

Hermeneutical Reflections on the Prodigal Son: Christian Educational Framework for African Father-Child Relationships

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Abstract

This article presents a hermeneutical analysis of the parable of the Prodigal Son in the context of African father-child relationships. The research majorly focusses on exploring the biblical narrative's insights into the complexities of African father-child relationships, characterized by authoritarianism, paternalism, and cultural expectations. The paper posits that a contextualized Christian education framework can facilitate transformative father-child relationships which is critical for African national development. Through a qualitative research methodology, the study adopted a biblical hermeneutical analysis of the parable of Prodigal Son in the Gospel of (Luke 15:11-32), as well as a review of existing literature on father-child relationships in Africa. Key findings reveal that the Prodigal Son's father exemplar offers valuable lessons for fostering acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and mutual respect in father-child relationships in Africa. The parable highlights the importance of a father's unconditional love as characterized in (1Cor. 13:4-8) for nurturing healthy and harmonious relationships between fathers and their children in Africa. Based on these findings, the major recommendation of this study is for African fathers to draw on the teachings of the Prodigal Son's father to cultivate a culture of unconditional love of their children to foster: forgiveness, reconciliation, and mutual respect within their households. Embracing these values, African fathers-children bonds will not only improve positively, but will also impact the development of Africa significantly. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on father-child relationships in Africa and offers practical insights for promoting positive family dynamics in the region.

Keywords: Biblical Hermeneutics, Prodigal Son Parable, Christian Education Framework, Father-Child Relationship, African Parenting Theories.

Introduction

The parable of the Prodigal Son, as narrated in the Gospel of (Luke 15:11-32), has long been a cornerstone in discussions of familial relationships, forgiveness, acceptance and reconciliation. Its themes resonate deeply within various cultures, but particularly within African societies that emphasize communal values and familial ties. Traditionally, interpretations of this parable have focused on the individual moral lessons it imparts; however, there remains a scarcity of works of scholarship that critically examine its implications specifically for father-child relationships in the African context. This gap in

works of scholarship underscores the necessity for a hermeneutical reconsideration that aligns the teachings of the parable with contemporary familial dynamics in Africa, highlighting the unique cultural, social, and economic factors at play.

While the Parable of the Prodigal Son emphasizes themes of forgiveness, acceptance and unconditional love of a father to his wayward son, traditional father-child relationships in many African cultures are often characterized by hierarchical expectations, structures and communication barriers. Denga, D.I. and Denga, H.M. observes that, "Challenges or burdens of child parenting must be addressed with a special reference to parents in developing nations [mostly in Africa] who earnestly struggle under peculiar circumstances to parent their children the best possible way" (2007, p. 11). They advocated further that children are not only the future strength of any nation but instruments for national development if given an enabling environment to grow their personalities and potentials (2007). This means father-child relationship is a major determinant factor for national development deserving considerable attention. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a contextualized Christian educational framework that can help African fathers and children navigate the complexities of their relationships, fostering greater understanding, empathy, and reconciliation.

Statement of the Problem

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) has been a cornerstone of Christian teaching and preaching for centuries, offering profound insights into the nature of God's love, forgiveness, and redemption. However, beyond its theological significance, this parable also provides a rich framework for understanding the complexities of human relationships, particularly those between fathers and children. In the African context, where family relationships are deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and economic dynamics, the Prodigal Son narrative offers a unique lens through which to examine the challenges and opportunities of father-child relationships. African father-child relationships are characterized by a complex interplay of traditional and modern values, cultural expectations, and socioeconomic realities. Despite the significance of father-child relationships for African development, there is a dearth of scholarly research exploring the intersection of biblical hermeneutics, Christian education, and African family studies. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by providing a hermeneutical reflection on the Prodigal Son narrative, with a view to developing a Christian educational framework for African father-child relationships.

Research Questions

To guide this investigation, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are the common challenges confronting African father-child relationships?
2. What are the key lessons that can be drawn from hermeneutical reflections on the Prodigal Son for improving father-child relationships in Africa?

3. How can the teachings derived from the Prodigal Son parable be practically applied to address challenges and strengthen father-child relationships in African communities?

