

BOOK REVIEW

By

Michael O. Afolayan, PhD

M&P Educational Consulting International

Title: The Secrets of Success in Marriage

Author: John G. Githiga, D.Min., DRE., DD.

Publishers: BV Book Venture (97 pgs)

Year of Publication: 2015

Introduction: I once ordered a copy of Githiga's *The Secrets of Success in Marriage* on Amazon.com this past year, and paid for it; but I never received it. I placed another order this year and paid for it again; but this time around, just a few days before leaving the United States for the homeland, I received the ordered copy. I decided I was going to read it to kill time during my long fourteen-hour flight across the Atlantic Ocean. It did not play out as I intended it because I inadvertently packed the book in my checked-in luggage. In the usual chaotic scheduling and travels in the first fourteen days in Nigeria, I did not have the much-needed time to read the book, in part because I had at hand the work of another minister I was editing, but on January 26, as I withdrew to bed, I decided to take a quick glimpse at the book. I am glad I did so because it happened to be one of those books you pick up just to read the first few pages but you ended up not putting down until you arrived at the very last page. Anyway, by the time I dropped the book, I had read from cover to cover all of its 97 pages and could not but praise God for the contents of it. On January 27, 2016, I started to write this review at the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja. God works in mysterious ways. It could not have been a mere coincidence that God made it possible for me to be in the homeland of Africa at this time for a project in education that has much to do with the education of girls in the most populous African nation of Nigeria, thanks in no small ways to the efforts of the United Nations.

It would not be a coincidence either that when I woke up in the morning to check the news on the Internet, the first one that jumped straight at me had to do with marriage. However, it was the bizarre news from the African nation of Eritrea, which had mandated every man in the country to marry at least two wives or face life imprisonment with hard labor. On the same vein, a woman who resisted or stood in opposition of the husband's effort at a marriage to multiple women in the household would also be sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor. I could not but remember the 1980s and early 1990s, when a colleague of mine in Wisconsin fought tooth and nails for the carving out of Eritrea from Ethiopia. I was convinced this could not have been his vision for this wonderful country. However, I thought in my heart that this development had to fit snugly into an aspect of what the Lord spoke about in Mark 13: 14, when he cited Daniel's prophesy concerning what he called "Abomination of Desolation." I was upset, but then thankfully, Holy Spirit gave me comfort, referring me back to Githiga's book that I read overnight. I knew I needed to write a review of that book immediately and distribute it through as many media as I possibly could. Here it is:

The Author: Dr. Githiga is the Chancellor and Patriarch of All Nations Christian Church International University (ANCCIU) and the Archbishop of All Nations Anglican Church. He is a former chaplain and professor at various institutions around the world, especially in the United States, including West Texas A & M University, Grambling State University, Pensacola Junior College, and St. Paul's University. Githiga is the foundation President of the African Association for Pastoral Study and Counseling. He has a lengthy academic and professional training record, which include having been a graduate of Church Army College, St. Paul's University, Makerere University, the University of the South, Vanderbilt University, from where he has accrued a variety of degrees, all of which make him an intellectual giant and an institution in his own right. Those degrees include Diploma in Theology (Dip. Th.), Master of divinity (M.Div.), Doctorate of the Ministry (D.Min.), Doctor of Religion (DRE.), and Doctor of Divinity (DD.).

But intellect and/or scholarship are not the crucibles of Githiga's story, and he makes little or no reference to these accomplishments in the length and breadth of this book. The critical watershed of the book is his marriage to the same woman, the Rev. (Dr.) Mary Githiga, for almost half a century, and this would be the subject of one of the chapters in this book. When Paul the Apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:1-3 enjoining believers to see themselves

as the epistles written for all men to see, the Githiga's marriage story is an empirical proof of this assertion and admonishment. For them to write this book on marriage is putting the proverbial square peg in a befitting square hole. The Archbishop is not just writing about marriage as an academic exercise, his marriage to the same woman over the years is the "gospel" of tangibility that proves that a godly marriage is not just a theoretical or theological matter, it is an objective reality. It can be achieved. It can work. It can last. It can be desired. It can be for one man and one woman – "until death do us part." The Githigas are the epitome of this possibility, and they have done so in spite of the modern day culture that has long departed from that sacred desire of God and His command for humankind to "Be fruitful and multiply. . ."

