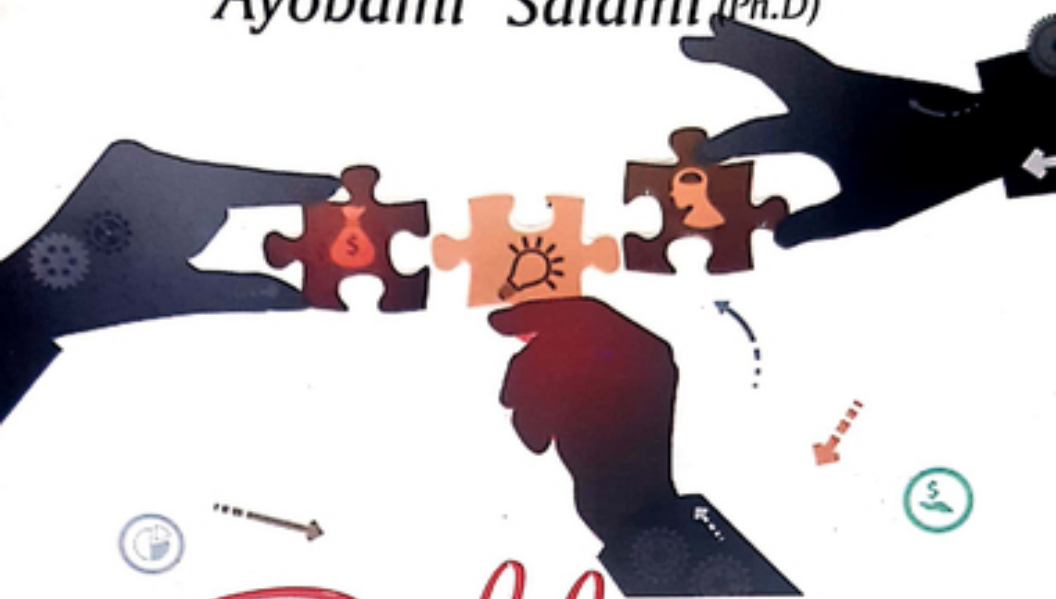


Ayobami Salami (Ph.D)



Building
**LONG-
LASTING
RELATIONSHIPS**



*BUILDING
LONG-LASTING
RELATIONSHIPS*

Ayobami Salami (Ph.D)

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BUILDING LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

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Ayobami Salami

November, 2015

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Introduction



Man is divinely created as a social being, and that is why he has been integrated, either by birth or adoption, into a particular family. Therefore, man has a general instinct to relate and interact with one another in the family, community, work place, school and the society at large. However, there are different types of relationship: friendship, marital, business etc. Generally, relationship of any kind is built over time just like a house; hence, it is worthy of note that a good, long-lasting and profitable relationship cannot be developed or maintained without love. In other words, love is the foundation of good relationships! It is very central to any kind of relationship and even successful marriage. Love is the only thing that brings the heaven to the

earth because, where there is love, there is God. **“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love ...”** (1 John 4:8).

Love can be expressed from person to person or from person to things. When expressed towards things, it means enjoying or taking pleasure in those things. For instance, someone may love jewelries, posh cars, sophisticated phones, latest clothes etc. On the contrary, love towards persons is more complex. Although loving persons may simply mean taking pleasure in their personalities, looks, achievements, etc, there is another aspect of interpersonal relationship that is very important to God. In this case, love is not a delight in what or who a person is, but a *deeply felt commitment to someone!*

If a man does not show love to people (family members, neighbors, co-workers etc) in his immediate surrounding but claims to love those afar or someone he cannot see, for example God, he obviously does not know what love is all about. **Love is the only currency for divine transaction!**

Unfortunately, misunderstanding of the biblical context of love makes it to be probably the rarest commodity in human communities. In the King James version of the bible, the word *love* appears about 300 times. In fact, the theologians argue that it appears specifically for 280 times which shows

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felt commitment
to someone.*
—  —

how important it is. The biblical love which is the true love has been so much abused, misunderstood and misapplied. Just like products are counterfeited, so also could love be faked such that care has to be taken in the search for the original. I really pity young girls and ladies who fall cheaply for sugar-coated advances of smart guys who eventually take advantage of them. Real love is not easy to come by; it has to be subjected to the test of time! The fact that love is the only currency for divine transaction and that it has been so much abused and bastardized means that we have to be very careful when searching for love. More so that one of the greatest needs of man today is to love and be loved.

The relationships you maintain, in terms of type and quality, will determine whether or not you would be able to achieve God's aim of bringing you into this world. Relationship impacts everything in life. In fact, whatever or whoever you are now as a person is a total reflection of the type and quality of relationships you have kept in the past. This means that the quality of relationship one has with the spouse, parents, siblings, teachers, peers and even God can either make or mar him/her. So, relationship is an issue that everybody must pay serious attention to in order to get the best out of life. For instance, most of the crisis faced by our youths today are traceable to the kind of relationships they have. It is my sincere hope that this book will provide guidance, especially for the young ones, on how to build long-lasting

relationships based on love. This book is divided into two parts. Part 1, consisting of five chapters, is devoted to a short exposition on love which is the basis of successful relationships. On the other hand; Part 2 consisting of four chapters, is devoted to guiding the youths about how to make marital choice and keep godly relationships.

PART I:

*LOVE AS
THE BASIS FOR
RELATIONSHIPS*

Dimensions of Love

There are different dimensions of love which must be clearly understood in order to be able to build a long-lasting relationship. However, the lack of appropriate word in the English language to rightly convey the meaning of some words in the Greek language led to usage of the English word *love* for about four Greek words that totally mean different things. The meanings of these four Greek words are central to our understanding of love and we must therefore consider them, even if only in brief.

1. STURGE

This is the kind of love that operates within a family; between parents and children; brothers and sisters; nephews, nieces and cousins. *Blood is thicker than water* is the popular saying



which indicates the strong cord of love binding a family together. It is based on *sturge* that a family is generally expected to be caring, supportive and ready to defend its members in times of trouble. This bond has nothing to do with male-female hormonal reactions or any other motive. It makes parents and children to interact in an environment full of warmth and conviviality. For instance, whenever I had telephone conversation with my daughter while she was in the boarding school, I never allowed our interaction to end without reassuring her of my love. Why? She would want to hear what she would have heard while with me at home. Parents are duty-bound to train their children to love one another and others around them.

2. ***PHILIOS***

This is about enjoying or deriving pleasure from somebody. It is a personal attachment as a matter of sentiment. This may develop into companionship or friendship. It is based on common interest or a common ground. In the Bible, that is what is called brotherly love; the phrase *brotherly love* is a translation of *philios* which simply means friendship. In the United States of America, the name of the city of *Philadelphia* was coined from *philia* because it was founded by the Christians.

If you like someone because he/she is good or kind to you, that is *philios*. To some extent, it may be said to be transactional because in a sense, it is based on 'this person is nice to me, I

need to be nice to him/her too'. There is no string attached, and there is no evil therein. Most relationships in the world today, including marital, started from *philios*. Let me say that *philios* (likeness or friendship) is necessary for attraction but not sufficient to build a long-lasting relationship. This is because likeness is based on changeable attributes or characteristics that are not permanent in nature, and qualities that can evolve or metamorphose over time. For example, if you are attracted to a man or woman based on physical attributes and you are married to him or her just because of that, you will find out that it would be difficult for you to still keep the relationship if he/she later gets disfigured as a result of an accident or whatever. Some ladies who are slim while single may become plus-sized after child bearing. Therefore, if the slimness was the main attraction, the love of the man would no longer be guaranteed after a while. Thus, if your claim of love is based only on the physical attributes, you will find out that the basis of your love would fade away with time. That is why I am of the opinion that although *philios* is good but not sufficient for an enduring relationship.

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*A lustful person
 works on breaking
 down your defenses
 and weakening your
 resolve either by
 deceitful persuasion
 or outright coercion.*
 —  —

3. ***EROS***

The third dimension of love is *eros* which means passion. It is

more about “*drive for getting*”. The overriding interest in *eros* is gratification of senses or desires. When you talk about *eros*, it is more of your emotions rather than your interest; it makes your emotions to work overtime. *Eros* brings up your five senses and responds to your natural stimulus. It is just to gratify emotions and mere passion alone; this oftentimes leads to sexual perversion. Every sexual perversion today is governed by *eros*; this is the kind of love that governs sexual interaction among unmarried people. Passion in this context, is an abandoned emotion and when it is not controlled, it results into sexual interactions outside the confines of marriage. So, when you see young men saying 'I love this lady', 'I love that lady' and they keep moving from one lady to another, it is not because of genuine love; it is *eros* and that kind of love is actually not allowed outside marriage. It is not supposed to operate outside wedlock because God has not ordained sex for a man and a woman outside the covenant of marriage. One thing about this kind of love is that it gives way to pain, regret and disgust the moment you satisfy your urge or gratify your senses through sexual gratification.

After this Absalom the son of David had a lovely sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her. But Amnon had a friend

whose name was Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother. Now Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, "Why are you, the king's son, becoming thinner day after day? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." So Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me food, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'" Then Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let Tamar my sister come and make a couple of cakes for me in my sight, that I may eat from her hand." And David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Now go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was lying down. Then she took flour and kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. And she took the pan and placed them out before him, but he refused to eat. Then Amnon said, "Have everyone go out from me." And they all went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the bedroom that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them to Amnon her brother in the bedroom.

Now when she had brought them to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." But she answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone!" (2 Samuel 13:1-15).

At that time, it was not a sin for brothers and sisters who were not born by the same mother to marry. It would be recalled that Abraham was married to Sarah who was his half-sister. In the above scriptural text, Amnon thought he loved Tamar with agape love; however, he never had a genuine love for her but *eros*. As stated earlier, *eros* works only on your emotion; it inflames your passion when you subject yourself to it. Amnon began to grow thinner and eventually became ill. He had a friend who asked him what the problem was and he said the illness was due to his love for his sister. Unfortunately, the wicked friend advised him to rape his sister. As soon as the

deed was done, what happened? The bible states that the hatred he had for the lady was much more than the love with which he first loved her.

A lustful person works on breaking down your defenses and weakening your resolve either by deceitful persuasion or outright coercion. A person who communicates only to stir up your lustful passion should be avoided at all costs. Be wary of such friends! Although *eros* stirs your emotion and inflames your passion before the deed is done; that *love* vanishes after sexual gratification. In fact, the two persons may hate each other more than they thought they loved each other as it happened between Amnon and Tamar. Thus, *eros* is just a desire to quench a *thirst* and after the episode, the experience is regretted. That is why it is important for you to caution anyone who claims to be your friend by working on your emotion. You need to put him or her in check. As Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking together in the same direction".



4. **AGAPE**

The fourth dimension of love which is the real one that every one of us should have is *agape*. This is genuine love. It is not a feeling but a commitment and an unconditional love. ***Sturge* is affinity, *eros* is a feeling, *philios* is sentimental but *agape* is a commitment; it is love without strings attached. It is love saying: "I see a need; I wish I could be**

given the opportunity to meet that need without strings attached". That is agape - the kind of love that God expects us to have. It has nothing to do with romance, affinity or sentiment; it is pure love. Agape is responding to the needs of humanity. The best example is recorded in the bible:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Having mentioned the four dimensions of love, you can now begin to weigh the company of friends you keep on the scale of love as expounded herein. You can begin to ask some questions about everyone in your company of friends thus: Is this one operating on the basis that we belong to the same family (*sturge*); or is that one relating on the basis of likeness (*philios*): or is he trying to overwork my emotion (*eros*): or just because of the love of God that is pure (*agape*)?

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Brotherly Love

“Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1).

In the above text where Apostle Paul requested that brotherly love should continue, it does not mean that *sisterly love* should cease. Brotherly love is very dear to God's heart; though it looks so simple, yet it is very crucial and critical to the Christian faith.

