



A 21 DAY JOURNEY

ON THE ROAD TO
I Da

KEMI OYEDEPO

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I Do

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KEMI OYEDEPO



Introduction

Marriage will be one of the most frustrating or exciting and fulfilling experiences in your life, depending on what you do on your way there and while you are in it. The aim of this e-book is to help you understand what areas you really should be paying attention to as far as marriage is concerned. It will help you whether you are single or in a relationship, put things in place as you are on the road to 'I do'.

One of the aims of CPYF is to equip you by giving you whatever is necessary to help you have an enriching time in your marriage and family life. This e-book is very dear to my heart; the contents of it are excerpts from a heavenly inspired book that will be released in the future. I pray that what has been put together for you will be a blessing to you. Remember to share it with others so they also can be blessed.

I am confident that it will add so much value to your life as you prepare for this lifelong journey of marriage. As you read it, I pray that your mind is renewed and your heart is receptive.

I'm so excited for you!

May your life and ultimately your future marriage, give others hope and light, and more importantly, point them to God, through Jesus Christ!

Blessings,

Kemi Oyedepo

DAY 1

The Journey To 'I Do' Begins With You... YES, YOU! (Part 1)

I'll begin this series with this statement that I often make when it comes to marriage – the quality of the individuals in marriage, determines the overall quality of the marriage. The core of your usefulness in your relationship and ultimately, in your family unit, lies in your understanding of the fact that the marriage you so desire has everything to do with you.

Regardless of what stage of life you may be at now, you need to know that you are the one that God desires to use to build an enviable home. In fact, you are the instrument He needs! I'm not talking about a mediocre or average home, but one that would be a positive reference point and give hope to others. You may be 100% single now or you may be in a relationship working towards marriage; either way, you are at the perfect place to do what is required to become a high quality husband or wife.

1 Peter 2:5 tells us that we are stones, living stones. To construct any building, stones are not optional. However, the quality of every building is determined by the quality of the materials, including the stones used to construct it. I don't know about you, but I have personally seen brand new buildings that look beautiful on the outside but after taking a closer look or stepping into the building, things are not as they seem. Something is breaking down, walls are cracking, or the roof is leaking. It's a brand new beautiful building so why should things be breaking down so quickly? It goes back to the quality the materials; it goes back to the type of raw materials used!

That scripture puts it this way:

“And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.”

I'll like you to leave this first day with this thought – I am the raw material required for the construction of my home. When you truly believe and accept this truth, the journey to 'I Do' will be a pleasant one.



DAY 2

The Journey To 'I Do' Begins With You... YES, YOU! (Part 2)

"For most people, a glorious home excludes their input. That is, they have such a beautiful picture of how their family will look like, but once you try to insert them into the picture, everything goes downhill. Until you address the individual you can't address the problem"
– David Oyedepo Jnr.

My husband's words have never been truer. I often meet single ladies and gentlemen, who genuinely look forward to such a beautiful family life and believe that everything will just fall in place by God's grace. While God's grace is a major requirement - in fact we cannot do without it, our input is also a determining factor in our experience. Many of these single ladies and gentlemen have even gone further and have told me point blank, "I don't want to work for it".

My father-in-law gave my husband and I one of the greatest advices before we got married and, till this day, we still make reference to it. He said, "Nothing works unless you work it. If you want your marriage to work, you must work for it". He also reminded us that a successful marriage and family life couldn't be inherited; each person must put in their own labour. This all goes back to how well cut we are as living stones (See Day1)!

If you look at 1 Kings 6:7, we are told about the temple of the Lord which King Solomon was building. That verse says, "The stones used in the construction of the temple were finished at the quarry, so there was no sound of hammer, ax, or any other iron tool at the building site." The stones were prepared at the quarry! A quarry is a place where stones and other raw materials are extracted.

I want you to pay particular attention to that scripture; it would help you. It stated that after the stones were prepared and used on the building, there was no noise at the building site! So, as living stones, if we prepare ourselves well in the 'quarry' when we begin to build our homes, there should be no noise. Only peace, serenity, and stability!

I like to say that it's better to work the hardest before marriage, not while in the marriage. If you do what you are supposed to do before saying, "I do", if you consciously work on becoming a high quality individual, if you'll just get rid of some of those traits, character issues and habits, and if you allow yourself to be cut and shaped appropriately by God, there shouldn't be any noise in your marriage. If there is noise, something is wrong somewhere.

I'll like you to leave you with this question – How is your time at the 'quarry'?

DAY 3

The Journey To 'I Do' Begins With You... YES, YOU! (Part 3)

Unfortunately, there are a lot of marriages filled with so much noise because of a lack of preparation (See Day 2). The truth is that anyone who is not properly prepared and shaped for marriage, his or her age or experience notwithstanding, will still make noise (sometimes too much noise!) in marriage.

The shaping and cutting of any stone will definitely cause frustration if it is not done at the right time. Many husbands and wives today are still being shaped and cut although the building of marriage has already started; so, they are under intense pressure. They are unable to fit together because they are misshapen stones that missed their time at the 'quarry' altogether.

I am confident that God has everything it takes to restore any home as long as the individuals are cooperative. So, I am in no way trying to make light of any marital issue that some people may be going through. However, to you as a single lady and gentleman, you can avoid it altogether if you use your time at the 'quarry' wisely.

In Exodus 20:25, God told Moses how the temple of stone should be built. He said, "If you use stones to build my altar, use only natural, uncut stones. Do not shape the stones with a tool, for that would make the altar unfit for holy use."

There was a reason why God told Moses not to cut the stones. He was saying that there is a specific way those stones must be shaped so they can be fit for a particular purpose. In the same vein, there is a purpose for marriage as ordained by God. So, that means you also must be shaped correctly if you will be fit for the purpose of marriage. The truth is that at one point or the other the noise of cutting must be heard, and it is better early than late. It doesn't mean work stops when you get married because building a marriage and family is WORK and it is for life. However, when you are prepared and armed with understanding and wisdom from God's Word, your experience in marriage must be fulfilling, despite the 'hard' work required.

Leave this third day with this thought – On a scale of 1-10, how fit am I for the purpose of marriage?



DAY 4

CLEAN UP (Part 1)

As a believer, you are a living stone; so, you are not supposed to be like any other individual out there. There is something unique about you. Ephesians 2:10 clearly states this: “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago”.

That sounds great, doesn’t it? Of course, it does! You and I were created to be His masterpiece. A masterpiece is defined as a work of outstanding artistry, skill, or workmanship. So, you are meant to stand out and there is no better time to begin standing out than now, while you are still single. However, I have to tell you that your usefulness in God’s hands is determined by one major thing: your sanctification. Yes! Your cleanliness is actually what determines your usefulness to God. Simply put, sanctification means cleaning up, and it also means to be set apart for holy use.

A beautiful picture is painted in 2 Timothy 2:19-21; it says, “But God’s truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: ‘The LORD knows those who are his,’ and ‘All who belong to the LORD must turn away from evil.’ In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work”.

God wants to use you to accomplish amazing feats that would point others to Him, but you have something to do. You have to consciously get rid of some weights in the form of bad habits, negative traits, and destructive behaviors that are weighing you down and making you unfit for His use. Anything that is affecting your spiritual growth is for the trashcan! You may be wondering why this is important for you and how it is needful for your journey to “I Do”. Well, remember it is the quality of the individual that determines the quality of the marriage. And as stated on Day 1, YOU are the instrument God will use to build a beautiful home. Cleansing your life and focusing on Him is what will make you useful in His hands now, and ultimately in your marriage.

Remember the inscriptions on the foundation stone in that scripture?

- 1. The Lord knows those who are His,**
- 2. All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil/sin.**

Leave Day 4 with this – Yes, He knows those who are His. Are YOU confident that you are His? If you are sure you are His, then point 2 is needful.

DAY 5

CLEAN UP (Part 2)... RUN FROM YOUTHFUL LUSTS

2 Corinthians 6:17 tells us this: *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”*

Come out, and be separate! Be different! Be unique! Be fit for the Master’s use! Any stone that remains defiled will lack use. On any construction site, there are useful materials and waste materials. It’s the unfit/unusable materials that are often called waste materials. It means they are not needed to accomplish the task at hand. Likewise, with God, it is the stones that are clean that He considers needful and fit for the task He has at hand.

