

WOMAN DUST IT OFF

**Real Life Lessons On How To Rise Above The
Heartbreak & Stigma Of A Failed Marriage To
Achieve Lasting Success As A Single Mother**

By

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DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to
all women who are striving to rise above heartbreaks
and heartaches to live their highest dreams.*

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INTRODUCTION

AS THE SUN RISES daily from the East and sets in the West, I see a beautiful world – continually changing around me, yet elegant too.

I see the enveloping smiles on the faces of little kids; I see the passion in the eyes of hard-working youths critically preparing for the future they envision in their minds and adults striving to create their dreams, meeting the needs of their new families as a challenge they can't bypass and to bring them alive; I see the old ones with their old arms of wisdom spread open for erring humanity to embrace and learn. I could imagine and see the minds of the old ones willing to relinquish their individual sapience to every child, youth, and adult who wants to become great in life and willing to be impacted by wisdom.

Life can be truly engaging if everyone is willing to be engaged and do the right thing at the right time. However, in the midst of life, I also see that single mum across the street struggling daily to find her voice, reclaim her confidence, deal with loneliness, rise above limitations, confront and redefine stereotypes, build herself up, nurture her kid(s) and see them doing well in attaining the acme level of greatness where she would one day be proud of despite all the challenges and life's various odds, and be all that she wants to be.

It is this image that continues to leave strong imprints in my heart and forms the reason for me yearning to tell my story. This is something my true self can't deny and ignore. And I hope someday the true yearning that keeps boiling in my heart will be a reason for someone to find hope and live again.

My name is Laurretta Chinenye. I am a single mum who got divorced after seven years in marriage and two amazing daughters. I was shattered! Like a splintered reed, a broken glass. I was Shattered. I became a shadow of myself. I was dazed and thoroughly washed out, like someone that got caught

up in a tornado, tossed and tossed again. My self-esteem was smashed. I looked around, and I couldn't find confidence where it used to be. I couldn't behold my face in the mirror because I knew I would meet dejection. I could only imagine a strange world, and the places I used to visit became odd and unpredictable.

Bitterness grew in me every day. I became isolated and lonely. I believed that there was a severe damage in my life, and I could only feel the pain of losing myself. I grew worse each and every day because I was depressed and frustrated. I suffered from depression, lost my drive to be productive, life became harsher, and I struggled through each day to pick myself back up. I was in a total clueless and frustrating condition, and at the same time, I was afraid to talk to people because I felt ashamed of myself. I was running away from my friends, neighbors, and those who wished to embrace me with comforts. It was a terrible period for me; frankly, the darkest and I thought I would not pull through. Seconds crawled away as each day seemed like an eternity. I spent most of the time in a room crying, grumbling, and feeling sorry and angry

at myself. I felt like the Angels assigned to watch over me all deserted me, and I was left all alone to figure my way out through the thorny woods of failure and disappointment.

I almost gave up on myself. I was lost. I was far from happiness and the beautiful things that used to excite me. I lost focus, and my pride disappeared from me. I saw the kind of person I used to be moving away from my real self. It looked as if it was a nightmare that flashes through my dreams and leaves a deposit of its sadness to wake up with me. If this describes you as a single mum or you are in a state similar to what I was in, then I want you to know that you are not alone. I want you to know that it's never the end of the road for you. I know how it feels and how terrible it used to be because I have been there, which is why I have decided to write this book to share my experience with you so that you can hopefully draw strength and some wisdom from my story and how I made it through this darkness that almost succeeded in leaving me lifeless.

Some truths: I am not a superwoman; I didn't see the light just because I deserved it, but I think I was

among those lucky women who found something I called GRACE to spur their strengths. I am also not a saint! I am just like you; a human being with flaws, weaknesses, strengths, dreams, and I do have my vulnerabilities. You see, I am human. Yes, I made many mistakes in marriage, which resulted in a divorce. I'm not perfect, in fact, nobody is, but over the last few years, I have been able to own up to them, learn, take charge of my happiness, find the strength needed to rise and move on. I have forgiven myself, groomed my two lovely daughters, and today, through my experience, I have found a compelling purpose of sharing my story with you and many others out there that are going through similar difficult situations and looking for hope to stand again.