Christian relationship is the one that is established on love. In fact, God relates with us on the basis of love. As long as we belong to the same Christian faith, the connecting rod is love. Why did Paul warn that brotherly love should continue when he was writing to the brethren in the book of Hebrews? This suggests that something was amiss which needed to be

corrected or addressed as at the time Paul was writing. Indeed, I think there were a number of reasons for this exhortation from Paul. In the first instance, a Christian is supposed to be an embodiment of love because our calling is based on love. The bible states: **“For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). It means the story of God's relationship with the world is the story of love. The pertinent question is: *are you an embodiment of love?*

Secondly, the house of God is expected to be a place where people should experience love. In the course of the week, people might have suffered; they might have been battered, embittered and traumatized by life's challenges. When they come to the church for fellowship, they expect to experience love. But to Paul's dismay, it was not so. Initially, people were bonding and flocking together, but at a point in time Paul realized that the flavour of love was not there again. The house of God was gradually turning to a place where people no longer experience love and warmth. Consequently, Paul took his pen and wrote a letter that brotherly love should continue.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that

you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Before Jesus Christ left this world, He said *a new commandment I give to you*. Meanwhile there had been the law of love right from the Old Testament. Do you know that the Law of Moses was a law of love even though it says *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*? Many of us may not agree with this but what was operating before Moses was a more stringent tradition. Based on pre-Mosaic law, if you slap me once for example, I should retaliate by slapping you twice so that you would know that I am not a fool. This would discourage you and others from slapping me in future. When you pluck one of my eyes, I should go for your two eyes! Later, Moses said *No! Let's level the ground; an eye for an eye- fair deal!* When he punches you once, just give it back to him once. Don't do beyond what he has done so that he will not suffer more than you have. That was Moses' law and concept of love under that dispensation.



When Christ came in the New Testament, He said *No!* If you say *an eye for an eye*, the whole world will go blind; Jesus then said *love your neighbour as yourself*. At another time, Jesus said a new commandment I give to you, don't just love your neighbour as yourself but love others the way I have loved you. What does it mean to love your neighbour as yourself? It implies that if you earn ₦10, 000 per month and you cannot

buy a car; then you don't need to pray for your neighbor to buy a car. If you want to love your neighbour as yourself but the only thing you drink is *gaari* (cassava flakes), then you will pray that God should provide *gaari* for your neighbour to drink just like you. If you only have one shirt, then your neighbour should also have one shirt like you because you love him as yourself.

Before He left however, Jesus decided to give a new commandment: *love others the way I have loved you*. How does God love us? He loves us at His own best; He loves us to the extent that He died so that we may live. What a sacrificial love! Paul discovered that the bond of love was already being jettisoned in the church. The same is found among the brethren in the present day church. Notable among the occurrences in our contemporary church which hinder brotherly love include the following:

I. Criticism

Criticism is defined as an act of passing severe judgment or an unfavourable comment. We tend to criticize ourselves a lot. For instance, a choir leader asks his members to sing tenor and a particular brother decides to sing bass, but instead of correcting him in love, the leader says: *don't mind him*

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One thing about critics is that they hypocritically set for others; the standards they themselves have not attained and may not attain.
 —  —

because that is how he always behaves. The brother in question will no longer see this as correction but criticism. Paul discovered that criticism had become the order of the day in the household of God. Today, we criticize ourselves in the household of God to the extent that love is no longer the currency of our relationships. Unfortunately, one thing about critics is that they hypocritically set for others, the standards they themselves have not attained and may not attain. Ask yourself, how do I criticize people?

II. Withdrawal

Withdrawal means:

- a. to separate something from other things with which it is connected or mixed;
- b. retreat or retirement especially into a more secluded or less exposed place or position; and
- c. an act of passing judgment as to the merits of anything.

When people are faced with barrage of criticism, then they withdraw. People who have been very zealous, fervent and committed begin to withdraw after a while because they do not experience love again. Paul found that this was happening among the brethren. The lukewarmness of many members of congregation in several churches is largely attributed to fear of criticism. In a situation where you feel that you are likely to be criticized, the tendency is to withdraw. Many people still continue to retain their membership of some churches today while in actual sense, they are already

psychologically and emotionally detached from such churches due to harsh criticism.

III. Isolation

People become unhappy when they feel they are being isolated, labeled or segregated within the congregation. Keeping members of a church together as one is a great task, but every effort must be made towards this. Members generally do not have the same academic background, social status and level of affluence or influence. Consequently, if care is not taken, some may feel sidelined within the fold and this leads to isolation whether real or perceived. To Paul's amazement, he saw this happening in the household of God, hence his epistle on brotherly love.

IV. Prejudice

Prejudice is defined as the act or state of holding unreasonable preconceived judgment or conviction or adverse judgment or opinion formed unfairly or without knowledge of the facts. We must realize that members of the church come from different backgrounds and they have different orientation. However, it is amazing to discover that some people use their own background as the standard against which other members of the church must be judged. When they see other persons behave differently from what they know, they see them as *devils* rather than working together in the unity of faith. They simply relate with people based on prejudice. For instance, a brother who was

previously attending a church where brothers and sisters sit in different compartments of the church may be uncomfortable if he is now attending a church where everybody sits together. He will be wrong to think that any sister smiling at him and shaking his hand is a harlot or trying to seduce him. In the real sense of it, he may be the one having problem with his emotions given his background and 'limited' exposure. Many people in the church today are relating with prejudice of different kinds, which end up affecting brotherly love in the household of God.

V. Rumour-mongering/Backbiting

Let me ask you, how often do you talk about other brethren when they are not there? Rumour-mongering is an act of habitually engaging in idle talk about others. Things that are commonly found among the unbelievers have been perfected and spiritualized in the household of faith. They even confidently and affirmatively support their claims. You will hear a statement like: *I am saying the truth, that is his life, I am telling you*. Real love does not allow a brother to peddle rumor about others.

VI. Slandering

Slandering is defined as a malicious, false and defamatory statement or report. It involves words falsely spoken that can damage the reputation of another. John Tillotson said: *slanderers are like flies; they leap over all a man's good parts to light upon his sores*. This was part of the things that Paul found as

hindrances to brotherly love among the brethren. Brethren were no longer relating together. They would come to the church, clap their hands and pray; after service, everybody carries his/her bible and goes away. The next time they relate again is when they come to the church and what brings them together is just the service; after that, it is *to your tent oh Israel!* Is that an embodiment of love? Is that the kind of church Jesus Christ envisaged? Paul was unhappy about this and unfortunately, it is still happening in our midst today.

Beloved, as you read this book; I will like you to begin to examine yourself and discover where you are culpable or have contributed to the freezing of flow of brotherly love in His household. Are you really showing love as a member of Christ's body? Let me tell you this, whatever you do without love is a mere waste of time. In any way you have been experiencing or contributing to criticism, withdrawal syndrome, isolation or any of the aforementioned; kindly open up to God to purge you so that brotherly love can continue and *sisterly love* will not cease.



**“By this all will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another”** (John 13:35).

In the above text, Christ was saying that the only reason that will make people know you are mine is by loving one another. He did not say that if you serve me or if you are an evangelist, a pastor, a worker and so on; but He said 'you belong to me if

you show love to one another'. It is a greater ministry to show love to the brethren than to have a church. What is the essence of being a pastor, a minister in God's vineyard or a church unit leader if you do not love people? As a Principal Officer of the University where I work, I always wear a badge when I go to the office or on official assignment. Why? It is for people to know that I represent an institution. It is always on me either within or outside the country.

As believers, our own badge and logo that Christ wants us to wear around is **love for the brethren**. How do you recognize each of the countries represented at the Olympics? By their flags of course! The flag by which people can recognize you is **love for the brethren**. I am not the one who said it, Christ did. He said *by this* (singular) not *these* (plural) *all will know that you are My disciples*. Services rendered to God without love is a waste of time and resources. Let us come back to the basic issue which is, showing love to one

another. Many a time, we go to the church and relate with only those on our friendship list. We have no contact of any member we can visit or even pray for during the week. **By this shall men know that you are My disciples**. Dear friend, I challenge you today that if indeed you are Christ's disciple, show love to people. Someone once said: *It's*

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*As believers, our
 own badge and
 logo that Christ
 wants us to wear
 around is love for
 the brethren.*
 —  —

good to be a Christian and know it but it is better to be a Christian and show it. You may say: “I know that I'm born again, spirit-filled, tongue-talking”, blah, blah, blah. Yes, it is good! That is what you know but what do you show? What can people see?

Expressions of Love

Yes, love can neither be seen nor touched physically but it communicates loudly and clearly in a set of codes which could be referred to as the *love language*. When love speaks, it usually expresses itself in several ways. I intend to highlight some of these expressions in this chapter.

1. KINDNESS

It is common in the Christendom for people to talk about how to increase the numerical strength of the church, the type of messages to preach, how to conduct outreaches etc. But do you know that kindness has the capacity to bring more people to Christ and establish them in the faith than the messages we preach or the tracts we give to people? If you are kind as an individual, people will ask for the church you

attend. Do you show kindness to the people who attend your church? Do they see the church as an atmosphere of love? The church should be a place of security but this can only happen when kindness is in the air.


“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36).

The only time the scripture refers to any woman as a disciple is in this passage. You can check it out; there is no other place in the scripture where a woman was referred to as a disciple. Was she among the 12 disciples of the Lord, the apostles or the 70 elders? No! But why was she regarded as a disciple? Historically, Joppa was a commercial centre and a capitalist society where everybody was thinking about himself/herself. If you remember, it was in this same Joppa that Jonah boarded a ship to flee to Tarshish. It was a commercial hub where people were individualistic and very busy doing their things. However, while people were thinking of how to make progress about their own individual lives, Dorcas was thinking of how to make progress by reaching out to the brethren. She saw ministering to the people as her own progress. But apart from being a capitalist society, Joppa was also a place of prejudice!


“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great

sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me” (Acts 11:5).

Joppa was where Peter saw a vision and concluded that he would not have anything to do with the Gentiles again. The same place where the anointed Apostle Peter was full of prejudice was where a woman was crossing borders, networking all races and people with different backgrounds to show love. Would you be the Tabitha of this generation? Would you rise up as the Dorcas your church is looking for? I mean someone whom, while others are pursuing their own things, will have genuine concern for others. Dorcas was not bothered by the prejudice exhibited by Peter. Otherwise, she could have said: *'after all if an Apostle could do this, why can't I do more?'* Consequently, she would not be able to do what she did. But this woman obeyed God's injunction and fulfilled her own ministry. Sometimes when we fail in our responsibility, we excuse our own failure by shifting the blame to our pastor, church leader, unit leader, etc. May the Lord make you a Dorcas; may He raise you up as a Tabitha in Jesus' name.

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—  —

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

How much good have you done to fellow brethren? Are you doing good to others or are you thinking of how to take advantage of them? In the past few weeks, what good have you done to others genuinely without expecting something in return? Can you henceforth propose to do good to people without any condition attached? The truth is that kindness entails sacrifice! Paul said: **“bear ye one another's burden so fulfill the law of Christ”**. The fact that you are bearing another's burden does not mean you would not have burden of yours. Everyone has enough trouble to contend with; even the presidents of nations. So, focusing on your own problem, and waiting for a comfortable season will not allow you to do anything. You have to make up your mind to show kindness now because, that is the only way to fulfill the law of Christ. You can bear another's burdens through prayers, intercessions, visitations, showing concerns, etc.

2. GIVING

In this context, I am not referring to giving to the church or the Lord (even though this is also important), but giving to the brethren.

“Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

You cannot say that you love your brother and you cannot give him anything. You don't have to be rich to do this. Distributing entails being sensitive to the needs of the brethren. It is not the *wants* of the saints like sophisticated-phones, 35-karat gold wrist watches, latest i-pad, etc. These could just be the *wants* of the saints or the *lasciviousness* of the saints. I am talking about the genuine needs. Most times, we spend our salaries only on ourselves; neglecting other people. The fact is that your salary or income can never be enough for you! So, you do not need to wait till you earn so much before deciding to spend a portion of your income to meet the needs of fellow brothers and sisters. Once you identify a need that is within your means to meet, you just go ahead to address it. This is something that the Lord expects us to do willingly and voluntarily. You do not need to wait until people come to tell you about their needs. We cannot show love if we don't give; there must be a prompting. The church is not a place to just serve God but also a place to serve others. This should be considered as an opportunity rather than obligation. There are too many Christians living their faith in their heads but not in their hands. These are the theoretical or conceptual Christians, not the practical ones. If you love, you must give.

One of the major ways by which anyone can have the

Heaven's attention is by reaching out to the saints. God is a capitalist who has invested in you because He expects you to share with others when He blesses you. What this means is that when He takes care of you, He is indirectly taking care of many other people. One of the ways to receive the unmerited favour of God is by reaching out to the brethren because some people may be secretly praying for you. So, when you enjoy divine protection; it may be a result of the good that you have done in the past. When you have what others need, share it. If you extend your soul to the hungry, you are actually keeping an account with the Lord.

**“He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD,
And He will pay back what he has given”**
(Proverbs 19:17).

God can borrow from you; but whenever He does this, He will certainly return it with generous interest. Can you imagine how huge the interest would be? If you buy all the stocks and keep your money in fixed deposit, the interest can never be compared with what God pays back when you care for the brethren. Stop complaining; look around for the need you can fix. God always pays back the money you give to Him by caring for the brethren. When God pays back, it won't be the same amount He *borrowed*. Imagine what the return would be when you *lend* to the Lord! When you are planning on your salary or income, put some portions aside to take care

of the needs of the brethren.