So, you must organise yourself to become useful in His hands. Until you take responsibility and clean up, you may remain frustrated in life and ultimately in marriage. You may be wondering what exactly you need to do to clean up. If you look at verse 22 of 2 Timothy 2, Apostle Paul gives us the answer:

“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.”

I want to focus on three points:

- a. Run (not walk, not stroll) from youthful lusts.**
- b. Pursue these four things: righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace.**
- c. Enjoy the company of those whose hearts are pure towards God.**

Let’s look at the first point. Simply put, lust means to have a strong craving or desire for something. It is usually associated with sex; however, it’s much broader than that. I consider lusts to mean anything you yearn for; something that stirs a passion in you that more often than not, doesn’t add any value to you, and negatively impacts your spiritual growth. The term ‘youthful’ is not just for those who are young. Really, many of us (if we are honest with ourselves) have gone through a phase of youthful lusting at one point or another, age notwithstanding.

You alone know your area of lust; it could be sex, drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc. These things should not be taken lightly. That’s why you and I are told to literally RUN from them. It’s important to use your single days to invest the most into your relationship with God. So

many single ladies and gentlemen are already entangled in the web of youthful lusts. If you are, you have to consciously make a U-turn from that destructive path. It may feel so good to engage in these lusts or it may seem like so much fun in the moment but it ALWAYS leads to regrets. Instead of following the crowd, separate yourself and let your light shine brightly.

Don't allow the devil to keep you bound, thinking you can never be free. He doesn't want you to be useful to God so he'll try to make you accept his lies as truth. You have to take the step to come out; God is ever ready for you. Whatever your lust may be and no matter how far you have engaged in it, please don't condemn yourself. It's never ever too late to get on the right track with God. Wherever you have made an error, go to God and allow Him to clean you up and make you a brand new stone. God's grace is available in abundance and the blood of Jesus is there to cleanse you from head to toe, but your willingness to come out and be separate is key, because He will not force you.

Please note that when He sets you free, don't keep going back to your past. Flee from places and people who draw you back and hinder your progress; receive grace and begin to walk in the light that you have found. If you are in a relationship with someone who is pulling you further away from God, don't be sentimental about it; that relationship needs to become history. Any relationship that is not positively impacting you, most especially spiritually, is not worth continuing. That may seem harsh but it's true.

Leave today with this thought - I cannot afford to be perverse. I must maintain a sanctified and clean life because it is vital for my life and ultimately, my marriage and family.

DAY 6

CLEAN UP (Part 3)... Pursue Righteousness and Faith

In 2 Timothy 2:22, Apostle Paul gave Timothy two major requirements in that scripture we looked at on Day 5. He admonished Timothy to flee and then to pursue. It is not enough to flee from something, you must also pursue after something else because whatever you flee from must be replaced. In 1 Timothy 6:11, Timothy was also told to run from certain things and pursue righteousness and a godly life, among other things. Pursue means to go after something hard; it means an unrelenting chase. Paul told him to remove his eyes from youthful desires, and to go hard after righteousness, faith, love and peace. Let's look at the first two.

Righteousness

Righteousness has been defined as being in right standing with God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that once we become born again, we have been made righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ. Once you believe with your heart that Jesus died on the cross, and rose from the dead, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, your salvation is secure (Romans 10:9). However, it is needful to still pursue righteousness in order to promote growth in your Christian journey. I consider chasing after righteousness to mean chasing after God's nature, desiring holiness more than any fleshly indulgence out there. Righteousness is one of God's most prominent attributes (Psalm 145:17) and we can only begin to exhibit His nature when we wholeheartedly chase after it. How?

In Colossians 3, Paul states that once we put on the nature of Christ, we must consciously 'put to death' certain traits that are contrary to God's nature such as anger, abusive language, malice, etc. Such traits are contrary to righteousness; for example, James 1:20 tells us that human anger does not produce the righteousness of God. I'm sure you know that anger or hot temperedness is a MAJOR problem in many relationships and marriages. In fact, most of the traits he lists in that chapter are rampant in many families. So, as a single lady or gentleman, you must work on pruning away traits that do not demonstrate the nature of God in you.

Most husbands and wives say the universal phrase, "That's how I am; accept me like that", but I have to tell you that's unacceptable. As Christians, our goal should always be to become better from the inside out. Remember, the scripture says you must thoroughly purge yourself (See Day 5). God doesn't want to leave us the same way He met us; the desire to please Him should always be our goal. It's true that we can't do this in the energy of our flesh. That is why the Holy Spirit is there to empower us; and we'll look at the place of the Holy Spirit further along in this series.

Faith

I often like to say that as believers, everything rises and falls on faith. This is the summary of our Christian journey, isn't it? It's all about faith. Pursuing faith is also about growing in faith because faith is in levels. Faith is a non-negotiable factor in your walk with God, and many situations will come to test the faith you claim to have. I often like to say that the testing of faith usually multiplies in marriage, so you cannot afford to relax. You must consciously keep growing.

My husband says that your faith is what really determines the direction of your life, and God can do nothing without your faith. It is what gives us the assurance about things we cannot yet see but we believe will happen (Hebrews 11:1). It's important that you strive not just to have faith, but also to keep increasing and developing it in order to overcome the challenges of life now in your single season, and ultimately in your marriage.

I hope you can now see the place of righteousness and faith; keep chasing after these two on your journey to 'I Do'. Both are non-negotiable if you desire to become and remain a useful tool in God's hands

Day 7

CLEAN UP (Part 4)... Pursue Love and Peace

As a single lady or gentleman who truly desires to be used by God as an instrument to draw others to Him and to build a quality home, certain things cannot just remain a part of you. As I have stressed since Day 1 of this series, as an individual you matter in the building of your marriage and family. The grace of God is already available, what you do with it, determines your experience. We have looked at two of the four vital points that as a Christian, you must never stop chasing after as seen in 2 Timothy 2:22 (See Days 4-6). Let's take a look at the final two: love and peace.

Love

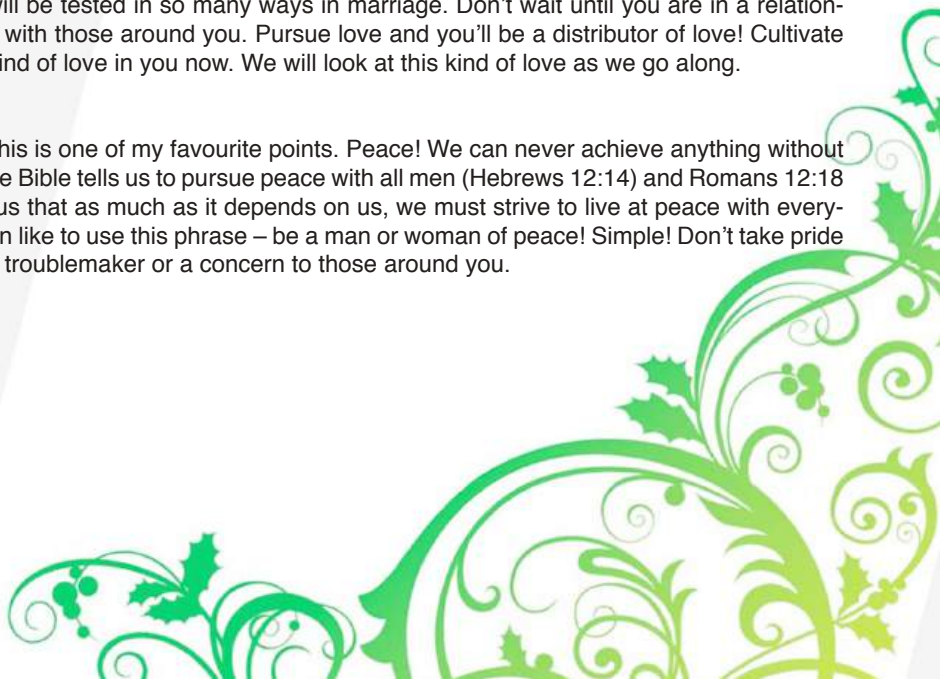
You know this: God is love (1 John 4:8)! The more we pursue God; love has no choice but to become our identity. The Bible tells us that it's actually the most important requirement because nothing can work, not even faith, without it (Galatians 5:6). In this day and age, love is interpreted in so many ways that many singles have such a warped definition of it.