Significance of the Study

The study of hermeneutical reconsiderations of the Prodigal Son parable is significant for several reasons: First and foremost, the study provides an opportunity to re-examine the Prodigal Son parable in the context of African father-child relationships, making the biblical message more relevant and applicable to African societies. Secondly, by considering the cultural nuances of African father-child relationships, the study promotes cultural sensitivity and awareness, which are essential for effective biblical interpretation and application in African contexts. Thirdly, the study's focus on father-child relationships in Africa offers valuable insights for improving family relationships, which are essential for building strong, healthy communities in Africa. Fourthly, by amplifying African perspectives on the Prodigal Son parable, the study empowers African voices and promotes a more inclusive, diverse understanding of biblical texts. Furthermore, the study's findings have practical implications for pastoral practice in Africa, providing guidance for pastors, church leaders, and families on how to navigate complex father-child relationships in ways that are biblically informed and culturally sensitive. Finally, the study contributes to the ongoing theological discourse in Africa, providing a fresh perspective on the Prodigal Son parable and its relevance to African father-child relationships.

Methodology of the Study

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing biblical hermeneutics to analyze and reexamine the parable of prodigal son in the light of contemporary African Father-Child relationship contexts. Moreover, it reviews relevant and related literature on father-child relationships in Africa. This research not only aims to fill a notable gap in existing works of scholarship, but it also aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on the evolution of family relationships in Africa, ultimately offering actionable wisdom derived from an ancient parable that remains poignantly relevant today.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Father-child relationship in Africa is multifaceted commitments, shaped by cultural values, socio-economic factors, and historical contexts. Understanding their intricacies is unavoidable background to find answer to the first research question proposed for this study; What are the common challenges confronting African father-child relationships? In view of this, this section explores Theories, styles, cultural barriers and impacts of negative father-child relationship in Africa.

Theories of Father-Child Relationship in Africa

In traditional African societies, father-child relationships were often characterized by a strong sense of authority, responsibility, and mutual respect (Njoroge, 2022, p. 78). Fathers played a critical role in providing for their children's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, while also serving as role models and moral guides (Kilonzo, 2023, p. 56). Several theoretical frameworks can be used to understand African father-child relationships, including: 1. *Ubuntu theory*, which emphasizes the importance of community, interdependence, and mutual support, provides a valuable lens through which to examine African father-child relationships. According to this theory, fathers play a critical role in fostering a sense of community and belonging among their children, while also modeling values such as respect, empathy, and compassion (Tutu, 2020, p. 123). 2. *Social learning theory*, which posits that individuals learn new behaviors and attitudes by observing and imitating others, can also be applied to African father-child relationships (Bandura, 2020, p. 56). Fathers who model positive behaviors and attitudes, such as responsibility, honesty, and respect, can have a profound impact on their children's social and emotional development. 3. *Attachment Theory* emphasizes the importance of early relationships in shaping children's attachment styles and future relationships, can also be used to understand African father-child relationships (Bowlby, 2020, p. 90). Fathers who are responsive, sensitive, and consistent in their interactions with their children can foster a secure attachment style, which can have long-term benefits for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Types of Father-Child Relationship in Africa

The styles of father-child relationship in Africa are diverse and complex, reflecting the continent's rich cultural heritage and social norms. According to Njoroge (2022, p. 78), African father-child relationships can be categorized into several styles; Firstly, is the *authoritarian style* characterized by a strict, authoritarian approach to parenting, where fathers exert significant control over their children's lives (Kilonzo, 2023, p. 56). As noted by Ogbonnaya (2020, p. 90), this style is often associated with traditional African cultures, where fathers are expected to be stern and authoritative. The second style is *authoritative style* which maintain a balance between warmth and control, where fathers are responsive to their children's needs while also setting clear boundaries (Mwaura, 2022, p. 123). As observed by Tutu (2020, p. 123), this style is often associated with more modern and urbanized African cultures, where fathers are expected to be nurturing and supportive. *Permissive style* is the third which characterized by a lack of control and boundaries, where fathers are overly indulgent and permissive (Bandura, 2020, p. 56). As noted by Bowlby (2020, p. 90), this style can be detrimental to children's social and emotional development, as it fails to provide them with a sense of security and stability. Finally, *neglectful style* is the type that lacks involvement and engagement, where fathers are distant and unresponsive to their children's needs (Njoroge, 2022, p. 78). As observed by Kilonzo (2023, p. 56), this

style can have severe consequences for children's emotional and psychological well-being. From all indications, the father-child relationship in Africa is diverse and significant, with varying types affecting children's development in profound ways. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers and educators aiming to foster positive developmental outcomes for future generations.