3. FORGIVENESS

We sometimes find it difficult to relate with people because we have decided not to forgive one another. In my experience, I have observed that it is sometimes easier to settle quarrels among the unbelievers than to settle the same among the believers. The church is not a gathering of the Angels, we are just a group of people on whom God has poured His grace. Hence, we will continue to offend and disappoint one another till Jesus Christ comes back. We must learn to forgive if brotherly love must continue. We must know that we have to accommodate and tolerate one another to some extent and even overlook the faults of one another from time to time without grudges. When some Christians offend themselves, they keep it and the next thing they do is either they withdraw or isolate themselves. Some would start to backbite or fill their hearts with prejudice. The disciples came to Jesus and asked Him: *how many times can I be offended before I react?* He said 70 x 7 (i.e. 490). Even if you have all the time to yourself, you will lose count by the time you start counting. Jesus was actually saying: *just forgive!* It is not because you are not hurt or offended but for the sake

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*You don't give your
enemy the whip to
help you discipline
your son; he may end
up maiming or
killing him!*

—  —

of Christ.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Some of us still practice the Law of Moses - *an eye for an eye*. In case there is anyone you are holding in your heart, please release and let him/her go.

“Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1).

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)

Love is the evidence of Christianity and it is the legal tender among the saints. Just like Dollar, Pound Sterling, Euro, Yen, or Naira is spent, Christians are required to transact business with one another with love. A Christian who will make a difference here on earth is not necessarily the one who can preach great messages ('spitting fire when ministering'), sing great songs or even stay longer around the church but, the one who shows concern for the people. Jesus had a complete ministry which involved ministering to every part of man; physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual. When about five thousand people following Him had nothing to eat, His disciples suggested that He should send them away but He said: *let them sit down*. If you want to make a difference, have and show concern for the brethren.

Anne Sullivan said: *you cannot touch love but you can feel the sweetness it pours into everything*. Love may look intangible that you cannot touch it, but you can feel the sweetness it pours out. Anne Sullivan, who was once blind and deaf, was the teacher of Helen Keller. Anne Sullivan took it upon herself to pour love into Helen Keller by teaching her through love. Eventually, the visually impaired Helen Keller became a prolific writer. She even became a lecturer and an activist. Imagine, without a loving Anne Sullivan, there couldn't have been a fulfilled Helen Keller. Indeed, it is true that you cannot touch love but you can touch the sweetness it pours. Pause and check your life, are you someone whose life is pouring sweetness? What is your life pouring? Is it bitterness, criticism, backbiting, isolation or sweetness?

4. SINCERITY

The fourth expression of brotherly love is **sincerity**. The love you have for your brother or sister must be pure and sincere. A love feast was organized in a church I was pastoring some years back. After the meeting, a young man who attended the programme asked a sister to follow him to a night party which according to him was *another love feast* because, he wanted to know how much she loved him. The sister then told him that what he was asking was a complete misrepresentation of the type of love that pastor was talking about, and that love is first pure and then sincere.

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

Love one another sincerely and fervently! How pure and sincere is the love you have for your brother, sister, friend, husband or wife? It should not be a love that is based on something. Rather, love should be sincere with no string attached and no hidden agenda. We must relate with one another on the basis of Christ's love. Timothy was a man that we need to emulate on this subject. Paul testified about Timothy as to how he was an excellent example of sincere love for the brethren.

“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (Philemon 2:19-21).

At the time Paul wrote this letter, he was in the prison where he should be thinking about his predicament. He was supposed to be questioning God about his imprisonment. But instead, he was thinking about the welfare of the brethren. He was not bothered whether or not they were concerned about his welfare. He was not perturbed whether

they knew his state or not. He was only going to be encouraged not just by his release but also by the welfare of the people. Jesus said: *love one another the way I have loved you*. Timothy was truly outstanding as Paul testified: *I have no one like-minded*. May God make you the Timothy of our time, may He make you the Dorcas of your community. Most of us are consumed with the passion for dealing with our personal challenges but Timothy was not carried away by his own selfish interest; he was burdened about others. You could be the next Timothy and Dorcas if only you would respond to God's word and make a decision today. Love must be sincere and pure!

5. PROTECTION

When you love your brother/sister, you must protect him/her. You must not spread negative things about him/her. You cannot love someone and be broadcasting his weaknesses and faults. True love would not allow you to expose the nakedness of your brethren to others. When Saul died, David said: *tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the street of Ashkelon!* Was it because Saul didn't deserve to die? At least, David should be jubilating and talking about how God had dealt with the household of his enemy. When something bad happens to a brother or sister, the love of God will not permit us to jubilate about it. If you need to correct a brother or sister, walk up to him or her. If he or she does not listen to you, then talk to an elder in the church.

An elderly Pastor that I respect so much told the story of a young man who just got married to a lady. After their honeymoon, he invited his friends to have a dinner with them. He asked his wife if she could prepare bitter leaf soup which is his native soup. His wife responded with an affirmative and emphatic 'Yes!'. However, the *august* visitors came in while the wife was busy preparing the bitter leaf soup. When the food was not ready on time; the husband came into the kitchen to see how far she had gone. 'Wow, it is ready' she said. The husband picked a spoon to have a taste of the *delicious* soup prepared by his loving wife. Surprisingly, he could not swallow it but spat it out. He said to her, '*Honey what is this? This is too bitter! Did you wash the leaves at all? Anyway, don't worry this is what we will do, I will carry the soup while you will carry the gaari (eba).*' While they were carrying the food to the dining table; the husband, who was ahead of his wife, intentionally slipped and the soup poured on the floor! The wife (realizing that the husband did this intentionally to protect her from shame) burst into tears immediately to the extent that the visitors had to be consoling her. The husband then said, '*it is okay darling, I'm sorry this happened after all you have put into preparing this meal for our guests. Well, it is my fault, so we are all going out to eat in a restaurant*'. This way, the man protected his wife from the looming embarrassment and shame.

If you were the one, would you have covered up this much

for your wife? Would you have used the opportunity to let your friends know how badly she cooks? Have you been ridiculously exposing your brother/sister? Protecting your brethren is not about condoning the wrongs, it is simply about preserving our common interest. You don't give your enemy the whip to help you discipline your son; he may end up maiming or killing him! Regardless of what your brother/sister could have done, don't publish it on the street but settle it under the roof.

6. STICKING POWER

If we are truly brethren, then we are supposed to stick together. For instance, you would not change your surname because your blood brother/sister offends you.


**“A man who has friends must himself be friendly,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a
brother” (Proverbs 18:24).**

We may offend one another sometimes but in the midst of this, we should manage our differences, settle the rift, move on and bond together with the cord of love. The Bible states that *the path of the righteous shines brighter and brighter unto a perfect day*. In other words, every one of us is a work or project in progress. You are not perfect, so anytime you feel offended, walk up to the 'offender', if he/she does not listen to you, then discuss it with the elders. Never slander, or form caucus, just because you are not getting along with somebody. That

barrier must be broken, it must not continue among the children of God. We must all determine to get out of our comfort zone and reach out to someone whom we think needs real love and care.

7. ACCEPTANCE

We must learn to accept one another as we are. Even children of the same parents are not 100% the same and most likely cannot behave the same way. Therefore, it is paramount that they have a way of accepting one another. Never attempt to clone other people in order to be like you. The fact that you don't approve of someone's view does not mean that you should not accept him or her. Somebody once asked me how we deal with the issue of mode of dressing in our church. I told him that when people who dress *questionably*, come to our church; we don't send them away. We accept them the way they come but that is not to say we approve of them. After some time, they eventually integrate themselves into the church's culture and come to the realization of the fact that certain things are not expedient even if they are lawful.

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*If you want everybody
 to be like you, then
 you are only trying to
 clone people without
 their consent.*

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Therefore, acceptance is different from approval. The bible reminds us that *while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. He accepted us but did not approve of our sins. Hence, you must learn to accept your brethren even if you do not

approve of them.

There are individual differences and thus, people cannot always be like you. If you want everybody to be like you, then you are only trying to clone people without their consent. Anywhere you find yourself, most importantly in a church setting, study the culture and find a way to *flow* with them as long as they are not going contrary to the principles of Christ. True love is sensitive to the feelings of others. You cannot be individualistic! Don't just do the things that are convenient for you alone. There is a difference between being planted and growing. To grow, you must first be planted and go through a period of dying or else you will never grow. For instance, if you plant a maize seed, it must first die before it grows. You cannot come to the church the way you are and choose to remain the same. Christianity is a way of life. The early believers were called Christians in Antioch of Pisidia when people saw Christ-like attitude in them. Come to Jesus Christ the way you are, but after some time you must die to the old ways of life. You don't send people away because they are not *conforming*, they should be accepted with the aim of reaching out to them but their unacceptable conducts should not be approved.

The story was told that Mahatma Gandhi read the bible when he was young and got to know about Christianity. He decided that he would become one so that he could liberate India from the caste system. However, when he got to a church in

England, as he was about to sit, someone walked up to him and asked him to go and sit at the back. He felt bad and told himself: *so there is even the caste system in the church?* Since then, he never returned to the church. Imagine the strong influence he would have had on the church in India and the world at large. Let us accept one another as we are, let us be sensitive to one another and let us show love to one another. Everybody may not behave the way you behave, think the way you think or talk the way you talk. But as long as they are called by the name of the Lord, they deserve your love. We must consciously learn to accept one another. We show love by adjusting to accommodate one another. If you say you love a person, you must be ready to accommodate certain things; you must tolerate certain things just for the sake of Christ. You need to adjust yourself to be able to walk in love with people.

“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion” (Romans 12:16).

Do not set your mind on high things but be associated with the humble. When people are full of themselves and so opinionated, they think they are the only saints or champions around. This should never be found in the household of God.

Barriers to Brotherly Love

It is not always easy to express brotherly love to everybody no matter how much we try. Usually there are some things that tend to discourage us or dampen our spirit even when we try hard to live with love. In spite of the barriers, the Lord still enjoins us to express love! Let us consider some of the barriers to brotherly love and how we can confront these challenges.

1. BETRAYAL OR DISAPPOINTMENT

How easy is it for you to express sincere love to someone who just betrayed you? Betrayal is all over the place, even in the church! Betrayal is found between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, business associates, church leaders and members. This is actually a major barrier! Do we then stop

expressing love due to the reality of this challenge? If you find yourself in this shoe, you are not really alone because Jesus Christ was betrayed and disappointed, yet He still expressed love to those who betrayed Him. Hence, He has given us a ministry that is universal. Some persons are evangelists, pastors, teachers, prophets and apostles; not all of us can operate in each of these ministerial offices. However, everyone has been given a ministry called *the ministry of reconciliation*.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

“But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:18).

God has given unto everybody the ministry of reconciliation because He knows that sometimes you would be betrayed and disappointed, thus, He called us into this ministry. It is time to get personal with the word of God. Now is the time to look inwardly and let the word from the Lord change you. In the face of betrayal, you should take note of the following:

i. Forbearance

This means to be patient when subjected to annoyance or anger, exercising restraint or self-control in the face of

provocation. This also means making a decision to let go when you are annoyed, rather than hitting the roof.

ii. Reconciliation

To reconcile means to win someone over to friendliness and bring someone into harmony. When you are disappointed or betrayed, don't abandon your betrayer, take a step of reconciliation. I don't think any man has been so disappointed like Jesus Christ was.

“So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first” (John 20:4).

After the death of Jesus Christ, all the disciples went back to the various jobs they were doing before joining Him in the ministry. It was only Mary Magdalene, who was not one of the disciples, that came to the tomb crying. She stayed with the body of Jesus even when there was nothing to gain from the dead body of Jesus Christ. But because of the connection she had with Jesus, she stayed with Him even at His death. Are you connected with Jesus to the extent of staying put with Him in difficult times? Incredibly, when Mary Magdalene went to tell the disciples about the resurrected Christ, they did not believe. Even when Jesus appeared to them in the room showing them the scars of the nails on His palms; still someone found it difficult to believe Him.

Today, some of us still show around the *scar* of the hurt from fellow brethren saying: *if only you know what he has done to me, you won't ask me to reconcile with him*. What we do today is showing the whole world how badly we have been offended, why that brother is bad and why that sister is not good. After Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples for the first time, they went their ways instead of broadcasting His resurrection. Later, they told Thomas who doubted and insisted on confirming it in person.