I have come to learn that love is simply all about demonstrating God's nature to another person. I don't really know any other way to define it. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, we see everything that love is. It's so much deeper than human love. Human love has its limits; to love like God demands much from us because there would be times you really don't feel like loving. That's why; again, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is required. It is that empowerment that helps us to love each other deeply (1 Peter 4:8).

As a single individual, now is the time to work hard on allowing this kind of love to find expression in your heart because trust me, the love you claim to have for your potential spouse, will be tested in so many ways in marriage. Don't wait until you are in a relationship; do it with those around you. Pursue love and you'll be a distributor of love! Cultivate the God kind of love in you now. We will look at this kind of love as we go along.

Peace

Oh yes! This is one of my favourite points. Peace! We can never achieve anything without peace. The Bible tells us to pursue peace with all men (Hebrews 12:14) and Romans 12:18 also tells us that as much as it depends on us, we must strive to live at peace with everyone. I often like to use this phrase – be a man or woman of peace! Simple! Don't take pride in being a troublemaker or a concern to those around you.



There are so many people that are men or women of war; they are never at peace when there is peace. There is always something wrong; even when all is well, they look for what can be used to cause contention or strife. If you are like that; caution! It is not a good trait and you should not be proud of it. When I have met some single ladies or gentlemen who are troublesome, I don't need to be told any other reason as to why they are not in a relationship leading towards marriage. NOBODY wants a contentious partner. That's why you find that a husband does not like being around his wife or vice versa because he or she knows they should be prepared to contend in battle when they are together. Don't misunderstand me; it doesn't mean issues should not be discussed; however, there is always a right way to handle issues while still promoting peace; that is wisdom!

In fact the Bible says that it is hatred that stirs up strife (Proverbs 10:12). It is a hateful person that enjoys war. Pursue peace! Pursue peace! And, pursue peace! Jesus is the Prince of peace; if you are really chasing after Him, it must reflect. If it is not reflecting in you, please check yourself.

I always tell singles that when you are praying for a life partner, on the top of your list should be "Lord send me a man/woman of peace", and "Lord make me a man or woman of peace". One of the things that drew me to and keeps me glued to my husband is that he is a man of peace; in fact, he is immune to drama and that enhances my own peace of mind. And, his peaceful nature has rubbed off on me! Don't carry on in a relationship with anyone who enjoys fighting and arguing; contrary to popular belief, it is not normal. We'll discuss this on another day. The point here is that no matter what, in life and in marriage, if there is no peace, there is nothing. So we must pursue it with everything in us.

Check yourself! Are you a peaceful and loving person? You know yourself. Be humble enough to admit the truth and let the Holy Spirit help you become better. Even if you are indeed peaceful and loving, there can never be too much of either one so remain empowered to keep demonstrating both traits to those around you, and carry it into your marriage when the time comes!

Day 8

GOT VISION? (Part 1)

We have discussed quite a bit about certain crucial points that make you useful to God as you are on the road to 'I Do'. I've reminded you that you are the one who determines the ultimate picture you get, of your marriage and family; God's side is already settled. I have also reminded you that if you are to be useful to God, you must clean up from the inside out. This will enable you to know God deeper and exhibit His nature, thereby causing you to live your life to the fullest on earth. See Days 1-7 for clarity.

Among the most critical things required to live a fulfilling life is vision. Every one of us is destined to fulfill a purpose on earth but we cannot do so without this critical force of vision. Vision has been defined as the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. Vision is also the unfolding of God's agenda concerning you; it is divine insight into God's plan for your life. I consider it as the ability to see the future through mental pictures. Every human being needs a vision. Someone once said, "A man (or woman) without a vision is a man without a future. A man without a future will always return to his past". This applies to women too! Not a single one of us came to earth without a purpose or assignment to fulfill. Jeremiah 1:5 says, "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations." I believe that scripture applies to each one of us in our own unique way.

We will get to the point in our lives when we must answer the question, "What exactly am I here for"? You were not created just for the fun of it but to fill a void somewhere. As believers, our very first ministry or assignment on earth is to point others to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21); that is general to us. However, you and I were also created to fill a specific need somewhere. That is where our fulfillment is and it is our responsibility to locate that place and know the steps we must take to get there as God is leading us. One great thing about having a vision is that it gives a sense of direction; it also boosts our effectiveness in life.

Vision keeps reminding us that there is somewhere called forward. In fact, any organization that intends to be sustainable has a vision statement and a detailed plan on how to achieve that vision. They must know why the organization exists in the first place. In the same way, you and I must know why we exist and believe me, as a single lady or gentleman, NOW is the time to locate the answer if you are yet to do so. I have met singles that have made up their minds to wait until they get married before they would begin to seek what their assignment in life is. That is in essence saying that marriage is more important than your destiny, when it is not. Marriage adds to our fulfillment on earth but it is not the most important requirement to live life as God has ordained. If it was, I believe most of the scriptures, and even Jesus Himself would have focused on it.

It's true that some individuals don't locate their purpose until they get married for some reason or another, but that doesn't mean that that path should be taken on purpose. You should seek to know God's agenda for your life whether you get married or not, and irrespective of when you do get married. So, locate your vision and do it quickly, then begin to make motion towards it. Marriage is wonderful but don't let it overshadow the reason for your existence.

It's important to note that any vision God gives must be towards people; whatever you believe God is sending you to do must affect somebody else positively. If it is all about how you'll achieve this and that and how it'll make you feel good and accomplished, it can't be from God! You need to go back to Him for clarity.

As we go along, we'll discuss some vital steps to take as far as vision is concerned.

Think on this: Have you located why you are on earth yet? If so, what do you see? On The Road To I Do



Day 9

GOT VISION? (Part 2)

It is vital that you locate your vision and walk in it because one of the most critical points you will use to identify the person to marry is clarity of vision. If you have not located vision by the time you are located for marriage, you will look like a misfit. Before you begin a relationship with any lady or gentleman, just as you should be sure of where you are going, you must also be sure of where he or she is going. My husband often says, particularly to single ladies, that marrying a man who has no clue where he is going is a dangerous thing. He likens it to getting on a bus that has no destination; in other words, it's going nowhere. Even if they are still trying to figure it out, at least they should have a 'sketch', for lack of a better word. Don't say it's not a big deal. Men and women who are presently married to spouses who have no direction, wouldn't tell you it's an exciting place to be.

You should be able to pass your vision across with clarity and confidence. You also need to fully understand what he or she will be offering the world. What problem do they believe they are here to solve? When I ask individuals where they see themselves in five or so years, I'm not convinced when they give a general answer like, "I see myself doing big things" or "I'll be rich". Doing what specific big things and in what industry? Engineering? Media? Medicine? Be clear! Nobody becomes a billionaire or impactful by dabbling in different sectors or by simply confessing it; there is always something specific that brought about their impact. I'm sure you've heard this statement – if you don't know where you are going, anywhere will look like it to you.

Ask each other specific questions, write down and compare. Go to God and ask Him to show you how you fit in that person's vision or purpose. He has what it takes to show you things to come and your place in it (Jeremiah 33:3). There is no assignment that God gives that cannot flow together; so, even if you are not going to be working together, do you still buy into their vision? Do you support the vision? Is there any way you can add some kind of value to the vision? If you don't believe in their vision, don't carry on with the relationship and don't get married to them. Unfortunately, there are many individuals who know that they couldn't care less about what their potential husband or wife is doing; yet they carry on and then become a thorn in their flesh in the marriage.

Some don't want to call off the relationship because of the length of time they have courted. Please know that the length of time you have been in the relationship is not relevant; being fulfilled in marriage while fulfilling your destiny is more important. Besides, marriage is meant to boost your destiny, not stagnate it. So, don't force yourself into someone's vision and don't let anyone force himself or herself into yours.