Barriers to Effective Father-Child Relationship in Africa

Father-child relationships play a crucial role not only in the personal well-being of children development, but also on the family, community and national development. However, in many African societies, there are cultural barriers that hinder the establishment of effective father-child relationships. These barriers are deeply rooted in cultural norms, beliefs, and practices that shape the roles and expectations of fathers within the family unit. The first cultural barrier is the traditional gender roles assigned to men and women in African societies. In many cultures, men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and providers for the family, while women are responsible for caregiving and nurturing roles. For instance, in Nigeria, research has shown that fathers who are not involved in childcare are more likely to have children who experience emotional and behavioral problems (Adegoke, 2022, p. 90). While in South Africa, research has also shown that the lack of involvement of fathers in childcare can perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, as mothers are often left to bear the burden of childcare and domestic responsibilities alone (Richter, 2020, p. 56). The traditional gender roles of men in Africa have devastating effects on their intimacy with children.

Secondly, Research has shown that authoritarian parenting styles, characterized by high expectations and low warmth, can have negative consequences for children's psychological and social development (Amato, 2020, p. 123). For example, in Ethiopia, research has shown that children who experience authoritarian parenting are more likely to experience low self-esteem and social skills deficits (Tilahun, 2022, p. 123). In Ghana, research has shown that authoritarian parenting can lead to the development of externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and delinquency (Agyei, 2022, p. 56).

The third cultural barrier is the prevalence of patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority and control within the family. In many African societies, fathers are expected to be the head of the household and make decisions on behalf of the family. This power dynamic can create a barrier to effective communication and collaboration between fathers and their children. As highlighted by Brown (2019, pp. 150-154), children may feel intimidated or fearful of their fathers, leading to a lack of open communication and trust in the relationship.

The fourth cultural barrier is the influence of extended family networks on father-child relationships. In many African societies, families are closely knit and extended family members often play a significant role in child-rearing. This can create challenges for fathers who may feel overshadowed or undermined by the presence of other family members in the upbringing of their children. As discussed by Johnson (2017, p. 46), the involvement of

extended family members can dilute the authority and influence of fathers, impacting the dynamics of the father-child relationship.

The fifth cultural barrier is the impact of traditional beliefs and practices on parenting styles in Africa. Many cultural practices, such as corporal punishment or strict discipline, may be passed down from generation to generation and shape the way fathers interact with their children. These traditional parenting styles can create barriers to effective communication and understanding between fathers and their children, as noted by White (2020, p. 225). Fathers who adhere to strict disciplinary practices may struggle to build a positive and nurturing relationship with their children, impacting their emotional well-being. Cultural barriers significantly impact the quality of father-child relationships in Africa.

Traditional gender roles, emotional stigma, patriarchal norms, extended family dynamics, and traditional parenting practices all contribute to the challenges faced by fathers in establishing effective relationships with their children. Such phenomenon in turn affects the social, economic, political, and religious development of African countries. Negative father-child relationships often lead to a range of negative outcomes for children, including lower academic achievement, higher rates of delinquency, and increased likelihood of mental health issues. These consequences can have a ripple effect on society as a whole, impacting the social fabric of communities and hindering progress towards economic and political stability. Adebowale, (2017, p. 160) lamented that only God knows the numbers of African talented children who would have championed a landmark development in the society but were silenced and destroyed due to unfriendly home environment created by negative parenting in Africa. This apart from killing creativity and talents, is also a contributive factor to higher rates of crime and violence in communities, as individuals may turn to negative behaviors as a means of coping with their emotional struggles.