When Jesus appeared to him and he saw it, He told him: *blessed are those who believe without seeing*. Jesus appeared to them the third time and stood with them but they could not identify Him. This probably means that they had forgotten about Him, they had written Him off until He said to them “*cast your net into the sea*”. He also addressed them as kids by asking them a question this way: *children, have you any food?* Do you know why He addressed them as children? He expected them to have grown beyond the level of unbelief and quick forgetfulness. In terms of chronological or biological age, there was no much difference between Jesus' age and Peter's. They did not know that it was Jesus because they had completely forgotten about Him and they were bogged down by other issues of life.

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art

thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that He was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto Him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep” (John 21:12-17 KJV).

Actually, Jesus came to His disciples in order to reconcile them to Himself. All would have been lost if He didn't. Don't just go about showing the bruises and scars but take a step further to reconcile with your offenders. Your own scar could even be emotional that no one can see but don't give up on that brother or sister. Let us be like Jesus Who never gave up on Peter and other disciples. Don't let betrayal and disappointment be a reason for not reconciling or showing

love to your brethren. Remember that Jesus told Peter: *when you are converted, strengthen your brother*. This was a source of strength for Peter. Let me ask you this question: *are you a source of strength to someone?* Talking to everybody around about the hurt will not fix anything. Rather, decide to be a source of strength.

2. THE UNLOVABLE

Some people actually appear to be undeserving of our love. Indeed, their look and actions may really be unlovable. But God is not relating with us based on whether we deserve love or not. If He does, none of us will be here today. Paul was not asking us to relate with those who deserve our love when He said: **let brotherly love continue**. This does not refer to those who love you, those who understand you or those who deserve your love. The only reason you should love your brethren is because of Christ, and this is called grace. God actually extended this grace to us through His only begotten Son. Jesus went back to reconcile with Peter and other disciples not because they deserved it. If I were Christ, maybe I would have concentrated on Mary Magdalene, leaving out the rest of the disciples. I would have anointed her with so much power and presented her before my Father as the real one while branding others as traitors. That is what we do sometimes in the church; we only look at those who love us; those doing our bidding. They are the ones we cleave to while we neglect others. If Jesus had done the same, the gospel


would not have gotten to us. Jesus Christ did not just focus on Mary Magdalene. Yes, He appreciated her gesture but went back and extended the grace to Peter and other disciples.

Friend, He loves you and will continue to love you in spite of your weaknesses, failures, imperfections and flaws. Don't focus on the flaws of the brethren; focus on the love of Christ that has brought us together. What is grace? Grace is unmerited favour. It was what God extended to us which we must extend to others in return. Your brother may not deserve your love, your friend may not deserve your love, and your sister may not deserve your love. If you never deserved to be loved by God and He still loves you, then you must show love. This is the time to focus more on grace, and God will in turn deal with you graciously.


3. PREJUDICE

This is another reason why many people find it difficult to trust others. For instance, many of us usually have prejudice about other cultures using the prism of our own background to filter the preferences of others. The moment we begin to view others from this jaundiced point of view, we make our own expectation the yardstick for judging others. When we have prejudice about people, it will be difficult to see the possibility of them turning a new leaf. It is often said that *it may take one's entire life to build a reputation but it could be destroyed in just one day*. Why? This is because when you mess up the

first time, people don't usually give you the second chance. No matter how much you try to impress them that you have changed, they don't want to believe you. Rather, they continue to judge you by the impression they have already formed about you, even when you have moved on. When we tag some people with one habit, the assumption is that they will always behave in a particular way, and we continue to paint them with the brush of the past even when they have changed their ways of life.

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A Yoruba adage says that *for anyone who has been caught stealing once, no matter how expensive any dress he wears is, it is regarded as a product of theft, even after repenting.* Such is the power of prejudice! A brother/sister has offended you and you are saying you will have nothing to do with him/her, though you have forgiven him/her. Well, that is not real forgiveness. If Jesus had done this to Peter and the rest of the disciples, we won't be here today. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore but rather resolve issues and do not put a stumbling block on people's way. Forget and suspend the judgment of



the past! It is wrong to think that the brother or sister who was wrong yesterday would be wrong today and always.

“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:26-27).

Apostle Paul was, at the beginning of his Christian race, a victim of prejudice when he came to the believers who did not want to have anything to do with him. But thank God for Barnabas who stood by Paul and told them that he was a changed man. Your brother, sister or friend can still change; don't see him/her in the light of past flaws and failures. Give room for another opportunity or else we won't be able to express brotherly love and we won't move forward.

4. HIGH MINDEDNESS

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philemon 2:3-4).

In the church, some people will say '*I cannot bring myself to her standard; I am a PhD holder while she is just a school certificate holder, so, we cannot be friends*'. Even some people, in the midst of their friends, will always want their view to be upheld as the most superior. Hence, when you say they are wrong, they find some ways not to get along with you. They are the standard by which others must be measured in —  — order to be accepted. We must know *We must know that that in the house of God, the ground is level. At the cross, nobody is actually God, the ground is level...There is no class at the cross! That is why we must reach out to our brother/sister in love* —  — irrespective of our status.

“... so when he came, he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for by occupation they were tent makers” (Acts 18:3).

The above scriptural text is referring to Aquila and Priscilla who were tent makers unlike Paul who was a lawyer. Paul forgot about his reputation as a Senior Advocate, he decided to be lowly-minded and fellowshiped with them even though they were illiterates. Christians must forget about who they are, their achievements, positions, etc. and then put on the garment of love. Remember that at the cross, the ground is level.

5. MISUNDERSTANDING

“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:22-24).

Beloved, I have talked about the need to express brotherly love, the seven expressions of brotherly love and the barriers to brotherly love. How would you respond to this message? It is not just reading this book that matters but living the message.

“A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city and contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Proverbs 18:19).

We should not allow contention. Sink whatever contention that exists between you and your brethren into the pool of the blood of Jesus.

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:14).

Love is the bond of perfection. If you are walking towards perfection, the easiest way to do this is to put on the love of Christ. Forget about all the barriers and issues you have had with the brethren, put on love which is the bond of perfection.

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).


It may be true that you have been offended, but let the love of Christ in you cover the multitude of sins. Don't focus on people's faults but consider their strength. Don't relate with others on the basis of prejudice. Mary Magdalene was tagged by some people as a harlot, although there is no portion of the scriptures that supports this, except that seven demons were cast out of her. This so-called indecent lady eventually became the most significant follower of Christ. Let us put away prejudice completely.


Attributes of Love

It has been mentioned that love appears to be in an abstract form since it could only be felt and seen in action. However, it has a number of attributes which describe its identity. In this chapter, I have identified and listed seven attributes of love. Let us consider these one after the other.

1. LOVE IS NOT CHEAP

Some people claim they fall in love with the blink of an eyelid; this is not real because that kind of love cannot withstand the test of time. True love is more of commitment than feeling and genuine commitment is not procured in a jiffy! It demands a lot of praying and a great deal of thinking. So, love is neither cheap nor blind. It costs God His only begotten Son to reconcile the world to Himself. If you believe love is really

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blind, marriage is the only miracle you will need to open your eyes! If you say love is blind, marriage will teach you to be alert and cautious. Love is not cheap and it has roots which must be allowed to grow deeply. Cheap love cannot withstand the test of time. Unfortunately, many young people are ignorantly looking for and engaging in cheap love. *Love needs to grow deep roots if it is going to withstand the test of time.* You need to have a strong basis on which to anchor your commitment.

2. LOVE HAS NO PRICE



“Much water may not put out love, or the deep waters overcome it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be judged a price not great enough” (Songs of Solomon 8:7-BBE).

“Water cannot put it out; no flood can drown it. But if any tried to buy love with their wealth, contempt is all they would get” (Songs of Solomon 8:7-GNT).

Many women are trapped under the illusion that a man who takes care of their bills is someone who truly loves them. That

is deception! Such action is not one of the features of the kind of commitment that indicates genuine love. There are countless numbers of sad stories of women *falling* for rich men who spent extravagantly to buy their affection. In most cases, they usually end up broken-hearted.

Warnings from the house of God usually fall on their deaf ears in many instances. Any man who tries to buy a woman's affection is not worthy of it. Love has no price! I mean no amount of money or material substance can buy true love.

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*Any man who tries to
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3. LOVE ABHORS IMPURITY

There is nothing as holy as love because God, whose name is love, is holy. Some people claim they can do anything for their friends. That is not an appropriate statement. You cannot just do anything for your friend; for instance, anything that does not tally with the counsel and the will of God. Love abhors impurity, if somebody says he/she loves you but introduces ungodly things to you, then that is not love. I remember when I was in the secondary school; one of my best friends and I sat for the 'O' Level examination conducted by West Africa Examination Council. While I passed just at a sitting, unfortunately he did not. I later gained admission into the University. He attempted the examination for three

consecutive years but never made it. This was a friend I loved so much; we were even the best of friends in secondary school. Eventually, when I was in Part IV, he came to me almost in tears saying, *“I’ve bought another GCE form, you know that we are friends. Look at the gap between us, we were so close, but now we are far apart. Can you just help me as a friend? Please do this examination for me”*. Although, I was moved by his predicament but I had to turn him down because as a Christian, I have a good understanding of love. Love does the best, I mean the very best for its recipient. Therefore, writing the examination for my friend could not have been ultimately the best for him. I would rather patiently tutor and painstakingly teach him until I see him capable of passing in flying colours. Many people mistake their lustful feeling and passion for love but the truth is that love abhors impurity. There is nothing as holy as love!

4. LOVE IS NOT SENSUAL

In this present day and age, the mind-engaging media is redefining love for many people who are addicted to it. The world, which does not know God as love, can never understand the meaning of *Agape* until it comes to the knowledge of God. The world, with the help of the media, only ignites our lustful passion which consequently leads to heartbreak and confusion as to the reality of love and what it actually means.

“Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words” (Colossians 2:4).

Love does not work with the intent of stirring your passion. However, please note that if your emotions are stirred up by your relationship with a person, it may not necessarily mean the person is having an intention to make you lose control. Love actually restrains you from satisfying sensual desires.

5. LOVE IS PATIENT

Patience is a virtue that many do not like to cultivate in this *instant* generation we live in.

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up...” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

From the above verse of the scripture, one of the characteristics of love is patience. Love without the virtue of patience is not real and cannot be the foundation for building long-lasting relationships. A research has shown that Christian couples who had sex while they were engaged are likely to be unfaithful if they eventually get married. In the research, the authors looked at people who are





Love actually restrains you from satisfying sensual desires...So, if you want to build a long-lasting relationship with someone you have the intention to marry, you must avoid pre-marital sex.



unfaithful in their marriages and found out that about 70% of them had sex while they were courting. So, if you want to build a long-lasting relationship with someone you have the intention to marry, you must avoid pre-marital sex. True love waits; it is patient, you need to exercise self-control and that is why love is patient. This is one of the strongest evidences of genuine love; not quick to criticize, not quick to get angry, not quick to believe evil, etc.

6. LOVE IS NOT SELFISH



Love is neither self-seeking nor self-centered. People who are always willing to take but never ready to give are not mature in love. In fact, their love is suspect! However, this does not imply that we should avoid opportunities to help one another because people are not reciprocating. Love is generous; love is charitable and not egocentric. Love will respect your body, your integrity and your good name.

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*People who are
 always willing to
 take but never
 ready to give are
 not mature in love.
 In fact, their love
 is suspect!*
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7. LOVE IS FIRM BUT TENDER

Love is firm in the sense that it speaks the truth. People, who do not summon up courage to always tell the truth when they should, will not be capable of loving to the fullest capacity. Love is tender; the scripture says *love covereth all sin*. This

portion of the scripture does not imply that love is an anaemic sentimentality that overlooks wickedness and error as though such do not exist, but love always seeks to protect and shield with the best of interest of all men. God loves us but he will not tolerate our

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*Love will respect
 your body, your
 integrity and your
 good name.*
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rebellious acts. Love extends its heart to those who want to do the right things. Peter declares that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). In the light of this scripture, we are only to confide in people whom we know love us genuinely as they will always seek to protect us and not expose us. Love rattles and cuddles at the same time. It rattles by making known to you your faults and weaknesses in the most appropriate way and cuddles by drawing near to help you out of your weaknesses.