My husband and I courted for four years and within the first 2 years; we had discussed our plans and visions with each other and felt we were on the right track. However, close to three years into the relationship, he sought the face of God and was called into full time ministry. He discussed this new direction with me. Although I was convinced that God had validated him as my choice for a husband and he felt the same way, he told me to take some time to pray because his vision had changed. His point was that I needed to be sure I could fit into his life as a pastor's wife since that was not the original plan, to us anyway. When I came back to him with a positive answer, he detailed everything and told me the specific directives given to him by God. I don't pastor with him now but I am 100% for his vision, and God has shown me how to add value to him and fit perfectly in his vision in my own unique way. In the same way, he has been a helper of my destiny and supports my God given pursuits, as I need him to.

Take the time to really seek God so He can show you things concerning your future as an individual first and then as a couple when the time is right. Then, be ready to take the necessary actions concerning the vision. If you are really not sure, don't wallow in frustration; get some counsel so you can be guided properly. Be careful not to associate yourself with big dreamers and 'no action' type of individuals, whether as friends or as a potential spouse, and be careful not to be such an individual. Don't keep dreaming and confessing what God has said He will do through you, forgetting that the actions you take or don't take determines the results you get. No dream or vision can ever come to life without your input. We would discuss this further as we go along.

Watch yourself! Do you take steps on the dreams/vision that you have? Watch your potential spouse! Does he/she take steps on the dreams/vision that he/she has? Or is it all talk?

DAY 10

GOT VISION? (PART 3)

It's important to remember that the vision God gives to you is for an appointed time (Habakkuk 2:3). It won't happen overnight; there is a process it must follow. You need a blueprint or design plan first and then, like a builder, you can begin to take the necessary steps to see that blueprint come to life. What you must do, among other things, is enjoy the process and don't be in such a hurry to get to your destination.

If you move too quickly, you will more than likely miss some critical steps in the process and that will negatively impact the vision. Write the vision down, put the plan in place and then place it back into God's hands for safe-keeping and continuous divine guidance. Make sure it is clear enough and you can pass it across to others with confidence. When you get married, your spouse won't be able to run with something they don't understand. It's important to also remain spiritually sensitive because the vision will keep evolving. Also, be careful not to put your own ambitions ahead of God's instructions.

When it comes to your potential spouse, don't set your mind on ready-made men or women. That is a mistake too many people make. There is nothing wrong with courting and marrying an individual who has already attained success; however, don't be bent on doing so at all cost. If it happens naturally, great! However that's not the only path to take on the road to 'I do'. Don't despise a potential spouse's present level or their vision. The fact that he or she is not yet there should never be reason enough for you to ignore them. Remember that though their beginning or your beginning may look small, in your latter days, there shall be great increase (Job 8:7).

As long as they have a God given vision and they are ready to run with it, the provision will always follow and at the end, the vision will speak. As stated earlier, one of the critical things you must do is pray concerning how you fit in (see DAY 9). You never know how your input will add so much value to their vision, causing it to take flight. One of the exciting things about marriage is that you get to assist in bringing another person's vision to life. If you are there from the days of little beginnings and you are present while it unfolds; that's exciting! So don't look down on that process as it concerns you or your potential spouse; you'll be better for it.

Capturing the vision is great, but taking responsibility to run with it is even greater. We'll discuss this next!

Food for thought: Have you written your vision down? Have you written out the process to get there as you received it from the Holy Spirit? Is it clear? Are you running with it? Will your potential spouse understand it?

DAY 11

GOT VISION? (Part 4)

We have established that as you are on the road to ‘I Do’, a vision for yourself, as well as for your potential spouse is vital. Guess what! It doesn’t end there. A vision for the marriage and family you intend to build is absolutely needful if you want to enjoy God’s best. In other words, have a picture of what your marriage and family should look like. Even if you are not yet in a relationship, know what you want. Then, when you start courting someone, both of you should paint pictures with the scriptures so that you can see where you are going as a couple and as a family.

Many singles have the ultimate goal to get married and have children but few see beyond that. Don’t just look forward to having a marriage like everybody else; take time to pray so that God can show you specific things concerning your marriage and your future. I’ve heard people call it “the purpose-driven relationship” and I quite agree with that.

Yours, especially as a Christian, should have a purpose. It should be a positive reference point, a unique marriage. One that people will look at and know of a truth, your relationship is like no other. One thing my husband and I agreed on very early on in our relationship was that our marriage, even our courtship, will stand out from day one and we agreed to give it all it will take while we rely on God’s help. In fact, we accepted early on that this marriage is bigger than us; it’s more than just us finding fulfillment and enjoying life. It must point others to Christ and give people hope.

Having such a vision has boosted our effectiveness and continues to bring out the best in each of us, and ultimately, the marriage. To some it’s not that serious but to us, it is absolutely that serious. We are absolutely not perfect BUT the vision keeps us in check!

Accept that you are both flawed and so you will make some mistakes, but agree on how you will handle each other in the marriage. Discuss at length and assume nothing. Ask often overlooked questions and agree on the answers you will run with. For example, know what your family dynamics will look like. Don’t assume that because your father did things

a certain way, your potential husband will automatically do the same. As a man, don't assume that your potential wife will do things the same way your mother or any other lady you know does things. In fact, the fact that you are both from the same country, and speak the same language, doesn't necessarily mean you will see eye to eye on all issues. Let's take it further; the fact that you are both Christians doesn't mean you will automatically agree on the major issues of life. Discuss and discuss! Assuming will always lead to frustrations. When conflicts arise, how will you handle each other? Yes, challenges will come but how you handle each other determines whether your home will fall or keep standing (Matthew 7:24-27).

If you find that you don't agree on critical issues, wisdom demands that you go your separate ways. I often like to say that marriage is not a problem solver; it actually magnifies problems. Therefore, if something poses as a dividing force in courtship, don't expect that when you get married, it'll dissolve. It won't! Division means that there is more than one vision, which means you will be heading in different directions. If you go in different directions in marriage, you will suffer strain and eventually become torn apart. It's better to nip it in the bud before marriage than deal with it later in marriage.

As you work on the vision, be mindful of those you allow in your space. There are those who will discourage you and tell you that marriage is a necessary evil; don't allow them to sow such seeds in your heart otherwise you may begin to accept that as truth and it will affect your experience. Those who use God's Word as their guide to tackle any issues and maintain peace in their homes, are the ones who should have your attention. Whatever you do, don't draw up the vision for your family based on what others have done in their own families. Yes, use positive examples as your guide but remember that you are unique individuals, so you cannot do EVERYTHING exactly like another couple. What may be working perfectly in one relationship or home may backfire in another. Have your own specific family vision and be prepared to run with it wholeheartedly. With God on your side, you will succeed.

Do you have a vision for your future family? If you are in courtship, do the both of you have the same vision?



Day 12

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY (Part 1)

Someone once said that responsibility is the price you pay for greatness. That is to say that anyone who ever wants to be great in life must be willing to pay this price that comes with that status. Responsibility has been defined as the act of being answerable or accountable for something or to someone. In essence, you are answerable for the outcome of your life. Remember that as a living stone, God requires that you purge yourself so that you can be fit for the Master's use (See Days 4 -7); that requires taking responsibility. Also, when it comes to searching out your purpose, getting your God given vision and running with that vision, responsibility is required. And of course, to build your home according to God's divine pattern, you must be responsible. So, taking responsibility is not negotiable if you want to enjoy God's best in life.

Too many of us wait for God to do everything; then we get frustrated and even angry that nothing is happening. The fact that you are a believer doesn't excuse you from doing what is needful. The fact that God has given you a beautiful vision for your life and family, doesn't excuse you from doing what is needful either. I often hear individuals make this statement - "God will give grace" to do a particular task while they do nothing. Then months or years later, they are still saying, "God will give grace". I'm usually tempted to ask, "So when exactly will God give grace?" Don't misunderstand me; God's grace and help are absolutely vital in the race of life; I am a big recipient of both. However, I have learnt that God always gives capacity for anything He has called us to do. He gives the grace in abundance, in fact; so, it's not really about Him giving grace, He has done so already. However, while the grace is there, you and I must maximize that grace by taking responsibility to do the task or we won't see results no matter how much we talk about His grace and help.