Biblical Interpretation of the Parable of Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

This section embarked on the hermeneutical analysis of the parable of the Prodigal Son to purposely respond to the second research question—what are the key lessons that can be drawn from hermeneutical reflections on the Prodigal Son to improve father-child relationships in Africa? To effectively accomplish this, the context, contents and the central message of the parable are treated as follows:

The Context of the Parable: According to Plummer, R.L. (2009, p. 4), "The Greek word *parabolē* which underlies our English word "parable" has a broad range of meaning. It can refer to proverbs, similes, figurative sayings, stories, etc." However, a parable is an earthly story which convey spiritual truth about the nature and principles of life in the kingdom of God. Most of Jesus' teachings were in parables. "It has been estimated that at least one-third of Jesus' recorded teaching is found in the parables" (Copeland, 2006, p. 3). An interpreter must examine a parable to determine the central truth been taught. Therefore, the context of the parable of prodigal son (15:11-32) is linked to the proceeding ones: Lost

sheep (15:3-7) and lost coin (15:8-10) to clearly reemphasized that he came for sinners not the righteous.

The Content of the Parable: Since the focus of this study is to explore the fatherly role in bringing up stubborn and wayward children in African context, attention shall be devoted to examining the characteristics of a good father played out in the parable. Therefore, the contents of the passage are considered in four sub-sections: Firstly, the father granted his son's request (Luke. 15: 11-12), secondly, the experience of prodigal son outside home (Luke. 15:13-19), thirdly, the father accepted him back home unconditionally (Luke. 15:20-24) and finally, the father persuaded his elder son to accept his brother (Luke. 15:24-32).

The Father Granted his Son's Request (Luke. 15: 11-12): In the context of Africa, the younger son request was both ridiculous and embarrassing; "*Give me my share of inheritance*" (Luke 15:12). The Greek expression Δός μοι τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μερίς τῆς οὐσίας (Dos moi to epiballon meris tēs ousias) implies he was being; impatiently seeking for immediate gratification, independence and self-centeredness. In ancient Jewish culture, the Prodigal Son's request for his share of the inheritance (Luke 15:12) has significant cultural implications: Culturally, requesting inheritance prematurely was not only to be seen as a breach of filial piety and disrespect towards the father, but also a serious threat to his father's life which by law, he deserved to be stone to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). In view of this condition, one will expect that: 1. The request must have caused the father significant emotional pain, feeling rejected and unappreciated by his son. 2. The father might have to worry about his son's ability to manage the inheritance responsibly. 3. The request could be seen as a failure on the father's part to instill values of responsibility and respect in his son. On the contrary, the father out of tolerance granted the son his request. Three reasons might possibly have informed the father's decisions: Firstly, the father's love and desire to maintain a relationship with his son outweighed cultural expectations. Secondly, granting the request allowed the father to teach his son about responsibility and consequences. Thirdly, by acquiescing, the father may have sought to avoid conflict and maintain family harmony.

The Experience of Prodigal Son outside Home (Luke. 15:13-19): The prodigal son did not only make uncultured demand as seen in the previous section, but also took a rash, reckless and unplanned decision to move out to a foreign land. Not long after he achieve his desire, he set off for a distant country and there "*squandered his wealth in wild living*" (Luke 15:13). The Greek emphasis δαπανήσας τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶντός ἁσώτως (dapansēs tēn ousian autou zōntos asōtōs) indicating that the younger son's reckless lifestyle leads to his financial and spiritual bankruptcy. After he had spent everything, there was a "*Severe famine in that whole country*" (Luke 15:14). The Greek: λιμὸς ἰσχυρὸς ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ ἐκείνῃ (limos ischyros en tē chōra ekeinē) meaning there was shortage of food and high cost of living across the country. This condition subjected the prodigal son to unprecedented hardship which symbolizes spiritual desolation and consequences of sinful choices. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be right to man, but in the end it leads to death." Little did the prodigal son realize that his recklessness was going to earn him the following

unavoidable complications: Firstly, the Prodigal Son's choice led to physical isolation and emotional distance from his family (v. 13). Secondly, squandering his inheritance left him destitute (v. 14). Thirdly, he lost his identity by becoming a servant, feeding pigs, contrary to Jewish customs (v. 15-16). Fourthly, he was left without option to emotionally suffer from: hunger, loneliness, and despair (v. 16). Finally, he became spiritually bankrupt as he realized his sin of disobedient against his father and separation from God (v. 17-19). This confirms the popular adage, "experience is the best teacher in life."