In this book, I want to humbly present myself as an example of an ordinary person who has gone through that dark tunnel—the painful realization of divorce and early stages of single motherhood—and then help you see that as a single mum, irrespective of what you have been through, there is a light within, and ahead of you, if you can embrace and

apply some of the ideas I will be sharing with you. I hope you will find strength and courage to continue your journey with faith, love, and hope for a better tomorrow.

Through revealing my story, I will not only be addressing sensitive areas of being a single mum, but I would also be offering you practical tips and action aids on how to get ahead, rise to a whole new level, and be a better you. I will share with you strategies that will kick-start and moisturize your braveness to see the other beautiful sides and parts of your life.

Perhaps, the icing on the cake in this book is this: that I will use my story to educate, guide, challenge, and inspire ladies out there who are thinking of getting into marriage. Let me quickly state here that this is not a book written to demonize anyone, glorify divorce, kick against marriage, or present every single mum out there as a saint without flaws –of course not. It is not a book prepared to condemn you for saying, "Yes, I do!" to someone you're looking up to and wish to spend the rest of your life with. This is a book full of practical experiences with logical illustrations that will assist you to look into the

journey from the outset. Marriage is a beautiful thing, and as a single lady, if you desire to get married, please do (but do it for the right reasons).

For the sake of emphasis, this book has been written as a guide to help every single mum live their highest dreams, and to live to the full capacity of the grace of God upon their lives, knowing that He didn't create any one of us to be subject to limitations, defeats, and heartbreaks. In fact, He wasn't in a hurry to form you, neither was He in haste to package your destiny. It was a deliberate decision to come with the concept of making you in His image and after His likeness, and I want you to remember what He said concerning you in Genesis 1:26-28; it was a deliberate attempt to make you like Him. Therefore, anytime you think of limitation, any point you think of breaking down and giving up, remember your true nature in God. He always desires you think like a queen. The big picture of your dream is exactly who you are. Whether you are a single mother or divorcee, no societal stigma should ever take away your pride, your relentless efforts to aspire high, and the dream you wish to bring you to

limelight in the place of destiny. At all cost, you should never, in any way, allow your dreams to be shattered.

So I hope that through my story, I will offer practical counsel to single ladies on what they need to know, avoid, and learn as they gear up for marriage. Like it is said, what you learn from stories of mistakes is how to avoid similar mistakes or pitfalls in life. Without any hint of doubt, this book will show you the various mistakes I made and how you can avoid them and create the marriage and life that you desire. By reading this book and taking the right actions, I know you will find it easy to take steps that will bring out the best in you to live a happy and fulfilled life. I am very hopeful that you will grow to become that person you are meant to be – a champion!

Now, here comes my story.



CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning.

I strongly believe that every story has an origin. Therefore stories should start from the very beginning in order for them to have a full delivery of the ideas inherent in the core messages being passed across. In fact, just like you would expect to see a great movie from the beginning, EVERY STORY IS best told from the beginning. Yea - a great and interesting movie should start from the beginning in helping viewers to have a better clue and understanding of the entire storyline, and also for them to know where to pick the real lessons the movie intends to offer from. So at this juncture, consider me to be a moviemaker whose utmost desire is to fill your heart with a real-life story that will benefit you immensely or perhaps like a pastor that seeks to anoint your head with the oils of wisdom from this life-changing story.

You will agree with me that there are many ways to give back to humanity, and for me, this is my own unique way, by imparting knowledge to the lives of all the young ladies

and single mothers who really need to be uplifted. In truth, this is my own way of being a positive impact on the thousands of people out there who are going through a depressive and challenging time due to one issue or the other in their respective marriages. Giving back to society doesn't have to be only through monetary values which most of us focus our attention on, and I don't see anything bad and wrong in there, but I sincerely hope we would relate this to every basic life experience and flow in my direction.