The Synopsis: In addition to segments on dedication, acknowledgement, and introduction, this book is divided into 27 chapters. In the first two chapters, titled, "Let the Patriarchal be the Patriarchal," and "Let the Matriarchal be the Matriarchal," the author borrows testimonies of nine different couples to extrapolate the sacred roles of the man and woman in any marriage relationship. Recognizing and respecting those roles and responsibilities are the first recipe for a successful marriage.

In the next five chapters, that is, chapters 3-7, the author isolates unique characteristics that often cement the Christian marriage. They include the absence of bossiness, sticking together, sharing mutual respect, a total rejection of anything or anyone that would poke-nose into the couple's affairs, and step into the mutual love between the two.

Chapters 8-12 provide further examinations of deeper spiritual efforts that couples need in order to bring about a sense of safety and nourishment in the marriage. These include strengthening each other as "iron sharpens iron," endeavoring to see marriage as a learning process for each other, a mutual love for the Lord and the ministry, putting the Lord at the center of the relationship, and the determining to put up with each other in thick and thin, and regardless of circumstances.

Chapters 13-15 delve into the commonsensical sociology of marriage relationships. These sociological factors are for the couple to buy into humor and hard work, to hold on to deep fraternal touch in which the husband and wife are two best friends, and for each in the partnership to invest, give, and maintain the marriage with 100% intensity.

The next two chapters, that is, 16 and 17, are a candid discourse on sex and sexual experience becoming of a true Christian marriage. There, the author addresses the salience of virginity, the best gift a couple could give to each other, and the need for them to also keep themselves away from sexual pervasions and impurities, never denying each other of a good sexual relationship.

Chapters 18-24 are a medley of thoughts on some philosophical strings that tie marriage relationships together and provide pillars that hold a home in place. The section stresses that commonplace issue of proximity – rural versus urban upbringings, for example, as well as ethnic, sub-ethnic and interracial marriages should proffer great advantages to a believing couple. The strength of city upbringing and the humility of farm life may play a pivotal role in the face of conflicts and in resolving issues and making informed decisions in which a monolithic experience would not stand a chance of resolving. In other words, in a valley of great decision, multitudes of perspectives may bring forth an unbelievable solution. Going after each other – physically, emotionally, and spiritually, the determination to stay-put with each other, holding each other’s hands, effectively communicating, and the recognition of and reverence for, one’s spouse’s imperfection are among the most effective lethal weapons against the darts of the enemy, who often builds up its army of antagonisms against Christian marriages. Chapters 25-27 are a league of their own; and so, I will treat each one separately.

In chapter 25, the author delves into the secret of the marriage between himself and his wife, a love story that has spanned almost half a century. Precisely, the Githigas (John and Mary) have been married since 1968. In this chapter, the Archbishop shares five of the pillars that have held their marriage together on a solid foundation:

First, from the outset they adopted as their anchor Paul’s words of assurance and encouragement in Philippians 4: 13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Therefore, in all circumstances the couple has held to their faith in all circumstances of life that in Christ Jesus, there are no things that seem to be impossible, no rivers of life they cannot cross, or mountains of challenges they cannot climb or even move.

Second, they kept their virginities until the consummation of their marriage vow, a feat that many would see as impossible, especially in today's world where lust is misplaced with love.

Third, the couple made Psalm 23 its anchor, committing it to memory and singing it by heart. "The family that prays together stays together," as the conventional wisdom has taught us; and this has been made true in the practice of the Githigas.

Fourth, they started off reading the Gospel of John, which led them to studying one book of the Bible at one time, and eventually leading them into establishing a Bible study group that has in place for forty-four years.

Finally, once consecrated Bishop, the couple started using Daily Office, a prayer guide that has passed the test of time, having been used by men and women of God for more than two thousand years. The use of the Daily Office has helped Archbishop and his wife (Dr. Mary Githiga) grow spiritually, and more disciplined in focused worship.

In chapter 26, under the title of "Causes of Failure in Marriage," the author provides a thirteen-tier destroyer of marriage. These causes are: Lack of premarital counseling; premarital cohabitation; keeping bad company; separation between couples; interferences from in-laws; weak spirituality; poor division of labor; lack of compassion; not allowing each other to be or become who they are; one partner being a parasite to the relationship; bad habits (manners); engaging in private affairs; and the presence or absence of children.

