

LIVING WORD BOOKS

MENSA OTABIL



CHOOSING A
LIFE PARTNER

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Introduction

One of the greatest things in life is to love and be loved. Love is a universal subject which is expressed in different ways in different languages and cultures. Many songs, poems and several pages of books have been written about the subject of love. Award-winning films and songs have sought to explore, explain or demystify the subject of love. Every human being has the desire to love and be loved. The Bible describes as most wonderful, the way of a man with a virgin (Proverbs 30 v.19). Not surprisingly, some of the most heroic, and also the most atrocious acts in the world have been committed in the name of love. Perhaps the strongest description of love is found in *Song of Solomon 8:6*, which says “... *love is as strong as death.*”

The institution of marriage is intriguing because it offers the opportunity of sharing your pleasures and pains with someone you love and want to live with for the rest of your life. One of the most common preoccupations of many, especially young people, is to find a partner for a permanent union. Many do so successfully and go on to live very fulfilled and happy lives. Others make choices that seem appropriate but which turn out to be disastrous in the long run.

Since a marital partner is someone you intend to spend the rest of your life with, it is essential to identify the right qualities in the person you want to marry. Genesis chapter 24 provides a useful scriptural guide in looking for a life partner.

Looking for a Life Partner is Serious Business

¹Now Abraham was old and well advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all he that had, “Please put your hand under my thigh, ³and 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; ⁴but you will go to my country and family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” Genesis 24:1-4

Abraham sent his oldest servant on oath, to go and look for a wife for his son Isaac. Selecting a life partner is not a trivial or passive issue. It is one of the most important decisions a person may have to make in life. Abraham recognized how a partner could make or unmake the life of his son. He therefore decided to rely on the good judgment of an experienced person; someone who had served him for years and knew the values he held in high esteem and would not compromise on.

In choosing a life partner, it is essential to dwell on wise counsel instead of on your own imagination. It is therefore helpful to tap the experience and guidance of the elderly so that you avoid making unnecessary and regrettable mistakes. Apart from your parents, you can get help from godly persons who are older than you and who you trust are uncompromising on issues of faith and discipline. These are mines of wisdom often willing to allow you to dig into the wealth of their experience.

There are seven (7) essential ingredients, attributes or issues worth considering in looking for a life partner. These are:

- Common faith
- Divine guidance
- The ability to share
- Responsibility
- Attraction
- Knowing the family
- Acceptance by the family

Chapter 1

Look for Somebody Who Shares a Common Faith with You

*“... you **will not** take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you will go to my country and family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”* Genesis 24:3-4

Abraham made his preference very clear to his servant. The objection raised here does not border on ethnic or racial discrimination but is based on considerations of faith. The Canaanites were idol worshippers, while Abraham worshipped the one true God, Jehovah. He was therefore emphasizing a position which would become the divine standard for his children and descendants.

In choosing a life partner, find someone you can share your faith with. If you are a Christian, you must look for someone with like-minded commitment and faith.

**DON'T marry someone with the hope of
'renovating' him or her to your taste.**

Marriage is not the place where people change at a glance. Most people in marriage continue to be who they are or have always been - so don't marry someone with the idea that you will change their faith. There's no compromise on that. Worshipping God is the most important call of your life. Your faith forms the basis of most of the key decisions you make in life.

Shared faith is not just a religious issue. Your faith influences your career, educational and other equally important choices you make. The way

you organize your home and raise your children - the kind of discipline, foundation and values you give them - must be faith-based.

Your faith has a direct bearing on your financial choices. It determines what you will do or not do to earn a living or make money. Even how you spend money, subsequently, is determined by your faith. For instance, a committed Christian will faithfully pay his or her tithes on all income made in the month. However, if he or she marries somebody who is not a Christian, that person is likely to offer some resistance. This is bound to lead to conflict and place undue stress on the marriage.

Similarly, your faith determines the object of your devotion and whom you focus on for divine assistance. It determines what you will do or not do in a time of crisis. One of the characteristics of strong families is that they spend time praying together and sharing their faith. It is therefore imperative to marry someone you share a spiritual bond with.

Not everybody who goes to church with you shares your faith. This is because there are doubters and liars or even thieves in the house of God. Do not just rush into a relationship simply because the person attends your church. Take time to look for someone who genuinely loves the Lord and shares your faith. That way, both of you can trust in God when your relationship is challenged or attacked.

Chapter 2

Seek God's Guidance

Then he said, “O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham... 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 24:12-14

Marriage is a very long journey. Among the Akan-speaking people of Ghana, marriage is called “awareɛ,” which literally implies, “it is long.” Without God's guidance you may make a choice that looks good today, but which you may regret tomorrow. Pray about your partner and seek God's guidance as you wait for the right person to come your way. Consequently, after a potential partner shows up, inquire from God whether He approves of that person as a partner for you.