Concerning faith, my father-in-law often says that any faith that makes God absolutely responsible is an irresponsible faith. Meaning, God's part is there and our own part is there. You can't bring a vision to life by joking around and confessing or wishing it into existence. You can't build a formidable family life with a care-free attitude either. Do you remember the advice he gave my husband and I before we got married? (See Day 2). Exactly! Nothing works unless you work it!

As a single lady or gentleman, NOW is the best time to begin to work it! NOW is the best time to become responsible in your various tasks and assignments. No one should have to chase you about or monitor you in order to get things done. That's for children; a time comes when you just have to put away childish behaviors and attitudes. Children are generally irresponsible; it comes with the territory! Remember Apostle Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Some traits are the exclusive rights of children and when they are found in an adult, it's an eye sore. He or she is automatically unattractive because no one wants to do serious business with or marry a child. This great force of responsibility must be put to work. It is what pushes us to give our best in what we do, professionally and personally. We'll discuss this further.

Search yourself! Are you irresponsible? Are some childish traits still in you? Take responsibility and prune them away by the help of the Holy Spirit. If you allow them to linger, they will negatively affect your life, and ultimately your marriage.

Day 13

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY (PART 2)

Taking a cue from what we discussed on Day 12, I want you to know that an irresponsible man or woman will not automatically become a responsible husband or wife. It is a decision that you have to consciously make and take steps towards actualizing. No one is born responsible; it is proven. As you work on yourself, don't carry on in a relationship with a man or woman who has shown you that they are not ready to be committed and do what is required of them in their various tasks and in marriage. An individual that is not committed before marriage, won't become committed overnight just because you have said "I Do".

If he or she would rather not be accountable to one person and may have expressed this in one way or another, please save yourself the impending heartache and headache. Yes; give room for growth and positive change in them but if it's not happening, don't feel obligated to marry them, **NO MATTER WHAT!**

Be observant; do they take responsibility when they do or say something hurtful or wrong? Or is it brushed off and swept under the carpet? Just as you are willing to become a better person, are they willing to do the same? Don't carry on with your eyes wide open; the Bible calls that foolishness (Proverbs 22:3). In many marriages, one or both people have refused to take responsibility for anything so they remain in crisis. The husband speaks without thinking or the wife is full of pride. The wife refuses to submit or the husband refuses to love. Both of them can see it's negatively affecting their marriage and family but neither of them are willing to compromise. In fact, not only is that irresponsible, it is also very immature.

I always say that it's the maturity level of the individuals in marriage that determines their experience; it's not really their age. I'm sure you have met young mature and responsible individuals. In the same vein, you may have met older irresponsible and immature individuals; those that you expect should know better. The older ones may be celebrating their age but it's not evident in their output.

Your age notwithstanding, you have to stop behaving like a child; grow up! Stop saying that's how you are. Anybody can change for the better. Take responsibility for your words, your actions, and your life! Stop whining about what people are not doing for you. There is a great example of Jephthah in Judges 12:1-3. The Ephraimites were questioning Jephthah as to why he fought the Ammonites without their assistance and this was his response: "When I saw that you would not help me, I put my life in my hands and went to battle without you, and the Lord gave me the victory".

Do you see that? After he took responsibility, God gave him the victory. He wasn't hanging around waiting, but instead he made a decision to be responsible for the outcome he desired. So stop pointing fingers and do the needful; put this force to work!

Note to self: If I refuse to pay the price for greatness in my life and in my marriage, I would remain frustrated.



Day 14

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY (Part 3)

"You can't fly higher than how much responsibility you place on yourself" – David Oyedepo Jnr

The above statement carries a lot of truth and this has been stressed since Day 1. In fact, I've told you that the journey to 'I Do' actually begins with you. Anything you want to see in your life and ultimately in your marriage has a lot to do with you. Taking a cue from that statement, I want to remind you of a few points:

1. Pay enough attention to yourself in order to change yourself (2 Corinthian 13:5). Don't spend your time examining others at the expense of yourself (Matthew 7:3-5). Something critical to note is this: don't make yourself a fault-finder. Such people always find faults in EVERYTHING and EVERYONE. NO ONE likes being around such a person. Listen! Human beings (including you) will make and even sometimes repeat mistakes, so you must learn to be tolerant.
2. Nobody can run your vision for you like you. That is why you must be clear about the direction God has ordained for your life to go. And you must be able to pass it to others very clearly, particularly your potential spouse who is to help you.
3. When you take responsibility, God becomes committed. Your commitment to running with a vision fuels His commitment. Remember Jephthah? (See Day 12) God gave him the victory as he began to move. No matter how great the vision is, until you take responsibility, you will experience stagnation and frustration. The truth is that many are failing, not because they are not anointed, not because they are not chosen for a task, not because they cannot do what it takes to make their marriage work, but because they lack a sense of responsibility.
4. A sense of responsibility keeps you focused. Apostle Paul knew all about responsibility. Concerning his assignment of preaching the gospel, he said necessity is laid upon him, and had the guts to say, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). That's sounds to me like: "How dare I not preach the gospel when I have the light that people need?" That's the force of responsibility at work - it keeps you focused; nothing else is an option! That's how we all should be with everything that concerns us. Whether they liked him or not; whether they thought he was qualified or not, he was determined to do what was needful.

5. God cannot be left at a standstill. If you don't take responsibility and begin to move as He directs you, He has what it takes to get someone else to do the job.

6. Taking your responsibility seriously makes you refuse mediocrity and failure as an option. It makes you give your very best!

7. It is only when you take responsibility, that your vision in life and in your family can enjoy motion. This has been a clear message that has run through from Day 12 to Day 14.

As I have stated throughout this series thus far, in order to build a glorious home, YOU must start as a glorious stone. Take full responsibility for you part, and allow God to shape you so you can bring out His glory.



DAY 15

THE NECESSITY OF SELF-DISCIPLINE (Part 1)

Self-discipline is important in any endeavor of life. From work, to school, to family life; without it, success cannot be attained. We have discussed the need to put the force of responsibility to work (See days 12-14), and a proof of doing so is self-discipline.

Self-discipline has been defined as the ability to distinguish between what is profitable and what is not, and then subjecting one's self to the profitable things. It's also strict training that corrects or strengthens. I consider self-discipline to mean denying yourself of certain pleasures with the goal of refining yourself, or simply giving up the desired for the needful in order to attain a goal.

The truth is that too many people have lost their place in life, destiny and even in marriage because of a lack of self-discipline. Just as I said that an irresponsible individual would not automatically become a responsible spouse, the same applies here. A single lady or gentleman, who is not disciplined in various compartments of his or her life, cannot make a value adding spouse, no matter how much they desire or even pray for it. After praying, action is required otherwise you'll make no progress.

Self-discipline affects everything! From the food you eat to the places you go, to those you spend your time with, to even the words that you speak. You have to have a standard for yourself no matter what others are doing. There should be things that are never identified with you. You have to be able to say a loud NO to some things no matter how great the urge or desire may be within you. I know some of those things may not be bad or sinful BUT do they add any value to you? That's what you need to ask yourself each time you want to do something.

Apostle Paul said it best: You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. And even though 'I am allowed to do anything,' I must not become a slave to anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12, NLT). In other words, anything I cannot say "No" to is my master! Imagine that! Harsh but very true words. No one has ever become great by not letting go of some things; it's impossible. Throughout this series, I have echoed it so many times - as a single person, NOW is the best time to get yourself under control, otherwise it will affect everything about you including your marriage and family. We'll discuss some vital areas of self-discipline as we go along.

Remember this: The discipline of your life is what determines the outcome of your life!

DAY 16

THE NECESSITY OF SELF-DISCIPLINE (PART 2)... WITH TIME!

Becoming a self-disciplined individual is a gradual process especially if you are the kind of person who easily gives into your cravings, whatever they may be. However, no matter how many times you fall, you must be determined to overcome that craving once and for all. It takes some of us longer than others to become disciplined in certain areas of our lives but you must never allow that to deter you. Just be determined to give your best to it; remember the discipline of your life determines the outcome of your life, family inclusive.