The author then gives nine pieces of advice on how to be a blessing to one's self and to the children with which God has blessed the marriage. They include the following: Having time alone; respecting each other's points of view; impacting on the children the sacredness of the relationship between mom and dad and the children's duty to stay away from causing any rancor between them; being firm to, yet embracing of, the children in the marriage; understanding the psychology of their children and the tendency for them to want to be different from their parents; like the prodigal son's father, being willing to receive and rehabilitate their children back to their embrace whenever they choose to veer away in rebellion from home and against the will of their parents; never blaming each other because of the shortcomings

of children; joyfully adopting children if it pleases the Lord not to give them biological children; and being content with each other and with one's children.

Chapter 27 is a precise epistle to the yet-to-be-married individuals. In the chapter, the author admonishes the spinster or bachelor to recognize that the choice of a Christ-centered marriage partner is one of the most important decisions one could make in life and so must be done carefully and prayerfully. The individual must know that marriage is in the heart of God, because it is only institution ordained to fulfill God's blessing to humankind to "Be fruitful and multiply." The author's advice also includes getting to know each other intentionally – not rushing into marriage on impulse, to be prayerful in the choice, to look for a godly future partner with one's self also being godly, and making the trinity the cornerstone of the relationship.

The Theology: There is a biblical ideal for the tradition of marriage: It is the first institution ordained by God and the relationship of Christ to the Church is the quintessential model for it.

The Pedagogy & Methodology: A few years ago, I read another great book on marriage written by my cousin, Dr. Tubosun Odejide. I believe the title of it was, "*I Said I Do.*" The book was an ethnographic penmanship because it was a vertical rendition of the stories that birthed the success of his marriage to the same woman, Dr. Agnes Odejide, over the decades. I recall vividly as their stories developed from innocent upbringings in their different homes to their studentships at the University of Ibadan, their professional pursuits, and initial attraction to each other through their activities in the youth ministries on campus, which culminated into the two becoming engaged to each other, a marriage that was inundated with of challenges of growing experiences as well as the antitheses and paradoxes of joy and pain, humor and seriousness, failures and successes, and the ultimate raising of a viable Christian home with the blessing of children. My two favorite parts of their stories were once when they had a major disagreement that precipitated in the wife's anger and how they patched up and it soon seemed as if it grew them stronger in their relationship; and secondly when they realized the Lord was going to bless them materially, they put their first paycheck in an envelope and physically stepped on it as a graphic and symbolic demonstration that material possessions would always be under their feet and would never dominate them or take the place of their God. What a memorable imagery!

Theirs was a narrative methodology that builds their stories. As would be demonstrated, that of Dr. Githiga is a different approach.

Dr. John Githiga's story/ies could be seen as horizontal and empirical. The work steps into the genre of anthology of marriages with testimonials that point to the secret of the sacred institution that God ordained right from the Adamic dispensation. With assorted case studies upon case studies, the work became an action research in which the Archbishop utilized his profession as a counselor, minister, intellectual and apostle to present a work, almost an epistle, written for the utilization of the Church Universal. The methodology of this writing is unique. It is a combination of multiple stories – **76 case studies**, including a few that emanated from the marriage life of Githiga and his wife. The author clearly demonstrates being a profound and systematic pedagogue. The pedagogy, that is the method of delivering lessons, would attract anyone who is in the fields of education, writing, preaching, or language studies. A close attention to the style of the author would reveal that the chapters are ordered in such a way that the last sentences or phrases of the last paragraph of most chapters reveals what is coming in the next one. This is creative writing at its best, extraordinarily didactic! When serious intellectual exposition intermarries quality spiritual disposition, the outcome is always a grounded dosage of knowledge dispensation.

The Message: Marriage can work, but you've got to work on it. There is no rigid formula for a successful marriage but there is a proven secret to it – make Christ the center of marriage and you will see your house transformed to a home, your lust turning to love, your spouse no longer a sex partner but a life partner, and your struggles bringing forth victories!

Conclusion: Githiga's *The Secrets of Success in Marriage* is a must read for all intended couples, singles, those struggling in their marriage relationships and those who are living victorious marriage lives. For the last group, it is to learn from others and embed such wisdom into their repertoire of knowledge and experiences because, as the Yoruba often say, "Drinking from the pool of other people's wisdom is the secret of the wisdom of elders." For the other groups, it is good to hear success stories and learn from them so as to turn such learning into one's life possessions.

This book, *The Secrets of Success in Marriage*, is the like of which the 17th Century author and philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon, talked about when he

wrote: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.” I think this particular book belongs in the caliber of those to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. I believe strongly that anyone who aspires for a successful marriage, whether they are believers or unbelievers, should have a copy of it.

Michael O. Afolayan, PhD

M&P Educational Consulting International

Springfield, Illinois

March 2016