Although people do say "knowledge is power," I am here to tell you all, through this book, that, "information is power." And information will always precede knowledge in that knowledge is the mollification of all the information we've acquired and tend to get. To avoid being deformed, we need to be informed. The reason why I am writing this book is so that you can be informed. A practical experience is the best knowledge anybody can have in order to learn and prevent future circumstances.

So, let me tell you about my beginning, about my history, my story so that you get to know where I am coming from. For a tree does not grow without a root, neither does a river flow without a source. Even the existence of humanity has a starting point. There's always an outset for everything that has ever existed, and there will be for those that are yet to come.

I was born into the beautiful family of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome and Veronica Ufearoh. When I say “BEAUTIFUL FAMILY,” I meant it! And indeed, a family that other families loved to emulate. Even my friends and other children in my neighborhood wished they came through my loving mother and father to this world. I could not have wished for better parents than the ones God bestowed upon me. They were beautiful both within and without. They understood themselves, and I haven't seen them argue, perhaps they do behind me but none of such in my presence. They were two special friends I grew up with. When it comes to “TRUE PARENTING AND LOVE,” I could vouch for my parents. I had always planned to write a book before my 35th birthday. Although I would have preferred to have written it under a different circumstance, however, this book is the culmination of that dream. I am from a place in West Africa known as Awkuzu – a town in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra state, in a beautiful country called Nigeria. My hometown Awkuzu is primarily divided into three distinct parts, namely: Ezi, Ifite, and Ikenga. I am from the Ifite section that comprises three villages: Amabo, Isioji, and Ifite-Umueri. My village is Amabo.

Even though I am from the Igbo tribe in the East, I was born and raised in Katsina State, the Northern part of Nigeria.

The first time I went with my parents to our village, I was

overexcited, and I couldn't contain the joy that filled my heart. The experience was such an indelible one for someone at my age then who had been looking for such an opportunity. Everything was interesting, and I was able to play with neighborhood children. My grandmother was so excited to see me to the extent that she never failed to pull me close to her bosom and tell me interesting tales about the history of our village at the slightest opportunity she got. In one of the nights that we were bonding as usual, she told me Awkuzu was actually one of the progenies of the fifth child of Eri, his only daughter who was called Iguedo, and said to have given birth to the founders of Ogbunike, Nteje, Umuleri and Nando, Awkuzu. The colonial corruption of "OKUZU" is Awkuzu. I was told about the "EGBE CHAM." This stuff, according to grandmother, are pre-colonial Dane guns which are used mainly for ceremonies and hunting. Some of these guns were made of cast iron, and they were made by the villagers. History has it that these guns were used before it was recorded in history by the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. "These guns would always remind you what the past once looked like in this part of the world," She concluded. Aluminium pot mouldings, Ajalli cave, Igbo-Ukwu Bronzes among others were the things she told me about. I could picture how beautiful my cultural heritage must have been back then from the things she told me. Then, I was so curious and still wanted to know more about the

Igbo-Ukwu Bronzes. So, I went to ask her about it the following day after she had taken her supper. Igbo Ukwu is one of the ancient cities. It is known as the cradle of the civilization of the Igbos. People come here to see some great bronze art crafts that date back to the 9th century. It is a place where all the ancient sculptures gather themselves.

Now, let's move to Katsina State, the northern part of the country where I had my basic education. Katsina was a beautiful place for me to grow up. Katsina used to be very hot and was full of people who speak different dialects from ours. They are friendly people, and they relate so easily. People from Katsina are free people, and they are afraid of nothing. They always keep to their words. When they tell you they will do this for you, believe it because that's all they will eventually do. The major occupation there is "rearing of animals." They don't sit down idle and expect meal to appear on their table without working for it. They believe in trade and the works of their hands. Even on a sunny day, you see people busy with their trades buying and selling, while those amongst them who are farmers go to their farms. The educated ones are very smart too, and they always look good in their dresses. They are predominantly Muslims except for some few people like us who practice Christianity. People in Katsina don't joke with prayers. Particularly, the Muslim Parents go to the Mosque every Friday for prayers along with their children, and even when they don't have the

opportunity to be in the Mosque for prayers, they say their prayers anywhere they find themselves, even in the midst of a large crowd.