Let's look at one of the crucial areas that self-discipline is required: TIME!

You may have heard it before that time is the most valuable resource in life; no words could be truer. In fact, time is everything! Time is something that we never get back; all we can do is refer to the time past but we can never relive that exact moment again. I believe that's why we must be conscious of it. The scriptures tell us there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1) and as a single lady or gentleman, you must be conscious of the time or season you are in now and give it your best.

There is a saying that time is either spent or invested. I strongly agree with that statement. To spend something means to use it up or exhaust it. That means you can't get anything back from it. However, to invest means that although you may be expending resources, you do so with the expectation of a good return. In the business world, its call Return On Investment (ROI). If you use up a few hours to do something and you cannot see anything tangible from it, your time has been spent or perhaps wasted. However, if you are able to produce tangible results that actually move you faster to your desired goal, you have invested time. Unfortunately, many of us are guilty of wasting time and that has affected our experience in life.

To become disciplined with time, you need to set specific goals and then decide how much of the 24 hours of your day will be invested into each task. That means you have to know how long you will sleep for, pray for, exercise for, cook for, relax for, talk to others for, etc., whatever you do! Don't waste your time watching television shows for hours or checking up on everything happening on social media. Remember not everything is expedient! Be conscious of how much time you devote to anything you engage in.

A disciplined person is time conscious; they don't like wasting time and they won't allow anyone to waste their time. No one should be able to disrupt your plans unnecessarily. For

example, you may have planned to invest your time doing certain things and a friend calls you up to go here and there with them. A disciplined person or one who wants to develop themselves, will quickly decline. However one who has not mastered the art of discipline, will put his or her plans aside to go about town and at the end of the day, he or she will have no fruitful results.

Don't be easily swayed. Disciplined people don't do things anyhow; they distinguish themselves by the habits they develop. That's why it's important not to hang around or get married to those who are going nowhere or those without a vision or sense of responsibility because self-discipline will be the last thing on their mind. If you carry on with them, you will find yourself in their shoes. Don't carry on in a relationship with a time waster. If that man or woman is playing hide and seek games with you, what are you doing still hanging on? He/she is wasting your time!

Even when it comes to preparing for marriage, there is a time to do it. There is a time to prepare well and there is a time to enjoy the benefits of your preparation. When in courtship, you are either spending or investing your time and the results will speak for themselves. I often like to say, you either pay now or pay later (in marriage). The choice is yours.

If you feel like you have wasted time, don't worry. God has everything it takes to make it up to you, but remember your input is required. Maximize the grace available to become and remain disciplined, and He Who has the ability to restore and even recreate time, will do it for you!

Come to a point where time is too valuable to you; it'll make you do things at the right time. Remember that time waits for no man. Begin to develop habits one day at a time; anything that will become a part of you must be done routinely. It won't happen overnight. Don't be hard on yourself but don't relax either; keep demanding more from yourself. The more you stay focused and keep at it, you'll find that it will help shape you into an effective single and ultimately an effective spouse.

Reflect on this: What are you doing with your time? Spending it or investing it?

DAY 17

THE NECESSITY OF SELF-DISCIPLINE (PART 3)... WITH PLEASURES

One of the areas where many individuals get distracted is the pleasures of this life. It's most prevalent now in this generation where too many things are calling for our attention. It's so easy to get caught up in various seemingly enjoyable things that divert our focus from what's most important. You must be careful with what you entertain so you don't miss out on what God has in store for you.

I'll like to focus on some specific areas that trap many of us. It's not an exhaustive list but I believe just about everyone can relate to these points.

Food: Believe it or not, food has been the downfall of many, even Christians. It actually has a lot of power over individuals and if you are not disciplined, it can control you and even cause you to sin. For many (not all) individuals who have health challenges, it began with food. Your health needs to be in top shape if you are going to be useful to God. Be conscious of what you eat, when you eat and how much you eat; don't allow just anything to go into your mouth. When food is eaten without restraint, it affects weight and health and I also believe it affects spirituality because an individual who is not disciplined with food, cannot fast. I have heard people say fasting is not for them! Discipline your belly; food is good but you should be able to do away with it for a period of time. If you are unable to fast due to legitimate reasons, that's understandable.

I am referring to those who can do so but refuse to, because they simply cannot abstain from food. Don't let your belly be your god (Philippians 3:19). It may not seem like a big deal now that you are single but it would flow into your marriage and family so work on it now. Don't marry someone who has no control over his or her appetite either. It may look cute and funny now but trust me, when you are in it, you won't even be smiling.

Money & Material Possessions: Money is vital for living but you must be careful to ensure there is a balance. It's impossible to chase after money and also claim to be chasing after God. Many in this generation, see how others are living, flaunting their wealth and they want to join the bandwagon so they try to get money at all cost. All they have on their mind is money. The love of money always leads people to do evil things, and when people crave money they wander from the faith (1 Timothy 6:10). No matter how much money you have, if you don't have God, you have nothing. If you don't know how to control your urge for money now, you will do some things when you get married that will have serious consequences on your family. Many marriages and families have been ruined because the husband or wife was a lover of money. Don't marry someone who is chasing after money; you'll regret it!

Even as you have money, manage your money properly; be prudent! Don't be a waster. Don't buy what you don't need. Create a budget and discipline yourself to maintain it. It doesn't matter how much money you have, learn to not give in to the lust of your eyes and your flesh. The Bible tells us that such things are from the world and not from God (1 John 2:16). Some people have budgets but don't put it to work. They are up for anything. They see some nice clothes or shoes or whatever, that are trending and jump at it. Believe me, if you don't know how to manage money now, you will waste money in your marriage and that will only lead to friction. Imagine a frivolous spender being married to a saver! This is one of the reasons why money is a major issue in many marriages. Be wise! Remember not all things are expedient.

The truth is that an individual who cannot manage his or her money properly is usually covetous. Anyone who is caught up with having possessions is covetous and Jesus sternly warns against this (Luke 12:15). Your life is not measured by how much you own. A man or woman cannot claim to be spiritual and covetous; it's impossible! Don't maintain close relationships or get married to a covetous person. You may think it's so cool now but it won't be so funny when you are married. Such a person can easily spend the funds required for the family on material possessions! What a disaster!

Sex: As a single lady or gentleman who is born again, you shouldn't even be tampering with sex or anything close to it at this point in your life. Sex is sacred and it is exclusively for the married as prescribed by God. I'm not interested in what the world has to say about it and you shouldn't be either if you want to remain pure. Too many singles have been caught in this web, especially in this generation. You get to a certain stage in your life where your hormones begin to rage but you must learn to discipline your body and keep it under (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Many who engage in sexual intimacy before the right time have a very hard time stopping except by the grace of God. If you have not engaged in it yet, please guard yourself and keep yourself for your future spouse. Be mindful of the things you allow into heart and be careful with those you spend time with. If you are in a relationship with someone who is nagging you for sex; take to your heels! Listen, they don't love you, they are lusting after you; period!

If you have engaged in sexual intimacy before for whatever reason, I'm not a judge, go to God and ask Him for forgiveness. He is faithful and just and He alone has what it takes to cleanse you of all unrighteousness BUT as we have said before, you must begin to take responsibility so you don't fall again. If necessary, seek godly counsel to help you get back on track. Remember that sexual sin is against your body and your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so glorify God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

If you're going to indeed be a living stone in God's hands as we have discussed since Day 1, you have to refrain from the desires and appetites of your flesh by disciplining yourself. It's doable with the Holy Spirit and we'll look at the role He plays in our lives as we go along!

DAY 18

THE NECESSITY OF SELF-DISCIPLINE (PART 4)... WITH EMOTIONS

The Bible talks a lot about the importance of getting a grip of our emotions effectively. In other words, this is what we call self-control. Self-control is simply the ability to manage your emotions and behaviours. I consider it as the ability to discipline myself so I don't act on impulse. Managing our emotions can be a tough task. Many of us genuinely want to be in control of the things we say and do, but it always seems as if something or someone somewhere is ever ready to test us! You have to come to a point where NO ONE has control over your emotions but you. Our emotions are displayed in our words and our actions, so let's look at these two.