Jesus said, '**Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give unto everyone according as his work shall be.**' In this portion of the scripture, He was saying that He would rattle the rebellious and presumptuous. When He said '**Even though your father and mother forsake you, I will not forsake you**' He was expressing the cuddling arm of love. Love is both firm and tender! Firm when there is need for firmness and tender when there is need for tenderness; it combines the two. Love that is always firm with no tenderness or love that is always tender with no firmness is

not love exhibited in its fullness and entirety. Love is basically a combination of courage and compassion. There is a need to



Love rattles and cuddles at the same time. It rattles by making known to you your faults and weaknesses in the most appropriate way and cuddles by drawing near to help you out of your weaknesses...Love is both firm and tender!



consistently evaluate the various relationships we keep and question the basis for each of them. Openness and honesty with ourselves will reveal the true nature of our relationships. With God's help, we can learn how to handle each of them and let go of the ones that could be harmful while keeping those that would build us up.

PART II:



*MARITAL
CHOICE-MAKING
AND GODLY
RELATIONSHIPS*

Perspectives of Choice-making

In the previous chapters, we have considered love as the basis for building long-lasting relationships. I now intend to consider this within the context of marriage which was ordained by God to be a lifetime relationship. Although I have been married for about 25 years as at the time of writing this book, I decided not to write solely based on my experience because you cannot live on someone else's experience. You can learn lessons from the experiences of others but you cannot successfully live your life based on the experiences of others; doing such would be foolishness of the highest order! We live in a world of several options or alternatives which requires careful decision. Life is all about making choices resulting in our decisions. God did not create us as robots, machines or puppets but as people capable of

making decisions on their own. We have a free will. Life is a gift and a free gift indeed. Someone once said that *Choice is the maintenance fee for the free gift of life.*

For instance, if you are given a car as a gift, you would be expected to maintain it with your own resources. On the long run, the period of time the car is used and the performance of the car would depend on how well you maintain it. Decisions are the maintenance fees you pay for the gift of life that God has given you. Apart from the choice of accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and serving the Lord, I don't think there is any other choice you can make in life that is more important than the choice of whom you are going to marry. Career decisions can always be changed if the need or

—  —	desire arises. Ask people who have
<i>Decisions are the</i>	been changing wives or husbands; if
<i>maintenance fees</i>	they will tell you the truth, they are
<i>you pay for the gift</i>	crying secretly though they may be
<i>of life that God has</i>	laughing openly. Why? It is because
<i>given you.</i>	God has designed that man should
—  —	make that choice just once!

There is no trial and error in marriage or marital choice! It is not wise to make the choice of your spouse recklessly or carelessly because there is no second chance. It is often said that *you don't have the second opportunity to make the first impression.* Anybody who misses his/her marital choice in life

has missed it and will need the grace and mercy of God. The quality of life you live has a lot to do with the kind of choice you make with respect to marriage. Even the quality of service you render to God is also dependent on it to a great extent. There are some people who would have loved to serve God but their homes have been the major source of problem or hindrance. In the scripture, God did not give us a manual of specific ways by which we should make the choice of who to marry. However, the Bible gives enough principles and guidelines that could be followed in order to make this important choice in life.

While preparing to write this book, I searched the scriptures and other reference materials to study the models used by some bible characters to make this crucial choice in their life time. I found four ways of making marital choice which are found in the book of Genesis (the book of the beginning). The first one is totally out of God's way; He condemns it because it is not in line with His counsel. God was involved in the second one but He needed to do it that way just to register some important points, and the model is rarely in use again. In the third approach, God allows you to make the choice even when it did not originate from Him while in the fourth method God expects us to follow Him all the way. I will now take it one after the other.

I. REBELLIOUS CHOICE-MAKING

The first model in which the choice of a wife was made by rebellion is a warning for all of us and we see this from the narrative of Genesis 26: 34-35.

“When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.”

The rebellion here was not against Isaac and Rebekah, but a flagrant disobedience to the instruction of God. We can have a clearer understanding of why Isaac and Rebekah were unhappy about the choice of Esau by considering the stand of God as stated in Deuteronomy 7:1-4.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other

gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly”.

God had already given instructions about where His people should not choose wives from. The Hittites were one of them but Esau went ahead and married from the tribe. God is unhappy with any child of His who decides to choose his/her spouse from outside the household of faith. What fellowship has light got to do with darkness? That is why the Bible instructs in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that:

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”

Many children of the Kingdom allow their feelings to make this crucial choice for them. However, their feelings begin to wane after the union and then the reality of the truth of God's word begins to dawn on them. Thus, the first foundation is that scripturally, nobody is allowed to make marital choice from outside the body of Christ. Marital decisions should also never be made based on one's age and societal pressure as many people do today. Yes, your biological clock may be ticking fast but that doesn't change the truth of the word of God. The Bible says that the choice of Esau was a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. Anybody that chooses outside the perimeter of faith is causing grief to the heart of the Spirit. It is a no-go-area! Beware and heed the warning!

II. CHOICE BY BENEVOLENT IMPOSITION

The second model is called choice by benevolent imposition. Imposition itself is wrong but when it is benevolent it is mitigated.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man' (Genesis 2:21-23).

God felt Adam needed a helpmeet suitable for him but there was no record that God discussed it with Adam. To achieve this, God caused Adam to sleep, took a rib and used it to form a woman and then brought her to the man. Although, she was the choice of God for Adam, He still respected Adam's free will and gave him the choice to decide. Initially, Adam accepted the choice that God gave him, but later on complained about Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit.

“Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate’ (Genesis 3:12).

In a bid to refuse to take responsibility for his decisions, Adam put the blame on Eve, whom he stated was given by God, as being the person who advised him to disregard God's instructions. Since then, there has been a paradigm shift in making marital choice as captured in Proverbs 18:22;

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.”

The responsibility has been shifted. Now, man has to search for a wife but ultimately he won't find a good one except God helps him. Therefore, in marital decision, God gives man the opportunity to search but with recognition that it is only with His help and favour that one can find a good wife. So, if you bungle the process, you cannot blame God for the product.

III. CHOICE BY ATTRACTION

The third model is choice by sight or attraction or by infatuation and I am going to explain this with some copious examples from the Bible.

“Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone was on the well's mouth. Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put



the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." So he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well. And look, his daughter Rachael is coming with the sheep." Then he said, "Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them." But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachael came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachael the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother" (Genesis 29:1-10).

Jacob was looking for a wife, but as soon as he saw Rachael, he got carried away by her beauty and immediately got attracted to her. Physical attraction can be intense! As soon as Jacob saw Rachael, he got attracted to her and an unusual irresistible power came upon him that he alone went to roll the stone.

Who asked him in the first place to roll the stone? Ordinarily, the stone he rolled shouldn't have been rolled by a single man. In those days, such stones were so massive that not a single man could roll one.


Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep" (Genesis 29:3; 8).

At that time, at least 16 men were required to roll the stone that Jacob alone rolled. Even then, it was such a laborious task that was not done piecemeal. The men would wait for all the animals to gather together before rolling the stone. So, you can imagine the enormity of the task embarked upon by Jacob without hesitation. This simply buttresses

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As soon as Jacob saw Rachael, he got attracted and an unusual irresistible power came upon him that he alone went to roll the stone.
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what physical attraction can drive a man to do. There is power in attraction. A man's ability to reason logically and correctly is lost when he is consumed by physical attraction with no form of self-control. This is infatuation! So, there is power in attraction but God does not want you to make a choice based

on physical appeal. If you see a sister and you decide to marry her or a brother and you decide to marry him, you have not

—  — committed a sin against God. However, you might have committed a sin against yourself if your choice is based only on attraction because you are **on your own**. It is like playing roulette with your future! If you choose based on sight, what you see now may just be film trick, or window dressing. It may just be a passing phase in the life of the person you are seeing. Let me tell you that God will not crucify

you for it but you will have to live with the consequences. So, if this model is not right, let us take a look at the fourth and the final but the best one.

IV. CHOICE BY DIVINE-HUMAN PARTNERSHIP LEADING

So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall

go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac..."Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'-- let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master" (Genesis 24:2-4; 14).

The above passage accentuates a good way of choosing a partner for marriage and even gives further information. The story is a good one to glean out the principle for choosing according to God's will. The principle demonstrated here is so effective that even when engaged on behalf of somebody, the individual who is interested in marriage can still get a good spouse. There are eight things that could be deduced from this passage viz:

a. The choice of your spouse must be within the household of faith

I must however, hasten to add that it is not everybody that is in the church that is a Christian. Your choice of spouse must be a child of God (not just a member of a church) because when Isaac needed to have a wife, Abraham told his oldest servant that it must be from his family i.e. the family of God; those who are connected by blood to our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. The choice must be as directed by the leading of God, and not by human manipulation

Jacob impressed Rachael and swept her off her feet by the time he alone rolled away the stone meant for 16 hefty men. Women like heroes which can span from academic, social, political, ideological, financial to spiritual heroes, etc. Jacob also agreed to be a servant for a total of 14 years in order to marry Rachael as that was the term laid down by her father. So, Jacob warmed through the heart of Laban in order to marry Rachael.

Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'- let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master" (Genesis 24:14).



The above portion of the scripture narrates how a man is directed by God through the act of his total submission to His will. The servant appealed to the mercy of God. He prayed that God would lead him in a way that it would be easier for him to know the woman that was His choice for his master's son. The Bible instructs that in all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.

c. You must be involved in the decision-making despite the fact that the leading comes from God



You don't say 'well, God said it; therefore, I have no choice'. God will lead you but you have to be involved in the choice-making. You must be a participant in the process and not a spectator. What this means is that if God would not dictate to you on this, then, no man should dictate to you.

And he said, "Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren" (Genesis 24:27).

If he had sat in his house, would the Lord had led him? He went out searching and while doing this, God led him. So, the leading was from God but man took the lead in the search. This is what is called the principle of first action; you must act by taking the first step. From Genesis 24:8, you can see that it was not a water-tight choice.

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The leading was from God but man took the lead in the search. This is what is called the principle of first action; you must act by taking the first step.
—  —

“And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.”

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The leading comes from God but you are involved because the power to either accept or reject lies with you.
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It is clear from this passage that no covert or overt method of coercion or imposition should be involved. Thus, there is always a room for choice. Do not be falsely misguided by people with persuasive words even when they claim to be directed

by God. The truth is that God will direct you to the person He appointed but He will never manipulate you into making a decision. From the passage we read earlier, Abraham said '*If the woman will not follow you then you are released from the oath.*' Abraham realized the fact that the woman still had a choice; a free will. The leading comes from God but you are involved because the power to either accept or reject lies with you. The final decision, as regards your choice, is ultimately left to you and should not be delegated to someone else.

d. If you are involved, then your network is very important

If your network is among unbelievers, you may be misguided by their influence. In Abraham's case, when it was time to make a decision, he went back to activate his network. What is your network like? This is very crucial! If God is going to lead you, then it involves a lot of prayers before, during and after the courtship. When Abraham's servant saw the woman, he still prayed. Let us again see the various stages of his prayers in Genesis 24:26-27; 51-52; 63-64;

Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD. And he said, "Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren" (Genesis 24:26-27).

Even when he had found the woman, he still prayed. Some people, out of desperation, will choose to be led in ways that are not really endorsed by God. For example, some people will choose to follow dreams without bothering to wait on God and seek spiritual guidance. God can surely lead you by dreams, but you must subject what you see in your dreams to prayers and test of the scripture.

"Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken." And it came to pass, when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth" (Genesis 24:51-52).

After the parents of Rebecca said yes, the servant yet prayed. He recognized the fact that there was still a need for prayer.



"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked,

and there, the camels were coming. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel” (Genesis 24: 63-64).

While the servant was still searching, Isaac was busy praying and meditating. This shows that anyone who will go through this type of choice must know that prayer is extremely crucial! You must give yourself to prayer. Unfortunately, many take this process lightly. How well have you prayed? Because the quality of the prayer you sow into this process will determine the kind of outcome that you will get. Prayer is the master key!

There is something called *the riddle of the missing rib* which has continued to be a source of argumentation. When I gave my life to Christ, the doctrine which I embraced at that point in time was that because God took the rib of a man to make a woman, there is just only one woman that God has made for every man and vice-versa. The doctrine believes that there is just only one person that has been custom-made for you. Therefore, it means that you will be locked into a single life throughout your lifetime. If you were to be turned down by the person, either God or you would have to force the person. By turning down the man, the two people already missed the will of God for their lives. In other words, having followed the will of God; if your request for relationship was refused, the consequence is that both of you have lost God's will since

both of you were ordained to marry each other and no other person. So, the person who is right will suffer because of the person who is wrong! This doctrine also implies that a woman has no free choice because her chance of singular choice has been taken away by the fact that

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*God may lead you to
 the person you should
 marry but if the person
 refuses, you are free
 and not under any
 bondage to continue
 pursuing.*
 —  —

only one person was created or designed for her. Another terrible side of the doctrine is that if the woman chosen by the man dies; the man would have to remain single for his lifetime. However, you will notice that in the New Testament, there is a rule guiding re-marriage for widows and widowers. Based on this doctrine, as a young Christian, I watched several Christians putting their lives on hold just because they erroneously believed that the people they were infatuated with were God's exclusive choice for them. At least from the biblical arrangement of re-marriage for widows and widowers, you will clearly understand that God never wanted us to believe that there is only a woman for a man. This effectively negates the doctrine.