In this State was where I had my elementary education and proceeded to Federal Government College, Daura, for my secondary school. Later, I moved to the Institute of Management Technology (IMT) in Enugu, South east, for my first tertiary education.

My birth and growing up did not come without its riveting tale. I am the first and only surviving child of my parents, as my mum lost three of my brothers consecutively during childbirth. My mum, a strong woman in her rights, had this health challenge known as gestational diabetes, which meant that the babies in her womb had to be brought out before the due date. Sadly, none of the babies after me survived. I always felt so sorry for her when anything like such happened and said my little prayer to God to comfort her. I could still remember the little prayer I do say. I prayed to God if he could help her and let her be happy. As a little child still gathering wisdom, you will only think of happiness. The joy of the mother is to see her newborn baby alive and healthy. Despite all she would go through during the pregnancy stage, this sad moment will show up and darken her heart. I felt sorry as well for my dad. He too cried secretly and felt sad each time his wife lost a baby. None of those things gave me joy at all. However, God knows what's

best for the children they lost and even the reason why He allowed me to escape the odds. I believe only God knows why I was lucky because He loves me to have made me escape the terrible moments that always gave my parents sadness of the heart. I strongly believe He does.

Expectedly, it was a terrible experience for my parents, which made them offer me all the love, attention and care due for four children.

Being the only surviving child of my parents, I was the only hope of the family. They treated me as if I was the only reason they exist. The single fact that I am a female child made my dad treat me like a princess. He gave me all that I needed, and I remember he used to call me several pet names that tickled my fancy. He would call me names like "My girlfriend," "Chi Chi Bekee," "Chichi London," "Adaeze Mmm," and many others to prove how much he cherished me. With the way he treated and protected me, I became the envy of other kids in the neighbourhood. I believe they must have wished they too came through my parents to this world to relish the same care I enjoyed. For me, it was fun. I enjoyed growing up with the two of them. Yes, I know what you may be thinking. Is there any hint of a broken home in her early beginnings? Thankfully, nothing of such came through my path while growing up. With all humility and gratitude to God Almighty, I did not grow up in a poor or broken home. My parents were comfortable, happy, and we lived a good life. Even though we may not have been the

richest in the community, yet we never begged for anything.

My dad was not just a wealthy man, but he was blessed with wisdom and strong values. He was a successful, hard-working businessman with several employees. As a child, I saw seven boys work for him as apprentices in his business, after which he "settled" them with sizable amounts of money as start-up capital, as it is the norm in Igbo tradition. Consequently, he then brought in another set of boys to take their place –this was the regular practice. My father was a good man with a giant heart. He was a man with a heart of gold. He loved people around and gave cheerfully. He had integrity. Everybody around him could vouch for him. What a gentleman with plain principles! I can't recall if he had ever frowned at me, I'm not sure. His smile made me smile every time. Even though he did not attend school to the highest level of education, he developed the habit of reading quality books, newspapers, and networking with people who inspired him to grow. He was a Christian; dutifully spiritual and prayerful. I still remember he would always wake up by 1 a.m. each day to meditate, study the Bible and offer prayers to God, and in the morning, he calls my mum and I for morning prayers. It's a normal thing for us to say a word of prayer early in the morning before everyone set out for their daily activities. Even though he slept late at night, he would be the first person to wake up in the morning. He was very diligent and devoted, so I looked up to him as my role model, someone who could make me feel good and strong about

myself. I so much cherish and respect him as a father.

My dad was a leader.