How do you know whether the person you have found is the one God has given to you or not? One of the primary ways to find out the mind of God about your choice is by what we call “sensing of the spirit” or discernment. You may meet somebody who seems all okay but something within you, which you cannot explain, begins to tug at your heart and silently cautions you - 'no, that's not it.' Many times, that is the voice of God prompting you.

On the other hand, you could also meet somebody who you don't immediately like, and yet you could have great peace in your heart concerning that person. Somehow, anytime you think about, pray for or talk to that person, something deep inside tells you, 'its okay, that's the one.' Many have ignored such divine guidance and regretted later. Others have

fought off such promptings for a long time but eventually conceded and gone on to enjoy very successful relationships.

Having peace in your heart is often an indication of God's assurance. On the other hand, if you have agitation and confusion in your spirit, you are most likely struggling against the will of God.

Marriage is a permanent institution. It is not meant for trial and error or experimentation. It is like a chemical bonding, which cannot be changed. If you go into a bad marriage, can you imagine what permanent confusion looks like? Choosing a life partner is a decision you are going to live with for the rest of your life, so make sure you seek God's guidance...and tread cautiously.

Chapter 3

Look for Someone Who Can Share with you what They Have

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

Marriage and relationships are about caring and sharing. A stingy person, right from the beginning, is bad news. If you meet someone who finds it extremely difficult to share anything they have with you, run away because they are not ready to make you a part of their lives.

Marriage means sharing your poverty or prosperity; lack or abundance as well as your joys and pain together. For that reason, if the partner you have found is always demanding from you, without giving anything back, it is bad news. Some people go to the extent of consistently borrowing to spend lavishly and prove a point to their partners. In such situations, whenever the person comes to you for money and you don't have any, he or she gets upset. That is bad news and you must look for someone who is ready to share.

Sharing is a two-way affair that involves giving and receiving. Therefore, if all that the male partner you have found does is come to your house, eat, belch and pray in tongues, that's bad news. Those are the marks of an irresponsible man, right from the beginning. As the local Ghanaian adage goes, 'if the market day will be good, it shows in the morning.' Early indications or warning signals are important.

A selfish person is likely to be selfish for the rest of his or her life. Such people will insist that if they give you one cedi, you render a full account of it. That kind of person will not make any financial contribution but will enjoy all the benefits of a relationship without having the courtesy to ask where the resources came from. Marriage is sharing and not hiding what we have from each other.

Chapter 4

You must marry somebody who is responsible

And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. Genesis 24 v. 15

Anybody who is irresponsible is not a good material for marriage. Marriage is about shared responsibility. We manifest responsibility in many ways, but primarily in how we take up the tasks that are ours domestic or professional. If somebody does not know how to take care of his parents or siblings, even when he is in a position to do so, he clearly shirks his responsibility. Similarly, people who do not know how to keep themselves well - dress their bed, brush their hair, wash their clothes or have their bath - are equally irresponsible. They don't accept personal responsibility for the tasks they have to perform in life.

It is okay to marry a poor person who is on the way to prosperity. However, it is unacceptable to marry a poor person who is content with poverty and does not make any attempt whatsoever to fight it. You may see a person who may not have much but is clearly hard-working and responsible. People like that would be very diligent in business. Even from their veranda, they would organise extra classes, do some part time work or study to increase their worth in the future. You can easily see that even though their beginning is small, their end shall greatly improve.

Unfortunately, there are some people who start small but end small because they are unable to identify opportunities relative to their skills and responsibilities. Know some of these indicators so you don't put yourself in a marriage of pain.

**It is better to stay unmarried
than to be married to the wrong person.**

It's important for you to see early indicators of trouble in order to avoid it. The Bible refers to the man as the head of the house, not because he is better than the woman but because most of the major decisions to be made in the family are his responsibility. Culturally, men play a dominant role and so are considered the head, only in the context of marriage. Being the head means you must be able to make decisions; sometimes difficult ones and at short notice. You cannot afford to be indecisive and weak; because your wife and children depend on the choices you make.

In modern times, men are not the sole breadwinners. It is possible for a man to marry a woman who earns far more than he does. I think that a man in such a situation must not use it as an excuse for shirking his responsibility, because primarily, the upkeep of the children must be the responsibility of the man. A man must earn enough to be able to take care of his children, because the children do not bear the name of their mother. They bear his name.

I think that unless you are incapacitated or something terrible has happened to you, you must earn enough to pay your children's school fees and the house rent. Even if your wife can pay, you must bear that responsibility as a man in order to maintain your honor as the head of your household.

On the other hand, when it comes to the management and appearance of the home, it is the responsibility of the woman. In spite of women's liberation and all, if a house is dirty, it is the woman who should take the blame and not the man. Therefore, every woman must be able to manage a home and ensure that all areas, including the kitchen and toilets, are clean because you never know who is coming to visit and who may have need to use the washroom.

Successful marriages thrive on role differentiation with each partner taking responsibility for the aspects of the marriage that fall within his or her domain and faithfully executing their duties. That can only be ensured if you look out for a responsible person right from the start.

