1). If people continue to use the same patterns of behaviour in different contexts their behaviour may be ineffectual, even though it did make sense within the original context in which they developed (Guillaume, 2006:1).

Guillaume (2006:6) further states that people communicate at many levels and that people can communicate with much more than words. Our physical posture, gestures and voice patterns including pitch, tone and tempo are some aspects of communication without the use of words. A large part of an individual's ability to make sense of the world depends on that individual's ability to distinguish/interpret and comment upon the conflicting messages received from the world around him (2006:6). Guillaume (2006:2) also states that people continually comment about the actions and communications of others and that in order for people to accurately discriminate the meaning of another's or their own communication, they must be able to comment on the expression (appearance) of communication.

Tubbs, Roy and Burton (2005:80) concur with various studies which indicate that families noted the importance of time spent together. This time spent together according to Tubbs, Roy and Burton (2005:80), affirms family well-being, commitment, positive affect (emotion) and is also important because it provides the context in which important family building-processes, such as developing good communication skills, can take place. Tubbs, Roy and Burton (2005:80) also view family time as a valued process and a resource for building family relationships and further state that parent-child time is critical within the family time framework.

Importantly according to Tubbs, Roy and Burton (2005:83) reading bedtime stories (thus communicating with the child) and engaging in prayer on a daily basis provides routine opportunities for spontaneous parent-child conversations and transmission of religious values. Also in the study of Tubbs, Roy and Burton (2005:83) mothers described activities that generate conversations with their children that served the multiple purposes of transmitting family values about faith, education and relationships. Through active engagement, such as playtime, mothers promoted children's learning, encouraged creative expressions and became partners in their children's development (Tubbs, Roy and Burton, 2005:84).

In seeking a description of a family communication standard Matsunaga and Imahori (2009: 4) draws on various scholars to do so: Family communication standard is an overarching term with a number of distinct dimensions related to communication, such as openness (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, *et al.*, 1996), showing affection, respecting privacy (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997), and providing support (Fletcher & Simpson, 2001).

Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:4) state that a family communication standard guides individual's perceptions, evaluations and motivations as a yardstick to which actual family interactions are compared and contrasted and referenced. Caughlin (2003) in Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:6) found that certain family communication standard aspects, particularly beliefs in openness and support, are associated with enhanced levels of family satisfaction.

Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:7) suggest that people's views of ideal family communication would differ considerably across cultures. According to Matsunaga and Imahori (2009:3) individuals with different family communication standard profiles have different levels of subjective well-being and family satisfaction.

3.5. Meta-theoretical perspectives from Chapter 3 that can be utilized in constructing a theoretical framework for understanding, explaining and changing the praxis of communication in the Christian family system from a theological vantage point

Elements from human scientific research that should be deemed as important in identifying inter-human elements in a theoretical framework for restoring communication in problematic interpersonal relationships in the family system are summarized in this paragraph. This meta-theoretical information also assists the researcher in clearly distinguishing the challenges that a Christian approach to counselling problematic interpersonal rela-

tionships in the family system will have to face in the reality of a society that is becoming increasingly secularized:

1) Changing patterns in family life and the structures of inter-personal communication

- Institutional marriage was traditionally based on solid commitment, duty, raising children, economics and stability.
- In secularized society the concept of a “partnership marriage” becomes predominant. Partnership marriage - as the name suggests - functions as a partnership rather than one partner (usually the wife) submitting to her husband: it requires no less than 100% participation from both marriage partners.
- Whatever the changing perceptions regarding the function of marriage may amount to, research still confirms that fraying marital bonds lead inevitably to fraying social bonds in the wider society.

2) Family life and implications of distortions in communication patterns on family life

- The family was traditionally viewed as the basic social unit of society.
- The family was traditionally defined as consisting in a heterosexual marriage, occurring once in a life-time in which children are born and raised.
- The values that a family develops are traditionally the foundation for how children learn, grow and function in the world and how the family will behave towards each other.
- In the secularized view on marriage and family life the equality between members and rights of different family members and the need for mature communication skills in defusing conflict are stressed.
- Effective communication is viewed as a major characteristic of strong families; this characteristic is also viewed as of cardinal importance in helping them through times of crisis or problem situations.
- Because families are permanently tied together, the negative or positive handling of a conflict situation can have a lasting effect on family relationships.
- Women have gained independence and importance in almost every area of the family decision-making process.

- All roles that were once shared have become meshed and the marriage is based on negotiated settlements; men must accept their wives in the work force and also accept that household chores must be shared.

3) Parenting

- Human scientific research stresses that the parent-child relationship begins early on in children's lives and is critical for their long-term adjustment and success.
- A high quality parent-child relationship is regarded as strength of principal importance, which can help children during difficult times.
- Children are (basically) showed by their parents how to communicate properly by setting the proper example for them through the interactions of their parents with each other and with others.
- Fatherhood is (in the social-constructivist paradigm) constantly being shaped and re-shaped according to cultural context, work and family relations.
- Fathers shape their own form of masculine caring for children differently from mothers' interaction with children.
- Both fathers and mothers take part in the process of reproducing masculinity as the norm by giving masculine care a higher status.
- Healthy parents should have no problem in taking an authoritative role and using their authority when required.
- In destructive parenting, parents are not able to exercise their authority consistently; using their authority either too excessively or using too little of it.
- Parents may also struggle to share their authority: which results in both the parents and the children not knowing where they stand with each other.
- Even into adulthood children with parents whose marriages are intact, but in conflict may be unable to escape from their parents' marital problems.
- There is a relationship between problem communication with parents and child functioning.

4) Grounds for reconciliation in relationships and restoration in communication patterns that uplift fellow human beings

- In human scientific research findings it is stressed that constructive conflict can be described as a process of negotiation (collaboration and brainstorming) to obtain a mutually satisfying goal for opposing the other partner.
- Destructive conflict ends with both partners feeling dissatisfied with the outcome.
- Human behaviour, whether effective or not, is learned.
- Learned behaviours do not develop in isolation, but as a result of interactions with others (for instance with members of a family system).
- People communicate at many levels and that people can communicate with much more than words.
- It is important that families spent time together, because it provides the context in which important family building-processes take place.

5) Meta-theoretical findings regarding (anthropocentric) therapeutical means of restoring communication patterns and promote family health.

- Family communication standard is an overarching term with a number of distinct dimensions related to communication, such as openness, showing affection, respecting privacy and providing support.
- Family communication standard guides individual's perceptions, evaluations and motivations as a yardstick to which actual family interactions are compared, contrasted and referenced.
- Family communication standard aspects, particularly, beliefs in openness and support, are associated with enhanced levels of family satisfaction.

From these meta-theoretical perspectives it can be concluded that the following will be important challenges for a Christian approach to counselling problematic interpersonal relationships in the family system:

- Family members may not have a natural frame of reference in their living environment regarding the roles ascribed to husbands, wives, and children in the Bible.

- The Bible provides a set standard for interaction between members of the family system and this set standard should be communicated in an appropriate way.
- This Biblical standard also includes a family communication standard, which will guide members in the family regarding perceptions, evaluations and emotions to which actual family interactions can be compared, contrasted and referenced.
- The Bible as family communication standard will have to be utilized in a way that enhance levels of family satisfaction by encouraging openness in Christ centred caring and support.
- Secular notions of the inter-human communication seem to exclude the role of atonement and reconciliation with God and fellow human beings in Christ as the ultimate basis for restored relationships.