The Father Accepted him back Home Unconditionally (Luke. 15:20-24): The father was motivated by three major factors to accept his wayward child back home unconditionally: Firstly, on sighting the son, the father was "filled with compassion for him" (Luke 15:20). The Greek word "σπλαγχνισθῆ" (splanchnisthē) meaning "to be moved with compassion" (NASB). While the Hebrew equivalent: "רַחֲמִים" (rachamim) connote the idea of having "compassion and mercy." The father's compassion is an emotional response, driven by unconditional love and empathy as was practically demonstrated in Luke 15:22-23. Secondly, the father saw him as a child that was "Dead but alive" (Luke 15:24). From both the Greek "τεθνηκώς δὲ ἔζη" (tethnēkōs de ezē) and the Hebrew equivalent מֵת לְחַיִּים (meth lichayim) perspectives, the son's spiritual, physical and emotional rebirth symbolizes full restoration life. Thirdly, the father also saw him as a child that was "Lost but found" (Luke 15:24). Greek phrase ἀπολωλός δὲ εὕρεθῃ (apolōlos de heurethē) meaning "was lost but has been found" and Hebrew equivalent: אָבֹד לְמִצּוֹ (avod limtzo) also meaning "lost and found" suggest the father's joy highlights the value of reclaiming that which was lost according to Jesus in (Luke 15:4-5). Although, it was a breach of an elderly Jewish man's dignity and pride to run, but the compassion and the affection this father was longing to see his son was prioritized over his personal interest in this scenario.

The Father Persuaded his Elder Son to Accept his Brother (Luke. 15:24-32): The envious reaction of the older son when he learned his wayward brother was back and celebrated shows that both sons were lost sinners. The older son was like the Pharisees who were angry with Jesus because he welcomed sinners to associate with him. The father realized that his older son needed to be persuaded because: "The elder brother became angry" (Luke 15:28a). The Greek ὀργίσθη (ōrgisthē) denote the idea of being "angry, indignant, bitterness, envious." The elder brother's anger stems from perceived injustice and self-righteousness. The "father went out and pleaded with him" (Luke 15:28b). From Greek background, ἐξελθὼν ὁ πατὴρ παρεκάλει αὐτόν (exelthōn ho patēr parekalei auton) meaning "the father went out to persuade and help him to understand the situation." The father's actions demonstrate compassion, understanding, and reconciliation.

The Key Message of the Parable: Normally, a parable; teaches one key truth, emphasizes one main point, illustrates or explain one truth, corrects wrong teaching and answers a question. However, Plummer, R.L. (2009, p. 7) observes that "there is some debate among evangelicals as to whether each parable teaches only one main point as argued by Robert

Stein or whether a parable may have several main points according to Craig Blomberg.” Plummer further notes that while, Craig Blomberg insists that parables can have one, two, or three main points as exemplified in prodigal parable: (1) *The father*: God the Father is gracious and forgiving. (2) *The older brother*: Followers of God should beware a begrudging attitude towards his grace and forgiveness exercised towards others. (3) *The younger brother*: God welcomes rebels who confess their sin, turn from it, and embrace his mercy (2009). On the other hand, Plummer added, “Stein maintains that it is more helpful to express the main point in one sentence as follows: God (represented by the father) is gracious to sinners (the younger brother) and, therefore, we should not despise his love to others (as did the older brother)” (2009, p. 7). Plummer concluded that, “the focus of the parable, according to Stein, is on the response of the older brother and his unwillingness to rejoice in his brother’s return and his father’s complete acceptance. This analysis is confirmed by the context as Luke clearly indicates that Jesus is responding to the Pharisees for their begrudging attitude towards God’s mercy (Luke 15:1–2)” (2009, p. 7). However, it is interesting to note that, the parable commences with the younger son lost and concludes with the elder son also lost and the practical demonstration of their father’s unconditional love for both his lost sons.