**“And if the woman is not willing to follow you,
 then you will be released from this oath; only do
 not take my son back there” (Genesis 24:8).**

God may lead you to the person you should marry but if the person refuses, you are free and not under any bondage to continue pursuing. If you believe that God has spoken to you about a particular person of the opposite gender with respect to marriage, but the person is not in agreement, you are released. Finding the right person entails a search for the person that has been appointed by the Lord. The way the servant of Abraham, Eleazar, went about the choice of a woman for Isaac gave us the clue.

“Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'- let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master” (Genesis 24:14).

It is an appointment! In fact, all the Bible translations for the above quotation used the word 'appointed'. With reference to the context, the word 'appointment' means many people are qualified but the most suitable is chosen. So, the one chosen by you, through the help of God, is the one appointed! At any given time, there is the one appointed but if he/she refuses to co-operate on his/her own volition, you are released. If someone has been considered for an appointment but he/she did not resume, the job offer may be given to another person who is also qualified and ready to work. It infers that many

people are qualified but only one is appointed. The will of God in respect of marriage is by appointment!

e. Finding the right choice involves more than two persons

Some people do not believe that they should subject their decision of a life partner to the scrutiny of any elder in the church. Please note that with regards to Isaac; Abraham, Eleazar, his wife's parents and siblings were involved. The Bible makes us to understand that **in the multitude of counselors there is safety**. Don't make this decision in isolation! Solitary decisions with respect to marital choice

are not sanctioned by the word of God. Though it is a decision between two individuals; the Bible shows us that it is important that more than two people are allowed to be involved in terms of giving matured counsel and guidance.

f. The choice must not be based on convenience or trivial issues of life, but on divine purpose you have discovered for your life!

Many people base their marital choices on just the prospects



The one chosen by you, through the help of God, is the one appointed! At any given time, there is the one appointed but if he/she refuses to co-operate on his/her own volition, you are released...The will of God in respect of marriage is by appointment!



of their intended spouse. This is not good enough. I know of a beloved sister who made the decision on the basis of wealth and up till today she is still grappling with the consequences of her choice. Marital decisions based just on wealth, power and status usually end up in crisis. The decisions of marital choice should rather be made based on the purpose of the person and the intended ability to be able to fit into that purpose. Make your choice with eternity as the utmost consideration!

g. Even when you are convinced, watch and inquire

“Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. So it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels of gold, and said, “Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge?” (Genesis 24:20-23).

Eleazar, Abraham's servant, still made enquiries even though he had prayed and received answers. Running background



checks on a person you intend to spend your life with should not be seen as a form of embarrassing intrusion but as a wise step which will help in establishing a secured relationship. God did not make us as robots. He did not endow us with His spirit with the aim of sending our reasoning on complete vacation. Marriage is not an institution that should be rushed into no matter the sense of urgency.

h. It is good to follow the principles of God if you want to make a choice

One important point to note is that the way man sees is not the way God sees; don't begin to make your choice by sight or any of your senses alone! What is found even in the church today are people making choices by their sight or senses without consciously relying on the wisdom of God through His leading.

“And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are -- northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14-15).

Lot was dwelling together with Abraham but a time came when they had to separate, therefore, a choice of where to settle needed to be made. Lot lifted his eyes and chose every good area and left that which was not desirable for Abraham.

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*He did not endow us with
His spirit with the aim of
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are still going to use your
eyes to make your marital
choice but please let God
lift your eyes!... Are you
lifting your eyes or you are
allowing God to do the
lifting for you?*
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After Lot left, God then asked Abraham to lift his eyes. Both of them lifted their eyes; while one lifted his eyes by himself, God lifted the eyes of the other! *You are still going to use your eyes to make your marital choice but please let God lift your eyes!* When Lot lifted his eyes; he saw fertile soil, evergreen pastures, a land flowing with milk and honey; he hurriedly concluded that he couldn't have gotten it better. His choice though excellent was based on a faulty premise. Before God lifted the eyes of Abraham, anybody looking at the land would see an overgrazed land, deserted and unattractive field. But that land today is where the whole crude oil in the Arab world is flowing from. Israel lost it due to disobedience. At that time, it didn't look attractive and enticing; it was a brown field of no discernible value. Perhaps, you may say that the person God is leading you to marry is not beautiful or handsome enough; or the brother is too gentle for your liking. Are you lifting your eyes or you are allowing God to do the lifting for you?



Why Dating if you can Hear God?

In Chapter 6, we talked about four different perspectives of choice-making:

- choice by rebellion;
- choice by benevolent imposition;
- choice by sight, attraction or infatuation; and
- choice by divine-human partnership leading

One common culture among the youths of the world today which has found its way into the church is dating. Some churches and ministers even teach the young ones on how to date. The big question now is *why dating if you can hear God?* Many people, rather than following the biblical principles of choice-making, opt for dating. Unfortunately, the world system teaches singles to engage in dating relationship as

though it were a normal and useful practice. It is my conviction that the world system of dating, as it is currently practiced by most people, is far from God's original plan as described in the Bible. Dating is rampant but usually ends in heartbreaks with lasting scars! However, out of sheer luck, it may produce a union that may just stay around for a few years.

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Dating is basically an acceptance of the fact that you cannot hear from God and that you lack direction from Him.
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I contemplated strongly about writing on dating while pondering on the structure this book would adopt. Initially, I decided to include the subject because dating is a culture that has silently crept into the Church of God today with its attendant consequences.

Indeed, dating is a western culture which has caused a lot of problems along with heartaches. Unfortunately, it has failed to achieve its objective and purpose. Dating is basically an acceptance of the fact that you cannot hear from God and that you lack direction from Him. In this chapter, I will briefly highlight dating and explain how you can hear God speak to you.

WHAT IS DATING?

1. It is a test of compatibility without any involvement of God. It is a process where two people want to see if they are compatible and they do this by

starting to 'go out together'. As Christians, we should not marry based on compatibility alone but ultimately because we are led by God. I am sure you know that whatever God does is perfect and you would be able to say that lines have fallen unto you in pleasant places.



Man has perfected the art of deception, therefore, he knows how to camouflage and hide things. Thus, if you think that by dating you will discover a man, you are wasting your precious time.




2. Dating is a process by which you want to discover a person, based on your limited ability, before you enter into marriage with him/her. But consider the injunction of the Bible:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Man has perfected the art of deception, therefore, he knows how to camouflage and hide things. Thus, if you think that by dating you will discover a man, you are wasting your precious time because the heart is deceitful. So, there is no way you can know a man if you don't involve God because He is the only

all-knowing. That is why dating is wrong and as such no child of God should contemplate dating.

3. Dating intends to initiate a relationship without having a commitment. This means that you want to enjoy the benefits without having any responsibility. In God's household, courtship is well recognized and it involves some level of commitment right from the first day. On the contrary, dating is mostly about trying out the workability of a relationship and if it doesn't work, you are thrown out. Dating is really not a path of dignity for both parties. Why should you gamble with your life, destiny and future? In the scriptures, when Joseph and Mary (the mother of Jesus) were in courtship, there was commitment between them. When two people are in courtship; both families and the church will know, they will be available for scrutiny and counseling. In dating, you are just trying things out and a lot of things often go wrong.


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*Dating intends to
initiate a relationship
without having a
commitment...Why
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and future?*

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Today, dating has reduced man to the level of commodity. There are dating websites, even Christian dating websites. While writing this book, I had to visit some of these sites, not because I wanted a date, but to be able to substantiate some of the assertions in this book. People who believe they cannot or

are not prepared to hear from God go to those sites. From my search, I discovered that man has been reduced to an ordinary commodity which could be sold online. The site members upload their *photoshoped* pictures and post their well-structured profiles on the net. Through a computerized matching program; they are linked with unknown people who *fit* the kind of persons they would like to go out with. It has indeed reduced man to the level of commodity where you just shop 'n' pick on the internet. A lot of people have been duped through internet dating. Why dating if you can hear God?

Unfortunately, many people don't know that hearing God is part of the inheritance of His children. Part of the salvation package and part of the benefits of being a child of God is the ability to hear Him. If you look at the Bible, '**Thus saith the Lord**' appeared over 400 times. This just simply means that God still speaks to His people till date. Apart from *thus saith the Lord*, there is another phrase '**The Lord said.**' This appears in the scriptures over 200 times, making a total of over 600

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The problem is that some Christians don't know how to hear God; thus they make their decisions like unbelievers. They live just like any other person; like a commoner, their day-to-day decisions are based on common sense.

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times to further confirm the fact that the Lord speaks to His people.


However, the problem is that some Christians don't know how to hear God; thus, they make their decisions like unbelievers. They live just like any other person; like a commoner, their day-to-day decisions are based on common sense. Some people have tried to hear God but finally bolted out when they did not hear Him speak to them. To have a successful marriage, the most important thing is to ensure that you follow His laid down principles of marriage. When we focus on His principles instead of our pleasure, we end up having a very satisfying and pleasant marriage.

DOES GOD STILL SPEAK?


“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Looking closely at the above scripture, you will discover that there is an intimacy, a cordial relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. The question is this: to what extent does God know you? To what extent do you also know Him? If you do not hear God, it means there is something fishy about your relationship with Him. **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.** Who do you follow? People who live in disobedience cannot hear God! The first

thing you should check, if you are not hearing God, is to check your obedience to the word of God. When you live in disobedience to God, you cannot hear Him. It is easy to hear God when you are intimate with Him. Let me tell you this, the unique thing about voice is that though two people may look alike but the way each person speaks is usually different. In fact, there are about 7 billion people in the world today but nobody speaks exactly like me! A trial will simply make you an imitator.

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The first thing you should check, if you are not hearing God, is to check your obedience to the word of God. When you live in disobedience to God, you cannot hear Him.

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My voice is unique to me and so also is yours. Look around, have you ever heard anyone speak exactly like you do? If yes, the person is only mimicking you because you are specially made. Voice is so much unique that when you are intimate with someone, you will recognize the person's voice anywhere he is speaking even among the crowd. Those who are close to me know that my wife has a pet name for me which even my children can identify. Likewise, God expects His children to identify His voice and hear Him when He speaks. My prayer for you is that you would be intimate enough with God such that you would be familiar with His voice (Amen). It is actually a terrible thing to be living your

life as a Christian and yet you do not hear God. You will not be able to enjoy God if you don't know His voice. The first thing about how God speaks is that it is unpredictable; you cannot dictate to God the way you want Him to speak to you. Nobody can predict how God will speak but there are some established ways in the scriptures by which we know that God speaks to His children.

a. AUDIBLE VOICE

The spectacular thing, though not common but still happens, is that God speaks with His own voice and sometimes it may be so audible or come as a still small voice.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

This establishes the fact that God speaks the way we also speak. Although, it may not be every time; it may be occasionally but He communicates with His own children. God may speak to you audibly or with a still small voice as in the case of Prophet Elijah. Let me say that even an anointed man of God does not always hear audible voice. Very few people can claim to have heard His audible voice but know

that God still speaks audibly to His people when He chooses to do so.

b. DIVINE INSPIRATION

“But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding” (Job 32:8).

When you give your life to Christ, your spirit is changed and taken over by the Lord. So, there is a spirit in every child of God which gives perception. If something is welling up inside you and every other voice is subdued; then you know that this is God. That is why sometimes, while someone may be ministering, he/she may just pause and give a word of knowledge. You might not have heard an audible voice but the spirit inside you might be giving inspiration. If you do not respond to this immediately, the anointing may not be there again when you leave because, at that instant, you are under the inspiration of the Almighty God.

The first day I met my wife, she came along with a friend of mine and the moment I saw her, I had an inspiration that she was the one I had been praying for. Although, it was not an audible voice but I knew it was not my own thought, so I decided to watch and find out. There is a spirit in you and the inspiration of the Almighty gives you understanding. Sometimes, it happens to me in my secular work. Someone may be discussing with me in my office, and the Lord would

just put something in my spirit and when I say it, it is always correct. You need to know God by yourself, relate with Him, be intimate with Him, then each time you have that inspiration, you will know that God is talking to you.

c. PEACE OF MIND

**“The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD,
searching all the inner depths of his heart”**

(Proverbs 20:27).