Words: Learn to discipline your mouth! If you want to avoid trouble, you must watch the words that come out of your mouth. No one enjoys being around a person who doesn't think well before speaking. The truth is that many homes have broken down particularly because husbands and wives don't place a guard over their mouths. Don't be the kind of person who speaks without thinking of the consequences. One of my favourite scriptures says that it's a fool that speaks without restraint (Proverbs 29:11).

If as a single lady or gentleman, you don't know how to carefully select your words with those around you, how do you plan to speak to your spouse or children?

One thing I hate with a passion is to hear people say, "That's how I am". That usually tells me that such a person is unwilling to change. The Psalmist had to say, "Take control of what I say, O LORD, and guard my lips" in Psalm 141:3. That sounds like someone who wants to change. No matter who you are talking to, learn to speak words of life only. I have learnt that we can all actually control our mouths if we really want to.

The same husband that abuses and shouts at his wife at home, can keep himself calm at work when his boss offends him; what a paradox! It's a choice. He believes he can get away with talking to his wife anyhow but if he does the same with his boss, the consequences won't be funny; all of a sudden he knows how to remain calm. See? It's a choice! The Bible says that reckless words pierce like a sword but the tongue of the wise must always bring healing (Proverbs 12:18). It doesn't mean you won't be upset at certain things and it doesn't mean you should not speak the truth; the point is that you have to learn to calm down before you speak so you don't say something you'll regret. And remember, you must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:19). If you are in a relationship with someone who wounds with his or her words and is unwilling to change, think twice! If you get married to such a person, you will be miserable. It's not a curse; it's the truth! I pray God helps your understanding.

Actions: Your words are just as important as your actions in life, and in the making or breaking of your relationship or marriage. Do you know people who, when they get upset or things don't go their way, they throw tantrums, throw things around, or even begin to beat up or slap a person? Yes! Such people are not in control of themselves. You should work on yourself if you are that way. It's a fool that gives full vent to his anger but a wise person keeps himself or herself under control. Don't allow your emotions to produce negative actions from you. Otherwise, you'll be like a city whose walls are broken down (Proverbs 25:28).

As I have told you before, such behaviour is the exclusive rights of children and after a while, they are expected to grow out of it. Again, don't marry an individual who is like this; the price you will pay won't be good. They have shown you that they don't know how to behave; they push you, they shove you, they slap you and you still go ahead and marry them. That is unwise! What do you expect in marriage? Whether it's the man or the woman, a person who claims to be mature, should be able to get a grip on their emotions. In fact, someone once said, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them". Don't say they will change. See the change first. Yes! The truth is that even in marriage, they may actually change for the better but you don't determine when that change will come. So unless you are ready to devote your energy and time to praying and fasting on this issue in marriage, my counsel to you is don't go ahead! You are free to do as you please but remember that a wise man foresees danger and keeps himself but it's a foolish one who sees that same danger, keeps on going and is punished (Proverbs 22:3, Proverbs 27:12). May God help your understanding.

If you are going to be useful to God in your assignment and in your family, disciplining your emotions is non-negotiable. Many have lost out on their destinies and ruined their marriages because they refused to control themselves. People will offend you and sometimes, you will be the offender. Your spouse will offend you and at other times, you will be the offender. However, it is important to be aware of yourself. The greatest help is the Holy Spirit, so rely on His help and begin now while you are on this road to 'I Do' so that you get a head start!

Reflect on this: How well do you manage your emotions?

DAY 19

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS

One of the greatest things you can ever do for yourself is have a mentor or mentors if necessary. A mentor is one who is there to teach you, guide you, counsel you, keep you accountable, and keep you aligned with what is required of you in order for you to attain success. It's unfortunate that in this generation, everyone wants to do things on their own. Many individuals don't want to be answerable to anybody. That's actually an expression of pride and even foolishness. Proverbs 1:5 says this - "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance". So, it's actually wisdom to have someone instructing and guiding you!

As you are on this road to 'I Do', attach yourself to someone who has what you desire and someone you know will not lead you astray. There is nothing wrong with admiring what others have obtained by God's grace in their career, family, in their spiritual life, and otherwise. Someone once said that what you don't desire, you don't deserve. So don't despise what you see but be inspired by it, and find out what they are doing or have done to get what they have.

In your desired career or ministry, for instance, who do you look up to, far or near, that has already accomplished your vision or something close to it? You may not have physical access to them yet but I am sure you can find information about them and some of their achievements through various avenues. Be inspired by what you know about them now and let it guide your own actions in your field. Don't let it stop there; ask God to show you how you can improve on what that mentor has already done. If it's in your relationship, do the same. In fact, before you get married, please make sure you are speaking to someone. No serious relationship should be hidden.

A few things to do:

1. Be prayerful about who you follow concerning the various compartments of your life. The fact that a person may be an accomplished pilot does not mean that person will give you the best relationship advice. The fact that he or she is wonderful doesn't necessarily make them the right mentor for you. Be prayerful!
2. Be ready to receive some hard truths about yourself. A mentor is not meant to treat you like a baby or a friend, who says sweet things to you. For example, we have discussed responsibility (see Days 12-14) and the necessity of self-discipline in various areas (see Days 15-18). A good mentor is there to help shape you appropriately in line with these points and others but he or she cannot do so by focusing on not wanting to hurt your feelings.

3. Be ready to stretch. Mentoring has a purpose and the purpose is positive growth. It would demand more from you than you may really want to give. However, you should never remain the same when you come in contact with a mentor. If you are the same after days, months or even years, you have wasted your time. It is wise to rethink that relationship!

4. Be observant. Most people that mentor have so many other things they are doing so they may not be able to sit down with you 24/7 or they may not be where you are. A lot of the learning you may have to do is by observing them and if that's the case, no problem; make the most of it. We actually learn a whole lot by watching others.

5. Be sensitive. If a mentor is not adding any value to you and if your life, relationship, etc are worse off since that relationship began, wisdom demands that you end that relationship. Don't carry on unnecessarily because you will be losing out on time.

6. Learn from their mistakes and right choices. If a person tells you what they did that caused them to fail whether in marriage or in career or any other area, that means you shouldn't fail because you know what not to do. For example, I'm a big believer that if you are actually learning about certain things to avoid before marriage, you shouldn't experience them in marriage. If you do, you only gathered knowledge but you didn't have understanding. If you learn about the secrets to their success in their profession, you have no excuse but to be successful! Many gather information, get counseling and still repeat the mistakes of others; that should not be so.

7. Be inspired. In fact, any relationship that doesn't inspire you should end. You should be able to have a mental picture of the possibilities by looking at your mentor(s).

8. Whatever you do, remain humble and remain teachable. That's the only way the grace of God will keep flowing in your direction. And remember, once you stop learning, you start dying (Albert Einstein). Let me chip this in - don't marry someone who is not humble or teachable!

My husband often tells single ladies and gentlemen to never marry an individual who doesn't have a mentor or someone who they are answerable to. I support that counsel 100%! If that man or woman has nobody they can pinpoint to that adds value to them and can correct them at any point in time, be careful. Don't say it doesn't matter, please! In marriage, you will find that it absolutely matters. He or she would not always do what you like and may even make some wrong career moves. If they won't listen to you and they won't listen to anybody else, that's a recipe for disaster! The Word of God tells us about the importance of counselors (Proverbs 15:22, Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 11:14), etc because they are needful in this journey of life. While the Holy Spirit is helping you, don't disregard the importance of a mentor.

Reflect on this: Do you have a mentor for the various areas of your life? How's it going?

DAY 20

THE PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Anyone who knows me, knows that I don't know how to speak about anything, including marriage, without talking about the place of the Holy Spirit, our dependable helper. I strongly believe that no one can make it through life or build and maintain any marriage without His input, direction, guidance, and instructions. No one!

Really, the Holy Spirit is not optional for any Christian who wants to get the best out of his or her spiritual journey. If Jesus needed Him, it'll be foolish of us to think we can scale through without Him. Everything Jesus did during His time on earth was accompanied by the anointing of the Holy Spirit that was on Him (Luke 4:18). Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, life will be a burden. He alone has what it takes to remove every trace of sweat and stress.