Just like him, my mum too was a successful businesswoman and very hard working, despite her health challenge at that time. She too doesn't joke with her work. After she had prepared a meal in the morning, the next thing is to get set for the store. She does this every day. She used to run her electronics store in the town of Daura in Katsina State and had lots of customers patronizing her. She sells all sorts of electronic gadgets and appliances. With such enterprising parents, I dare say I was very fortunate as a child, and my future looked bright, as my parents could afford to enrol me into the best schools at that time. Life, however, is incomplete without its twists and turns. You can be alive, happy and well today, and then all of a sudden, an unpleasant situation will arise to shatter your world into pieces. Yes, a devastating turn happened for me - my dad died!

It happened in the year 1996. He was travelling by road from Katsina State to Benin in Edo State Nigeria for one of the annual business meetings of Full Gospel Business Men Fellowship (FGBMF) when he had a ghastly motor accident. He didn't survive it. I was only twelve when it took place, but I still remember vividly how terrible it felt when we were informed of his death by one of my uncles. His death altered everything for my mum and I. It altered life for me in particular because I was still relatively young then and

finding it very hard to really understand how his death would affect our lives going forward. I mean it was a completely strange and unbelievable period that shocked and overwhelmed me and mum with grief because we couldn't believe such a terrible thing would happen to a good family like ours, not knowing that when death knocks at the door, it doesn't look at how good and pleasant the occupants are, it just takes out whoever it visits. The day death visited my father was a full dark day, and I cried so much. Even till now, I still find myself crying because of how much I miss his love, care and presence in my life. Just like the lightning that strikes on a bright, sunny day, we never saw it coming, and hence not prepared. Puff! Just like that, my dad was gone. My mum was pregnant at that time, so I can't just imagine or describe in proper words how she must have felt losing her soul mate to the cold hands of death. Even her condition made the loss excruciating for her to deal with. She was due to deliver a baby boy, my little brother, but unfortunately due to the sad experience of her husband's (my father) death coupled with her health challenges at the time, she lost the baby yet again. As you can imagine, a pregnant woman who just lost her husband will definitely be depressed and low-spirited. So I believe that for this reason, she lost all the energy she had in her and couldn't help the situation during the child delivery process. I found it so unfortunate for her because she was going through a lot both emotionally and physically, even though it was a miserable experience for both of us. But even in all of this, she was the only one I

could cling to as nothing and no one else around me had any meaning. However, life's devastating twists wasn't done with us.

My mother's business also crashed and then, to rub salt into the wound, my dad's siblings and village people all moved in and forcefully took over seventy percent of my father's wealth. As if they were waiting for him to die so that they could take over and share his belongings amongst themselves. They made everything look more severe and hurting for my mum and me. We went through hell. It was so horrible! As a twelve-year-old girl and the only child, I was naïve, confused, but fully aware. I had a full picture and knowledge of the things that were going on at that time. I understood it was a terrible situation, and they never cared to know the picture of agony and bitterness they were creating in my mind. I saw myself in a place I had never been before, and I watched my mum struggle helplessly through the whole ordeals. I had no power to help her out from this unexpected and unwanted situation she found herself in. Yet, she never gave up, and she never stopped saying positive things to me, like, God is able and He will see us through this period. She's such a brave woman who is strong-willed and maintains a positive outlook towards life even in her roughest and toughest moments.

As the days went by, things degenerated and became more severe to the point where we were barely able to eat three square meals a day. It was a complete taste of hell, and

nobody in my father's family surfaced to assist us. I was not too strong to do many crazy things that ran through my mind those moments. I wanted to go to my father's family house without my mother's consent to shout and yell terribly on every living being, both young and old living in the place. Every one of them in my father's family was full of evil. They left us in such a painful condition; they made my mother go through many terrible things. They collected everything her husband worked for and left her with absolutely nothing. Someone who once lived conveniently as a married woman now became the person who couldn't afford to feed herself and her child two times a day because of the wickedness and greediness of my father's siblings. I knew all they wanted was for him to die so that they could show us their true colours. Most of them who seemed caring when my father was alive suddenly became our enemies. They hated my mother so much for no reason. They hated her as if she was the one who killed her husband. It was so strong on her. We almost lived in pain every day, and she became weak because the load and burden were too strong for her to carry. I never knew we would ever survive those moments of our lives; they were really tough for both of us. However, she never stopped declaring positive things to herself and me most of the time, and because I always believed in the things she says wholeheartedly, my life was immensely impacted by her positive words as I grew every day.