Major Lessons for African Father-Child Relationships from the Parable: The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 offers many valuable impressive lessons for African Father-Child Relationship: 1. *Unconditional Love and Acceptance*: The father's decision to grant the son's request, despite its unreasonableness and potential consequences, demonstrates his unconditional love and acceptance. The father prioritizes his relationship with his son over material possessions. 2. *Trust and Empowerment*: By giving the son his share of the inheritance, the father is entrusting him with the responsibility to manage his own life. This act empowers the son to make choices and learn from his mistakes. 3. *Letting Go and Allowing Growth*: The father's decision to let the son go, despite the potential risks, allows the son to grow and learn from his experiences. This act of letting go enables the son to develop independence, self-awareness, and resilience. 4. *Avoiding Enabling Behaviors*: While the father grants the son's request, he also allows the son to experience the consequences of his choices. This approach avoids enabling behaviors that might have prevented the son from learning valuable lessons. 5. *Forgiveness and Restoration*: The father's willingness to forgive and restore the son when he returns, destitute and humbled, demonstrates the depth of his love and commitment to their relationship. 6. *Modeling Healthy Parenting*: The father's response to the son's request serves as a model for healthy parenting. He balances love, trust, and empowerment with the need for accountability and responsibility. 7. *Embracing Failure as a Learning Opportunity*: The father's approach acknowledges that failure can be a valuable learning experience. By allowing the son to make mistakes and learn from them, the father helps him develop a growth mindset. 8. *Prioritizing Relationships Over Material Possessions*: The father's decision to grant the son's request, despite the potential financial implications, highlights the importance of

prioritizing relationships over material possessions. 9. *Demonstrating Patience and Understanding*: The father's patient and understanding response to the son's request demonstrates his ability to manage his emotions and respond thoughtfully, even in challenging situations. 10. *Emulating God's Character as His Older Children*: The father's actions in this story reflect God's character, demonstrating His unconditional love, forgiveness, and mercy as a model for his children.

Christian Educational Framework for Africans' Father-Child Relationship

The objective of this section is to apply the message discovered from the parable of prodigal son in attempt to provide answers to the third research questions proposed for the study which read: How can the teachings derived from the Prodigal Son parable be practically applied to address challenges and strengthen father-child relationships in African communities? To achieve this, the section discusses various lessons derived from the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a framework for enhancing father-child relationships in Africa as follows:

1. **Unconditional Love and Acceptance**: This principle reflects a father's unwavering support and acceptance, essential for fostering a child's identity and confidence. As Adeyemo argues, "parents who exhibit unconditional love provide a secure environment for their children, which fosters positive development and emotional resilience" (2022, p. 76). Such an environment cultivates children who can contribute positively to their communities, promoting social cohesion and reducing conflict.
2. **Empowerment through Trust and Respect**: Trust is fundamental in father-child dynamics. Esokwu emphasizes that "mutual respect between fathers and children encourages open communication, which empowers children to express themselves and engage meaningfully in their socio-economic environments" (2023, p. 92). This empowerment can lead to more significant community involvement and innovation, thereby advancing national development agendas.
3. **Forgiveness and Restoration**: The theme of forgiveness is critical in African contexts, where familial and community ties are paramount. Nwankwo posits that "forgiveness within families, particularly between fathers and children, enables healing and restoration of relationships that may otherwise be fractured, allowing for stronger community networks" (2021, p. 58). By promoting forgiveness, families can heal from past grievances and work towards collective progress.
4. **Balancing Discipline and Mercy**: Effective parenting requires a balance of discipline and compassion. According to Chibuku, "the ability to administer discipline with mercy lays the groundwork for children to understand the importance of accountability while also experiencing care and love" (2024, p. 43). This balance can reduce juvenile delinquency and foster a generation that values responsibility alongside empathy, leading to more harmonious societies.

5. *Prioritizing Relationship Over Materialism:* The parable emphasizes the value of relationships over material wealth. Okeke notes that “placing emphasis on relational bonds rather than material gain cultivates a sense of belonging and communal responsibility among fathers and children, which is crucial for sustainable development in Africa” (2020, p. 37). By fostering relationships, families can contribute to societal stability and development, focusing on human capital rather than mere economic wealth.