Chapter 5

You Must Marry Someone You Are Attracted To

Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. Genesis 24:16

Whoever you marry must be somebody you feel good about and are physically attracted to. You are going to spend a lot of your time together and have physical relations with each other. You can't have physical relations with someone you find unattractive. Ladies, how will you feel if you get a proposal from a nice man who simply turns you off and whose smile you just cannot stand? You can't marry this man because he'll be smiling for a long time, so stay out if you don't like the smile.

Some people are very fascinated by fair partners while others prefer dark ones. Some others have very definite preferences about the physique of their ideal partner, which they hold on to very dearly.

Beauty is subjective and it is said that, "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder." Everyone therefore has their own perception of what constitutes beauty. In many instances, one person's preference is another one's abomination. Everyone must therefore make their choice based on their own convictions and preferences.

By and large, one of the greatest attraction in a relationship is the character of a person. However, you cannot just say I love his/her character when you know that the person does not appeal to you physically.

Chapter 6

Know the Family You Are Marrying Into

...and said, 'Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge?' So she said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah's son, whom she bore to Nahor.' Gen. 24:22- 23

Marriage is not just a union between two people but also of their families. When you marry, you marry into the family of your spouse. Check out the family you are marrying into. Ask relevant questions, answers to some of which will be very useful in determining the decisions you make.

Certain characteristics are dominant in certain families because they have grown in certain cultures and have adapted to certain lifestyles. Some families are so controlled by one person in the family: a mother who dominates all her children or a father who is domineering, pompous and arrogant. Another family may be reserved and poor and not attempt to do anything about the widespread poverty they face. You may see some of these characteristics in the person you want to marry. If you are marrying into a family of womanizers and have clearly identified traits of the family weakness in your partner, better start thinking straight. Should you still decide to marry the person, you must be ready for what you are getting yourself into.

No matter how much you love a person, love could turn into hatred. Many couples who are divorced today used to be in love; so love is not always permanent. When love turns sour, people who used to be in love turn around to tear each other apart because the other factors which must sustain that love are absent. Without those factors, your love, eventually, may be destroyed.

Some people are adults but are still controlled by their families. Imagine getting married to a man who is tied to his mother's apron strings. He cannot decide on his own and does whatever his mum tells him at any time. Even when it comes to urgent and important issues, he cannot make up his mind but needs to consult before he can give you his opinion or consent. If you marry such a person, you should know what is in store for you.

Chapter 7

Find Out Whether the Family Will Accept You

Another issue worth considering is if there is room in your potential partner's family for you. Anyone above 18 years does not need parental consent to marry but that is no reason to throw out parental consent, because parents still have an influence. There are instances where parents have resisted a marriage only to later open the door for it.

If you find out that the family you are going to marry into is not ready for you, don't stubbornly rush into it. Should you still choose to go ahead with it, exhaust all avenues of arriving at a common position with that family. Talk to family members and pastors, and hold meetings, if need be, to explain yourself as clearly as possible. Sometimes the parents' fears may be unfounded, but other times they may have genuine concerns.

Usually, if a person from a Charismatic or Pentecostal background seeks to marry a typical Orthodox Church person, e.g. Methodist or Presbyterian, he or she is likely to meet with some resistance. In such a situation, it is possible to make both families come to an understanding, through dialogue.

If you are planning to marry someone from a polygamous family, and who has already been married five times, and your father disagrees, I think it will be good for you to listen to him. This is because, given the evidence of the person's background, you should know that history has the potential of repeating itself.

Do your very best to ensure that you are accepted in the family you want to marry into. Do your homework well. Get help from your elders or pastors; talk to people in the family; pray about it; do all you can to make sure that there is an opening for you in the family. You cannot afford to

ignore them because your children will become the grand-children of your in-laws whether you like it or not. It is therefore important that you have some relationship with your in-laws right from the start.

In certain extreme cases, you can have in-laws who are totally unreasonable and cannot be prevailed upon through dialogue. Under those extreme cases, I still advise that all effort should be made to make sure you are accepted into the family.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment. Choosing a life partner is therefore, an important issue that requires wisdom and prayerful consideration. It is, thus, important to look for someone who shares a common faith with you, who is responsible and to whom you are attracted. It is also important to develop cordial relationships with the person's family. Finally, pray that God will lead you to a person who is well suited for you, and that you will be able to identify the right person when he or she comes your way.

About the Author

Mensa Otabil is a respected Christian statesman, educator, entrepreneur and motivational speaker. He oversees the multi-faceted network of ministries of the International Central Gospel Church with its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, and serves as Senior Pastor of Christ Temple.

His passion is to see the timeless principles of the Bible made applicable to the renewal and transformation of Africa. His messages speak to the pertinent concerns of a continent and its people seeking solutions to their perplexing challenges.

Dr. Mensa Otabil is Chancellor of Ghana's premier private university, Central University College. He also serves on several Boards and Trusts of organizations. He is committed to human upliftment, and presents the inspirational radio and television broadcast, "Living Word." He and his wife Joy reside in Ghana's capital city of Accra.

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