But as life became more severe and tough, managing on

our own in the North of Nigeria was extremely difficult. I remember how tough it was for her to pay my college fees when I gained admission into IMT, Enugu. It was very tough, and I could see how helpless she was given her poor financial situation. She couldn't afford to meet all my needs, and I knew it was a very difficult period for her. She had to work even harder to make sure I got almost all the necessary things I needed for school. More drama awaited me. On the fateful day that I was to travel to school for the first time, I took a bus from Kano State going at night to Enugu. Unfortunately, on my way, the vehicle was attacked by armed robbers in the dead of night. Strange men with guns and other weapons I could not make sense of, terrorized us and threatened to kill us if we did not heed to their demands. They took all that I had with me, including my birth certificate. I was terrified.

With the absence of my father and all that was happening to me and my mum, a void was created in my life – a void that I carried all through my teenage years and even into young adulthood. Periods full of emptiness and pity. A complete resentful growing moment for me where none of my uncles and Dad's family members showed up to assist us, rather, they took all he had worked for away from us. This void eventually formed part of what caused me to make many mistakes in my marriage which I will be revealing to you in the subsequent chapters. It is an experience I'll never ever forget because it was a period of prolonged despair and

sorrow. We were struggling without any foreseeable solution in the nearest future. If I should agree that it was my fate, then, it was an unfortunate one, and I will never pray for such to ever happen to anyone I know, not even to my enemies.

My dad left too soon, and even though it has been over two decades now, I still miss him and wish he be around to see the woman I have become and call me by those lovely pet names he used to. I remember how he used to tell me that he was so proud of me. He always had something sweet to say about me. He had this statement he always made – that I was seven boys in one. Even though he would have loved his three sons to have lived, he still felt contented having me around. I still remember his words. His sweet words always turned my head and made me feel at ease every time. How I wish he were still alive to tell me more of those amazing things. He was my true hero, and I cherished him so much. His words have formed part of what has ultimately shaped my view about myself and uplifted me, my pride, and sense of responsibility to deal with my many mistakes in marriage and also as a single mum.

Okay, now that I have shared with you my beginning, join me as I take you right into the heart of the matter. The real practical experiences full of insights and wisdom that will help you shape your life as a single mother or as a young lady.

Shall we? Please do oblige me.

Important takes:

- Cherish the present moments. When time passes, it does not come back again. It's when you embrace the present that you can make your future dreams come through. Everything you do at this time of your life becomes a memory in the future. If it is a good one, it becomes part of the future you want to live in. However, if it is the other way around, you cannot prevent it from happening. Love yourself, embrace things that make you happy and cherish the life you're living at the moment. Once it's gone, you can't go back to it. You will remember it, but it will be in the past. Therefore, make every bit of this moment count, and cherish what you have so that you can be at peace with yourself.
- Live life and love life. Life isn't just what makes you breathe. There's more to life that you need to understand. It is mainly about loving your family, friends, and the people around you. Life is full of fun when you experience the totality of it. When you put aside the bitter experience and embrace the part that gets you excited. It becomes more fun and pleasant when we stop remembering the old things, things your thoughts can't change. Love people that cherish your existence and be part of their experience.



CHAPTER 2

Taking Responsibility for Your Mistake...

Someone said and I quote, "A true apology is a change of behaviour." When your responsibility towards your actions shows sincere amendment, you're on the right path and things will become easy.