6. *Embracing Failure as a Learning Opportunity:* In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the younger son's return after squandering his inheritance serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for personal growth through failure. According to Nwankwo (2021, p. 89), understanding that failure is part of the learning process is crucial in African father-child relationships. Fathers can teach their children to embrace mistakes as opportunities for growth rather than punishments. This approach fosters resilience and encourages children to explore their identities and aspirations without the fear of disappointing their parents.

7. *Avoiding Overprotection Tendency:* Overprotection can stifle a child's development, preventing them from developing independence and critical thinking skills. As highlighted by Okafor (2022, p. 175), fathers in African cultures often feel pressured to shield their children from life's harsh realities. The embrace of the Prodigal Son's journey illustrates that allowing children to face challenges fosters growth. By stepping back and allowing their children to navigate difficult situations, fathers cultivate resilience and autonomy, essential traits in today's complex world.

8. *Modeling Healthy Parenting:* Modeling behavior is a crucial aspect of effective parenting. The father in the parable embodies unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness. Uche (2023, p. 114) emphasizes that modeling such behaviors can actively shape the emotional well-being of children in African contexts. Fathers can demonstrate healthy emotional responses and communication, thus providing their children with a framework for building relationships. This modeling creates a stable foundation upon which children can develop their values and interpersonal skills.

9. *Practicing Patience and Understanding:* Patience and understanding are virtues that help fathers relate better to their children. The father's response to the Prodigal Son's return is marked by love and acceptance rather than anger. According to Mensah (2024, p. 203), practicing patience in the face of adolescent challenges can significantly enhance parent-child communication. Fathers are encouraged to develop a mindset of empathy, understanding that their children may struggle with identity and societal pressures. This relational dynamic builds trust and respect, which are fundamental in fostering healthy family relationships.

10. *Demonstrating Humility and Compassion:* Humility and compassion are portrayed in the father's acceptance of his son, regardless of his previous actions. Adebayo (2020, p. 45) argues that African fathers who exhibit humility and compassion can profoundly impact their children's moral development. By displaying these qualities, fathers teach children the value of empathy and ethical behavior, preparing them to interact positively with others in

their communities. Demonstrating compassion can help break generational cycles of rigid authority and promote more open, inclusive and respectful relations.

Overall, the lessons derived from the Parable of the Prodigal Son are not only spiritual or moral guidelines but also practical principles that can inform a Christian Educational Framework aimed at enhancing father-child relationships in Africa. By implementing these principles, African fathers will not only fulfil their biblical mandate according to Apostle Paul's instruction in Ephesians 6:4, but will be able to raise godly generation that will facilitate African development. According to Mandela (2008, p. 123) "The development of an individual is inextricably linked to the development of the community and the nation." Therefore, these principles of father-child relations present an opportunity worth consideration by African fathers.

Conclusion

This research paper delved into the hermeneutical reflection on Prodigal Son focusing on drawing Christian educational framework for African father-child relationships. Through a thorough analysis of the parable and its cultural implications, several key findings emerged. Firstly, the study discovered that poor communication, overprotectiveness, authoritarianism, neglect, and rejection in Africa parenting has been some of the major threats to moral, social and emotional growth of African child consequently detrimental to national development. Secondly, it was evident that the story of the Prodigal Son holds significant relevance for contemporary African societies, where traditional values of family and community are paramount. Thirdly, the study revealed that the character of the father in the parable serves as a model for parental behavior, emphasizing the importance of unconditional love, compassion, and understanding in nurturing positive relationships with children. Based on these findings, several recommendations are given for promoting stronger father-child relationships in Africa:

1. There is a need for theological institutions to develop a contextualize curriculum to holistically prepare competent Pastors to create awareness and education on the importance of parental involvement and emotional support in child development in Africa.
2. By drawing on the timeless wisdom of this parable, the Church should train parents particularly fathers to embody the virtues of forgiveness, compassion, and unconditional love, thereby fostering stronger bonds with their children and creating a more conducive nurturing family environment (Ephesians 6:4).
3. Africa states' authorities should actively implement the child right acts in other to protect children against abuses and emotional trauma. Fostering a culture of open communication, empathy, and respect within families, the cycle of generational trauma and dysfunction can be broken, leading to healthier father-child relationships.

4. The study recommend that further empirical research is needed to determine the relationship between father-child relationship and national development.

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