As a single lady or gentleman, it's important for you to take the time to build yourself up in your spirit man now, it'll help you in not just growing, but in taking crucial decisions about your vision as we have discussed in this series, and even concerning a potential spouse. Too many people miss it because they allow their emotions to get in the way so they become insensitive to what the Holy Spirit is saying concerning any matter. If you are sensitive to the Spirit, you won't need to go about looking for who will validate your choices because the Holy Spirit will tell you by Himself.

There are a number of benefits of having the Holy Spirit but I'll just list a few.

1. He teaches (John 14:26). He is there to teach us all things including what we need to know about what is required of us in all our endeavours, and marriage too. One of the reasons for strife, chaos and confusion in many relationships and marriages is that they lack knowledge so they are in captivity (Isaiah 5:13). But, if you take advantage of the presence of Holy Spirit, the Ultimate Teacher, you will have the information you need to make the most of your experience.

2. He boosts our understanding (Isaiah 11:3). He doesn't just teach us, He has what it takes to make us of a quick understanding and understanding is what establishes any home (Proverbs 24:3-4). While knowledge has power, I believe understanding has more power. We know a lot but until we actually understand a matter, it makes no difference to us. It is the understanding of marriage from God's perspective that will cause us to put in our best and get the best out of it. And, that's where the Holy Spirit comes in.

3. He guides us (Romans 8:14). He is the most authentic navigation system. When you are moved by His direction, you must enjoy ease; you won't struggle. Things flow naturally and

everything that concerns you, from your career to your academics to your family life, is tension free. Ensure you are following His directions step by step when it comes to choosing a potential spouse. I always admonish singles not to be overly sentimental about marriage. No matter how much pressure you feel is on you, remember that it is better to get it right. In fact, I always go further to say it's better to be joyfully single than miserably married.

If you have a very clear conviction from the Holy Spirit not to get married to an individual, no matter how emotionally attached you may be to that person, don't go ahead. Remember the Holy Spirit sees all things and knows what is to come. You may not see it now but He is protecting you from something. Many married couples chose not to heed His instructions for whatever reason and are paying the price today. I am yet to meet one who has said it's an enjoyable experience. God has everything it takes to restore any home. However, for you as a single person, you have every opportunity to get it right from the beginning. That is why we must keep heeding to His leading otherwise there will be frustration! Listen, that man or woman may be so nice and wonderful but if you are not at peace, take caution! And if you are really not sure, get across to a godly mentor or counsellor for guidance.

One major proof that you have the Holy Spirit is of course the visible expression of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We've discussed the need to get rid of certain traits that are contrary to the nature of Christ but you can't do so without the help of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who helps our weaknesses (Romans 8:26) and helps us mortify or kill the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13). And if you are indeed conscious about killing the deeds of the flesh, peace must be your experience. To be spiritually-minded produces life and peace but when one is carnally minded, death is the experience (Romans 8:6).

I say this a lot - Marriage is spiritual and we cannot build it or maintain it in the energy of the flesh; it requires the utmost spirituality. So where a couple is indeed spiritually minded, peace must be the result. If fighting and arguing and bitterness and unforgiveness, etc are normal in any relationship, the individuals cannot claim to be spiritual because those results are contrary to what the Holy Spirit produces. Keep building yourself up by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20), so that any negative trait can become a thing of the past for you, and so it doesn't affect your experience as you are on the road to 'I Do' and ultimately when you get there.

If you feel as if you need more understanding on this subject, don't wallow in ignorance, seek counsel as we have discussed (See Day 19).

Do you see how needful He is? I hope you do. His presence is what makes the difference. Keep craving for Him and don't make any move without Him so you are not full of regrets later. As you give Him His place, may the last regret you had, be the last one forever.

DAY 21

ON A FINAL NOTE...

For 20 days plus 1, I have given you, by the inspiration and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, a number of points that I am confident are value-adding to you on the road to 'I Do'. I clearly focused more on you as the individual because you have a huge part to play in the building of the home you dream about. Remember my statement from day one - it's the quality of the individual that determines the quality of the relationship and ultimately the marriage; it doesn't get any truer than that! The emphasis is on YOU because many people forget that their input matters.

I believe that marriage can either be the very best or very worst experience of your life depending on how you handle it. It can also bring out the very best or the very worst in you, depending on how it's handled. Of course, God's desire is that it adds much colour and beauty to your life but He can't do it for any of us. The same way God won't take your exams for you in your academics or professionally, and He won't run with your vision, He won't do what is required of you in marriage; He'll only do what is required of Him.

I'm rounding this series up with a few things I want you to consider when praying and looking out for a potential spouse. And while you pray and watch, ensure that you are also working on yourself so you also can be a desirable spouse. You may think of others but I am sure they fall into one of the points below. If you also go through all the days, there are many others I listed directly or indirectly!

1. A Christian with proofs. Anyone can claim to be a Christian these days. So, I mean the one who exhibits the nature of Christ. That means he or she will love like Christ, forgive like Christ, be patient like Christ; he or she will be a man or woman of peace; the list goes on and on. That is one who loves the things of God with passion, you won't need to drag them along to pray, study the Word, etc.

In fact, I always tell singles to marry a man or woman who will still love God and focus on Him whether they marry you or not. I've said it before - give room for growth but if the person is clearly not interested in growing spiritually and considers it burdensome, please loose them and let them go! A word of advice to the single ladies: don't marry a man who is not spiritually sound!!!! I mean it!

2. The one who understands God's intentions for marriage. This is a big one! Not the one who thinks he or she knows what marriage is about but the one who gets it from God's perspective and is willing to do his or her own part. There was a couple in pre-marital counselling, and the man said to the counsellors and to his fiancée, "Listen! I know God

expects me to love like Christ but I am making it known now that I can't do that. I will only love as best as I can". Needless to say, they didn't get married; good for both of them! If he loves her like that, it means his love will run out because human love has its limits!

When it comes to my husband and I, it's the love of Christ that binds us together and I mean it. We clearly love each other but we're human and our love has the capacity to fail. However, if we choose to express the God kind of love, our love can't run out. We'll be stretched, yes! But, it'll bring out the best in us, and ultimately our marriage.

No matter how nice, wonderful and even loving any individual may be, marriage is the ultimate test! I believe that a Christian marriage should actually draw others to Christ and glorify God. So, you shouldn't just enter into marriage without understanding. Be willing to lay down your will and take up God's will and you'll have the best of experiences. Remember, it is one thing to know and it is another thing to understand.

3. The one who will enhance your destiny. Some people are genuinely nice and loving but they really don't add value to you. Don't just pray for a nice person; ask God for a value-adding husband or wife. Be mindful of who you join yourself to; I can't stress this enough! We've talked about the importance of running with a vision (See Days 8-11). Do you know that who you join yourself to determines the direction of your life? There are people whose visions have been delayed or halted because of who they married. I heard of a husband who once said about his wife, "That woman set me back in life". When I think of that statement, I get goosebumps! God has what it takes to restore and rebuild any home but for you as a single person, you can still get it right from the beginning. So, pray and watch for someone who will add value to your vision and give you the necessary support to bring it to life.

Please note that God will not force you to marry anybody. Even when it comes to marriage, you have a choice, and even when He clearly tells you a lady or gentleman is your wife or husband, He won't force you to marry them. He also gives options but the choice is ultimately yours. You may see certain ladies or gentlemen who have the qualities and traits you like, your task is to pray and ask God to validate that choice or uncover any reasons not to go ahead with the relationship. Remember the place of the Holy Spirit (Day 20). Whether you believe God has specifically told you about an individual or He validates your choice, it doesn't mean you don't have work to do to enjoy the relationship and ultimately the marriage.

Regardless of your age or stage in life, while you are on this journey, it's important not to allow depression or frustration to set in. People may be putting a lot of pressure on you or you may even be putting the pressure on yourself. Listen, you need to enter your rest! Stressing out over it has not and will not add any value to you. God is not blind and He has the best in store for you. Keep your heart fixed trusting in Him; He has said He will grant you the desires of your heart (Proverbs 10:24) and He is not a man that He should lie. He

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