ONE OF THE MOST entertaining, yet inspiring actors I have ever watched on TV was Lee Jun-fan, popularly known as Bruce Lee. Even though he died in 1973, far before I was born, his name and legacy in martial art and the world of movies continues to live on. Okay, I am not trying to run a commentary on martial art or filmmaking, but there was something Bruce Lee said many years ago in a movie that I will never forget. Interestingly, it helps to capture the central message in this chapter. He said, and I quote: "Mistakes are always forgivable if one has the courage to admit them." I will like you to kindly think through those words for a minute or two, as I believe they hold great wisdom that could make a huge difference in the way you view life and things

that happen to you. As a single mum of two lovely daughters and a marriage that only lasted seven years, I must admit that I made many mistakes, and it all started even before I got married.

Well, every person one way or the other has made grievous mistakes one time or the other in their entire lifetime, so it's same with me. The mistakes may either bring short-term or long-term consequences depending on their magnitude. However, some mistakes may take some few years or a lifetime or eternity to get amended while some never get corrected, and you could live the whole of your life regretting your past. Like I said in the previous chapter, the death of my Dad created a huge vacuum in my life. A vacuum that no one else could fill, a sandal that no one dares to put on, because he was the breadwinner of my family. When he died, we lost virtually everything we had as a family—he was much more than a human being; he was like a small god to us when he was alive. My father's people took over my dad's wealth; this includes tangible items such as housing, and other personal properties as well as financial assets that could be of immense benefit to I and my mother in the later future.

In all these, my mum was confronted with severe financial pressure and hardship that she could not keep up with. At some point, she had to take her personal car to the city of Abuja, to be used as a commercial taxi so that we

could, at least, raise some reasonable amount of money to take care of our basic needs. At some point in your life when you realize you're on your own, you look around and there is no help forthcoming and no one is even willing to help, nobody cares anymore if you're living, whether you exist or not, it is just you and you alone. At that point, you will ultimately think of something to do with your life whether to persistently struggle to put food on the table to live or think of death. Otherwise, the story becomes different and difficult. She tried all she could to make it work. Unfortunately, that didn't work out well too. Only a strong and brave woman could have survived those ugly moments. She was just like my father, but there were limitations to her capability as a woman and single mother. The load was too much for her, but she tried her best, and I commend her efforts in those trying times.

As a young lady back in Enugu, after graduation from school, I found myself under pressure – at least, so I thought. It was the usual pressure of wanting to get married early enough, just like my other friends who were getting married in their early 20s. Also, as a young lady with all saturations and feelings of starting my own family as early as possible, I joined the league and felt good about it. The league of starting a family without knowing what would end it. As a young lady, you can copy and use your friends' lifestyles to judge your actions. This is what I mean; there are times in

your life as a young lady where whatever actions that your peers take is the same line of action you would want to take because you do not want to be left behind. But we often forget that the time of every other person is not the same as ours, it differs. There are times when we do some things, and wow, we have had and experienced great achievements in them whether academic attainment, getting to the peak of our careers, accumulating luxuries such as cars and houses, they all have their timing. It does not just happen at the same time, but one step at a time, so also it is in the case of getting married. Marriage was the whole happening thing among my clique, so I didn't see why I should be the one left out in the pack. Like we say in Nigeria, I wanted to belong. That is the slogan.

Rather than focus on discovering myself, developing a career and building my capacity as a young lady, I allowed my mind to be flooded with the thought of having a ring on my finger and being called Mrs. I just wanted to leave being single and transit into a becoming a married woman. I just wanted that change of my surname from a man without actually knowing the rudiments of marriage, without being fully aware of what a marriage was really about. Of course, it was only the picture of my parents' marriage that was on my mind. I carried that imagination everywhere, forgetting that there are certain ways that marriages should be built, managed, and sustained. I failed to realize that in my parents'

marriage which was my yardstick, there were times things didn't go well, but they had found a cordial and conducive way to manage it and make it work, over and over again. Well, I was really blinded by my desperation because, at that phase of my life, the metric of success that mattered most to me was marriage. Period! Anything outside marriage was a waste of time for me to discuss; it's either marriage or nothing else. I was literally in a fast lane.