Can you imagine that? God has a lamp in you, which is the spirit inside you that He uses to search you. God works from inside of you not just from outside. Sometimes, you want to take a decision then you find out that you are troubled and restless in your mind. You may need to pause and go back to pray again. At another time, you may want to take a decision and you will just have peace in your mind even when you are under serious opposition and nobody is seeing your opinion as being reasonable. There was a time I was working as a pioneer Head of Department at the University of The Gambia. I kick-started the Department and my services were treasured so much that they gave my wife an appointment too. After about 6 months, I became restless in that place. Of course my lot was better there; I was even there with my family and we were having a swell time! Everything we needed for comfort was provided by my employer but my spirit was restless. So, I knew I had to leave despite the attractive offer of the place.

As soon as I made up my mind to leave, I had peace of mind. So, I wrote an application and got another job in Tanzania, East Africa; the University authority however informed me that my wife would not be given a job. On the other hand, everything we wanted was at our beck and call in the University of The Gambia. In fact, only three people were ahead of me in that University at the time, despite the fact that I was in my mid-thirties then. When I made up my mind to leave, everybody was asking me why I wanted to leave certainty for uncertainty; they said 'your life is settled here, your wife has a job.' Even my wife asked me whether I had prayed about it or not. None of my friends seemed to agree with my decision to leave The Gambia for Tanzania. As for me, anytime I thought of staying back there, I was troubled in my spirit.

On the contrary, anytime I pondered on going to Tanzania I was at peace. Even though going to Tanzania was still with uncertainties, yet I decided to go. I finally had to ask my wife and children to return to Nigeria for about one year. But when I got to Tanzania, I encountered favour in different dimensions; and was reunited with my family in due time. My wife also got a job there afterwards and everything was settled; I was actually flourishing there more than where I came from. When I thought we had settled down, the Lord asked me to leave Tanzania for Nigeria after two years in that country; meanwhile I had the option of going to another

country with a much better offer. When my friends heard of my decision to leave for Nigeria, they presumed I was being stupid. They wondered why I wanted to go back as the economic situation in Nigeria at that time was not palatable. But the Lord kept on telling me to return home. One day, I was walking home from my office when the Lord told me again to leave. When I got home, I told my wife that the Lord wanted us out of that place because our time was up. Thank God we obeyed, as soon as we came back to Nigeria; things began to turn around for good.

Peace of mind is one of the ways by which God speaks to His children. Anytime you want to take a decision and you are troubled, pray several times but if it is still not settled, just drop it. But when you want to take a step and you have absolute inner peace; even though things around you don't seem to agree, just go ahead. Sometimes, the reason we get confused is that we want to see everything but it is not possible. The Bible makes us to understand that *we see in part, we know in part and prophesy in part*, but we want God to tell us everything! God does not work that way. Following God entails following His instructions per time because He will lead you step-by-step. When God told Elijah to go to the brook of Cherith, He asked him to declare that there would be famine in the land for three and a half years. God reassured him of His care and presence, and instructed him that he should take water from the brook and ravens would bring

food for him. Elijah sat there as a VIP, God did not tell him the brook would dry at a point in time. But when he got there and the brook dried up, he did not start praying and fasting, otherwise he would have fasted to death. He was constantly listening to God Who told him thereafter to leave that brook and go to a widow in Zarephath. He did not argue but heeded His instructions.

Sometimes, when God tells you certain things; it may not be reasonable. Spiritual issues look foolish most of the time. For instance, the great miracles and deliverances in the Bible sound stupid. The parting of the Red Sea by a rod; the feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fishes; the birth of Jesus Christ by a virgin, etc. Most of the time when God speaks, we begin to analyze and rationalize His word with our senses. 'God cannot even pair us together. Do you mean that guy/lady? No, it can't be because I am too much for that.' When you follow God, your path would be remarkable and with time all things will ultimately become beautiful.

d. MEDITATION

God speaks through His word when you meditate on the scriptures. He will begin to speak to your heart. Remember when a wife was being sought for Isaac, the Bible records that he went to the field to meditate.

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even tide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw,

and, behold, the camels were coming” (Genesis 24:63).

If you can spend time meditating on the word of God, there is no way He will not speak to you. God has spoken to me through meditation several times, He would tell me some things and I would write them down. God speaks when you find time to meditate on His word.

e. HIS SERVANTS

God may send people to you but when He does, you too should go and pray on your own for confirmation. Sometimes, when God is telling you certain things but you are in doubt or not sure, He may send people to you to confirm or establish what He has said. While I was still *struggling* with God on whether or not to go into the Ministry, a man of God whom I had not seen or communicated with for several years just came to my office one day. He said he was on the crusade ground in East Africa when he saw me in a vision standing before a crowd of youths, preaching to them and their lives began to change. He didn't even know I was struggling with the call into the ministry at all, but God sent him as a confirmation of what He had already spoken to me. God sends people to confirm what you already know or what you are not yet sure of. But He may also send someone to tell you something you have never known or considered before. When this happens, listen to the person but pray on your own to confirm.

F. COMMON SENSE

God gave us senses for specific reasons. Supposing a seventeen-year-old boy who has just gained admission to study medicine in the University comes to inform me that God is leading him to propose marriage to a fourteen-year-old girl in the secondary school; do I need to pray about it? My answer will be **NO** because, I know it can't be God leading him that way. It is either he is wrong or the timing is not right. It therefore means that

God leaves some decisions for us to take at times. For instance, if I say the Lord woke me up this morning and told me to brush my teeth before leaving home for office, does God need to tell me that? No! Some people will want to show that they are very spiritual; they will say 'God asked me to wear a black suit and put on a black shoe. He told me to sit in the driver's seat and drive at

80km/h; He said I must eat rice for breakfast, pounded yam for lunch and bread for dinner'. They will want you to believe that God tells them everything and they don't take any decision of their own at all. Sometimes, God leaves some minor decisions for us to take. Although, at times He may interrupt us and say; 'don't eat, fast today!' but He will not



Sometimes, God leaves some minor decisions for us to take...He allows us some freedom with the hope that we would act responsibly under His sovereignty. God speaks through circumstances; all we need do is to be very sensitive.



dictate everything to us. He allows us some freedom with the hope that we would act responsibly under His sovereignty.

g. THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES

God speaks through the circumstances we go through. For instance, we were in the church one Sunday morning and the choir sang about *Heaven*. I had already prepared a message to preach that day but I felt a strong urge to change the topic to *Eternity*. Eventually I did and God used that medium to reach out to many who were playing with sin and they repented. God works through circumstances; He arranges certain situations to speak to you.

“...but time and chance happeneth to them all”

(Ecclesiastes 9:11).

Sometimes, God arranges time and chance to speak to us; it is now left for us to be sensitive. The problem is that most of us are not sensitive; we are waiting for Angel Michael to speak to us audibly. God may not speak in such classical way but may arrange situations and circumstances to speak to us. For example, if you are in a place of work where everything you do goes wrong, you may need to pray and ask if God actually wants you in that place. God may use situations and circumstances to speak and when those situations and circumstances arise, you need to pray about it to get what God is saying. A former Minister of Agriculture in Nigeria, Akinwumi Adesina (Ph.D), once shared his life story. He

actually wanted to be a medical doctor but when he wrote the first entrance examination; he was given admission to study Agriculture. He rejected it because his father was a very poor farmer and he didn't want the baton of poverty passed to him. He applied for admission the second time and he was again offered Agriculture and so he rejected it. When he applied the third time, he was yet offered Agriculture. He then decided to accept the course with a determination to put his best into it. He graduated with First Class Honours from the then University of Ife and later became a renowned Agriculturist all over the world. He is reputed to be one of the best Ministers of Agriculture we have ever had in Nigeria and was appointed the President of African Development Bank, immediately after his outstanding tenure as Minister of Agriculture in Nigeria. He might not have gone this far if he had become a medical doctor. God speaks through circumstances; all we need do is to be very sensitive.

h. VISIONS AND DREAMS

God speaks through the gifts of the Spirit, such as visions and dreams but I wish to add that we must be careful about dreams. No doubt, till date, God still speaks through dreams but when you have a dream, pray about it. Also, let there be an inner witness in you that goes along with what you saw in the dream. If you are fantasizing about a sister, you may go to bed and dream that you are walking together hand-in-hand. You may then wake up in the morning and believe that God has

spoken. No! God has not spoken, your thought has. When you dream, you may also need to authenticate it from others. The Bible makes us to understand that *out of the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth is established*, so don't keep your conviction to yourself.

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing; Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets”
(Amos 3:7).

God is not so secretive that He will hide everything from you.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

Are you a child of God? If you are, you must be led by the Spirit and you must hear God. Relate more with God; know how He speaks to you. When anybody comes to me and says '*God said this is who I should marry*'; I ask him how many times in the recent past has God spoken to him on non-marital issues. God should have been speaking to you on some other issues of life and not only on marital issues. It amazes me that someone who has never heard God over small issues now suddenly becomes a prophet on marital issues.

Grand Rules for Godly Relationships

We live in a world that operates on the basis of relationships. It starts from the family to the community, to the nation and then to the global world. Everything in this world is about relationships! However, relationship between young man and woman, male and female; especially singles is a delicate one in which there are a lot of pitfalls. But if we follow godly principles, these pitfalls could be avoided. Let me bring this to your notice; you may call most of the people you relate with your friends, but that is not the truth. There are majorly three types of friends we relate with on a daily basis but the mistake we often make is that sometimes we are unable to figure out the category our friends belong to.


TYPES OF FRIENDS

1. CONFIDANTS

Who are your confidants? These are the people who are sold out to you; they are sold out to your values, vision and aspirations; they bond with you unconditionally. These set of people are the most important people you can relate with in life.

**“A man who has friends must himself be friendly,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a
brother”** (Proverbs 18:24).

Sometimes, we think people who should be closer to us must be our family members. But the Bible is warning us that there can be a friend who is not your family member but can stick closer than a brother. Some people believe that their siblings

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should be their best confidants; that was the mistake Joseph made. He took his brothers as his confidants and therefore confided in them. But what happened? He was sold into slavery! Perhaps, the most spectacular example of a confidant in the Bible is the relationship between David and Jonathan.

“Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt” (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

The Bible records that Jonathan loved David as his own soul. I want to let you know that it is only God that sends confidants to you, it is not something you begin to look around for or make by yourself.

Confidants are ushered into your life by God because without them, you may not be able to make it to your destiny. It is true that David was ordained to be the king but he needed Jonathan for him to secure the throne. Do you know that without Jonathan, David wouldn't have made it to the throne? The throne actually should be Jonathan's but the Bible shows that he did something so



Confidants are ushered into your life by God because without them, you may not be able to make it to your destiny...David was ordained to be the king but he needed Jonathan for him to secure the throne.



significant. He removed his robe (honour), sword (authority), bow (strength) and even his girdle (defense); he ceded his throne to David. It was not David telling Jonathan to do that or manipulating him. Many people today want to manipulate other persons to believe in them as their friends. You cannot get confidants by manipulation or scheming, they are sent to you by God; the only thing you need is to recognize them, embrace them with both hands and never let them go by being careless. In fact, you must be loyal to your confidants.

“Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted greatly in David. So Jonathan told David, saying, "My father Saul seeks to kill you. Therefore please be on your guard until morning, and stay in a secret place and hide” (1 Samuel 19:1-2).

If David had died, who would have been the beneficiary? Jonathan, of course! Jonathan was supposed to see David as a threat to his inheritance but he was the one who went to reveal the assassination plot of Saul, his father to David. Confidants are not envious, rather they celebrate when something good happens to you; they also empathize and identify with you in difficult times. They are not just for the fair weather. They feel secured with you; they are not threatened by your progress, advancement, blessing,

promotion, fortune, lifting etc. Among all your friends; confidants are very few, so don't relate with people intimately when they are not your confidants. Only your confidants should know about your secrets; be vulnerable to them only. If you are vulnerable to just a friend, he/she will use your weakness against you and may eventually expose your weakness to the world. Confidants are very scarce that they could be counted on your fingertips. Anybody that doesn't have a confidant will live a very frustrated life. They are one of the special gifts God gives to His children. There is no single child of God for whom He has not ordained at least a confidant.

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5).

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were confidants to Jesus. Confidants are also people God has given to you to minister to you. We understand from John 11

that anytime Jesus Christ wanted to take a break; He would go to the house of Mary and Martha. Everybody saw Christ as the provider and the miracle worker, who would multiply two fishes and five loaves of bread to feed thousands. On the other hand, Mary and Martha knew



Confidants are not envious, rather they celebrate when something good happens to you; they also empathize and identify with you in difficult times.



that whenever Jesus was hungry; they had to go to the market, enter the kitchen and prepare food for Him to eat. Others saw Jesus Christ as the one who would turn water to wine but Mary and Martha would have to get to the field and gather grapes to prepare wine for Him to drink. So, if you don't have confidants; your life would be full of giving without anytime of refreshment. That is why I said confidants are one of the special gifts God has given to us and the relationship of confidants is marked by dedication, sacrifice and commitment. Thus, when you see confidants; appreciate them, don't let them go, bond with them, don't take them lightly, know that they are special gifts sent to you by God. You need to pray that God will send a confidant to you. Don't campaign or manipulate to have a confidant, it's one of the gifts that you need to have from God. Confidants are not quite easy to come by but they are very essential to the fulfillment of our dream and destiny.


2. CASUAL FRIENDS

These are actually not your friends but they are relating with you on the basis of some vested interests which are more important to them than you. They are also called 'co-travelers' since they play along with you for some reasons. This type of friends will hook up to you as long as their interest is served by relating with you, but if there is nothing for them; then they have no need relating with you. They actually don't identify with you as a person but with what you

have. That is why you see a young guy and lady *going out together* but later on they break up and each looks for someone else. For instance, a lady may be *going out* with a guy because of money or material things. However, the moment she sees another guy who is richer than him, she breaks up and hooks up with the new guy. Someone may need something from you but he/she knows that it won't just come easy on a platter of gold except he/she gets close to you. Unfortunately, many people take casual friends as confidants which is very dangerous. The truth is that once a 'co-traveler' finds someone else who can advance his/her interest better than you, he/she leaves you. But as long as his/her interest is served, he/she continues to relate with you as a jolly good fellow. One thing is certain, co-traveler will desert you when the weather is rough. Don't be surprised, we have a lot of them in the church!

3. COMPATRIOTS

These are people brought together by certain common cause, situations or conditions, therefore, they begin to bond together on this premise. If you are a student, your classmates are your compatriots but when you are through in school, everybody goes away. In compatriotism, the moment what brings you together ends; then that is the end of the friendship. You therefore need to know that compatriots will not be around you for long, they are just there for the passage

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In compatriotism, the moment what brings you together ends; then that is the end of the friendship. You therefore need to know that compatriots will not be around you for long, they are just... a bird of passage.



of time. Every compatriot is a bird of passage. In the church also, you can have compatriots brought together under the umbrella of a church or ministry. Once something takes you out of there, you may not relate with most of the church members any longer but when you see again; you hug, chat and depart.

When relating with people, categorize them into any of the three groups mentioned above. Are they your confidants, 'co-travelers'/casual friends or compatriots? There can also be conversion of friends from one category to another; someone who is just a compatriot can become a confidant.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip

called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:45-49).

In the above scriptural text, Nathaniel and Philip were just casual friends. Nathaniel started by questioning whether any good thing could come out of Israel. He tried to ridicule Jesus' background but eventually he admitted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. What happened? A conversion has taken place! Some friends can upgrade from co-travelers to compatriots and eventually confidants. Ensure that the people you tell your secrets and choose to be vulnerable to are your confidants. See others as either casual friends or compatriots and relate with them based on that premise until you notice a conversion taking place. If you do this, you will rarely be disappointed.

Principles of a Godly Relationship

In the previous chapter, we tried to consider the different types of people we call our friends. But after you have categorized your friends, what are the guiding principles that must be followed in maintaining a godly relationship? This is the question I intend to address in this concluding chapter.


A. Operate within godly environment

All your relationships with either gender should be operated within the boundaries of a godly environment. Sin can be avoided if you run away from a temptation-prone environment. For instance, it is not good for a brother and a sister who are engaged to go to a lonely place to have night

vigil. Though they have a good intention; they want to seek God's face but the chosen environment may make them to compromise. No matter the level of a relationship, make sure it is conducted within godly boundaries.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

The Lord made the Garden of Eden very beautiful and placed Adam and Eve there. Then He said to them, '**of all the trees in the garden do not eat from only this one, it is the tree of knowledge of good and evil; the day you do, you will die**'. At a point in time, Adam went about tending the Garden. One day, as Eve journeyed through the Garden; she was tempted by the serpent to eat of the forbidden fruit and also got Adam to eat of it. Some people argue about the ability of the *enemy* to lure them into sin when viewing pornography. They make seemingly reasonable excuses for viewing such. Eve did not start by thinking she wanted to eat from the tree

—  —	but started by appreciating it, trying to
<i>Familiarization</i>	familiarize herself with it.
<i>may eventually be</i>	Familiarization may eventually be
<i>followed by</i>	followed by intimacy. She should have
<i>intimacy.</i>	completely avoided going to the tree of

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knowledge since it had been forbidden by God.

B. Know that when relating with anybody, the devil is always waiting to inject negative ideas into your mind

In any relationship; whether husband-wife, male-male, female-female or male-female, the devil always wants to inject negative ideas into your mind and if you don't know the word of God or you are not on your guard, you may fall flat.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Genesis 3:1-3).

The devil knew that Eve had begun to visit the restricted environment; therefore he took advantage of her vulnerability by twisting the word of God while conversing with her. The enemy still uses this strategy successfully till date. He raises questions in our minds that cause us to doubt the word of God and also makes us to trivialize the word. In Eve's situation, God didn't say that they should not eat of every tree but of only one tree. Unfortunately, Eve continued

with the conversation and fell for the devil's cheap lie as he exploited her weakness. He injected a negative idea into Eve's mind and she fell for it.

C. Be vast in the word of God

Building a good relationship requires that you must be enriched and conversant with God's word. In believers' relationship, God's word must take pre-eminence because iron sharpens iron but if iron and wood come together, what will happen? Iron will cut the

wood! If it is iron and stone, what will happen? Stone will blunt the edge of the iron! In your relationship, whether married, engaged or in friendship; one constant thing that should never be missing is encouraging, feeding, and guiding each other with the word of God.




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D. Trust and Confidence

Trust and confidence are vital in the cultivation and maintenance of relationships and as such every effort should be made to build it. When I was a postgraduate student in the University, I had so many Christian literatures. Brethren would come to my room and pick some books saying that

they would return them the following week. I never bothered to write down their names and the book(s) they took because they were brethren. Unfortunately, before I knew it; I had lost almost all the books till date. This happened because we usually take one

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another for granted. You know it takes a long time to build trust but just one-time failure leads to betrayal. Gossip betrays confidence amongst friends and leads to withdrawal, hurt and bitterness. Do not betray confidence!

“And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary” (Acts 27:1-4).



In the above text, Paul was a prisoner at that time. In the course of his captivity, Paul had developed a relationship with

the captain. The captain unchained him, when they alighted from the ship at Sidon, so that he could see his friends though he was on his way to the prison. Paul went to his friends and came back afterwards. For many people, that would have been the opportunity to escape. Just imagine a prisoner to whom a warder says **go back to your home, when you are refreshed come back**. How many prisoners will come back? Many people will come and give testimony about how God had worked out a great deliverance for them after they might have run away to another country. Incredibly, Paul came back to the ship so that he could be chained again. Do not betray any confidence reposed in you. Many people will say *after all he/she is my friend, so I can do anything*. When you are in friendship, make sure you don't betray your friends' confidence or take them for granted, and learn how to relate with a person that consistently betrays your confidence.

E. Define the Level of Your Intimacy

Define the level of your intimacy with whoever you are relating with. Some people who are in the circle of your friends may be extremely possessive. If you are not engaged to a brother or a sister but work, study or read together, don't be too possessive as it may drive other people away; and this will be most unfair. Most brothers are guilty of this! They might not have proposed or been engaged to a sister, but they will *capture* her in such a way that even if any brother is seeing or

receiving any message from Angel Michael, he won't have enough confidence to go near. Don't be too possessive! That is why you need to define the level of your relationship. If both of you are not engaged, give him/her a breathing space, don't create a wrong impression. Even when you are engaged, you need to draw the boundary line. The fact that you are engaged doesn't mean you are already married. Never attempt to have a glimpse of the end of the process while the process is still on!



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*Never attempt to
 have a glimpse of
 the end of the
 process while the
 process is still on!*
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F. Clear Goal

The goal of your relationship should be clear to the two of you. If you are friends, then let it remain at friendship level. Some people are friends but behave as if they are engaged, some are engaged but behave as if they are married by wearing the same kind of dress. If you are friends, stay as friends; if you are engaged, stay as engaged; do not cross the boundary.

G. Avoid Suffocating Relationships


Avoid any relationship that is suffocating! When you are relating with somebody and it is becoming unbearable or too over-bearing, give it a break; it is not healthy. A good relationship

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*Relationship is not
 supposed to be slavery
 where one is under the
 captivity of the other.*
 —  —


is the one that offers mutual benefits. One should not be at the receiving end while the other enjoys every bit of the relationship. Relationship is not supposed to be slavery where one is under the captivity of the other.

H. Understand the Male-Female Differences

Know that there are biological and emotional differences between a man and a woman. This is a major problem which young people of today have; when you don't realize these basic differences, you will face a lot of problems. A man responds to sight, but a woman responds to touch. That is why a sister should not dress just anyhow. No matter the level of holiness claimed as a man, when you see a provocatively dressed lady; there is a tendency to have a second look even if it is just to confirm what you saw. That is exactly the biological make-up of a man! Therefore, as a man, be mindful of the way you hug; don't hug a lady who is not your wife as if she is. As a lady, if you dress anyhow all in the name of fashion, you will give a wrong impression of yourself.

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man!*

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Real guys actually know what they want in a lady who is a promising wife material. It is not about the dos and don'ts but about preventing what can cause trouble for you in the nearest future. A man is a *rational* being, but a woman is an *emotional* being; a man will say 'I think' while a woman will say 'I feel'. A man behaves like a predator while a woman is a weaker vessel. That is why as a lady, you need to protect yourself. Don't let a man prey on your weakness! When you dress carelessly, you are inviting the predators and you may not be strong enough to stand when they come in droves. The understanding of the male-female differences will help you to develop a healthy and godly relationship. It will help you as a man to mind the way you conduct yourself as well as the way you dress as a lady. A woman must avoid unnecessary touch while a man must avoid unhealthy sight.

I. Openness in Communication

All communication lines must be open. You don't begin to keep things which you should make open. Communication is more than the spoken word; it is not just about what you say. Communication is actually said to be about 40% verbal and 60% non-verbal. What is not spoken is more than what is spoken! When you are relating with someone, don't only listen to what is being said but be sensitive to what he/she is saying; the tone of the voice, facial expressions, body language and the totality of him/her because spoken word is only conveying just about 40% of the total intention. For

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instance, a guy may say: **waoh! that girl is cute!** That is what is being said but in his mind he might be saying the girl is sexy! He might also say '**I don't mind that girl**' but in his mind he is saying he would like to have a carnal knowledge of the girl. Thus, as a lady, if a guy is telling you **I'm dying for you** and you fall for it; you are being fooled. All the guy is saying is that he wants to sleep with you, so don't get carried away by that.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

J. Consider One Another in Love

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

In relating with people, consider what you think is good for yourself. Don't be so carried away to think about yourself alone and forget about others. Don't be self-centered.

If you follow the principles highlighted in this book, you are surely on the path of building long-lasting and godly relationships.

Final Words

Friend, I need to let you know that every human relationship ends on this planet. However, there is a relationship which outlives you, if you are connected with the real source. The fact is that Christianity transcends religion; it is basically a relationship! I mean it is an opportunity to relate with your Maker in the art of true worship and acceptable service. Are you connected with God? Do you really have a relationship with Him? Please, be sincere with yourself! Do not procrastinate the day of your salvation. **If you are not saved, then you are not safe!** Acknowledge that you are a sinner, confess your sins to God and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour. Perhaps, you are a Christian but your ways are not right with God, you need to

retrace your steps back to Him. Experience the eternally-rewarding relationship with Him. God bless you. Shalom!



BUILDING LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

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BUILDING LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

The concept of relationship was originally conceived by God who created Adam and Eve to live together in the beautiful Garden of Eden. Indeed, man was created as a social being who can neither live alone nor exist singly. It is a fact that the life span of a house depends, to a very large extent, on the depth of its foundation and the quality of materials used. Thus, a number of chapters in this book delve extensively on *love* as the foundation for building virile and long-lasting relationships. The book expounds on dimensions, attributes and expressions of love. It specifically considers God's ultimate desire for brotherly love and what constitutes barrier to it. Worthy of note also, in the book, are the specific godly principles for marital choice in order to avoid regrets later in marriage. Overall, **"Building Long-Lasting Relationships"** provides practical teachings on having healthy interpersonal relationships in our contemporary society. It is, therefore, recommended for everyone who wants a relationship that will stand the test of time.



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