I remember some people warning me that I should slow down, and that everything will fall in its place, that I was too naïve to be thinking of getting into marriage at that young age. I can still remember them telling me that marriage is a life-time decision and when it's gotten wrong in the process, it can become the most difficult and frustrating experience that one must have to endure and cope with. I never listened. I was my own counsellor and chief adviser—a huge mistake. I thought I could handle my decisions myself. I even thought I could handle any issue that comes up as a result of my marriage. As far as I was concerned back then, it is my life and my marriage. I thought all that mattered was to take full control of my life and all the decisions I made. As a matter of fact, for everyone that warned me, I saw them as enemies of my progress, and at some point, I felt they were jealous of me, and that they never wanted me to do good things in my life, so I proceeded to cut them off. I only listened to people who reinforced my already made-up mind and notion about

marriage. I sought validation of my decision and only appreciated people who approved of this decision. Perhaps they weren't the real enemies of my progress, but their decisions and validations gave me more push of certainty to do what I ended up doing. Even though they may think they were doing the right thing to help my life by backing up my uniformed decision and childish desire, I came to the realization that I was actually with the wrong set of people with the wrong motives and choices. I could blame them to some extent, but I was the real enemy of myself.

Now, let me pause and say this. Your friend graduates with a first-class, you shrugged it off. She got a great job, you were neutral. She posted a holiday picture with her colleagues, and you didn't even take a look. But when she got proposed to, you started jumping up and down to celebrate with her. I am not saying getting married is bad, rather I would say marriage is something that needs time, and I mean enough time to plan for. Most of the time, it is the last decision to make for complete freedom. For you, all the things she achieved all these years are 'normal,' while getting married is the ultimate. She has found a husband. You now like every post. You comment "congratulations" and go on every picture. To you, that is the only thing that matters. She has a man and must hold him tight. This is the kind of behaviour and attitude that fuels patriarchy. Men know that for most women, their ultimate life ambition is

getting married. So, they see themselves as the vessel of happiness for women. Many males do not know that because you have a penis, you don't automatically become a man. Unfortunately, most women don't agree. Any man is a man. Dirty, irresponsible, vile, violent...does not matter. They say, at least I have a man. At least my friends will be happy to see someone with me. In fact, when he's a rich dude, he becomes a stage show and the topic for every discussion. These things are actually good, and it's something that everyone should pray to get. However, when the concept of going into a relationship and planning marriage becomes the wrong priority for you, it will end up losing its value and worth.

I think this is one of the major mistakes many young ladies make when it comes to the issue of love and marriage. Just like me, they allow their emotions to cloud their sense of reasoning, and only look out for opinions that validate their already biased feeling even further. So, when someone offers a particular voice of reason that is not in line with their emotions, the chances are that they would consider that person as being unreasonable or against their progress. They will conclude that such a set of individuals doesn't want the best for them. Perhaps they don't enjoy their marriage, and they want me to feel the same way. This will be the only thought that runs through your mind at every bit of time you have. All that you think about them will be full of hatred. None of what they tell you will make meaning to

you, and so you begin to distance yourself from them. You don't know that when someone gives you a piece of advice, there's more to it than to have a biased conclusion about it.

There's a place of sitting down to ruminate on the things you've heard, and there's a place of taking the same advice to another person for proper mollification of its unclear state. There are several ways of adequately approaching a serious and life-depending decision like that of marriage. You need total calmness and a neutral motive. Even though the whole goal is to get into marriage, the application of wisdom is crucial, and you can only get that from several opinions and advice. Although the Bible in the book of Proverbs says ... in the multitude of counsellors, there is safety. But the truth is, sometimes when people ask for advice, they are only trying to validate or get the other person to support the decision they have already made and not necessarily seeking his or her candid perspective. This is what I think is quite common in the area of relationships and marriage.

In my case, I was like that. I had made up my mind that I was going to marry, and I only needed friends and family members to support it. Even though they love me and want the best for me, yet those who will support my decisions will still do, and my biased feelings will craft them as my true friends and family that think the way I do. In fact, I will always find the pleasing ground to hear the word, "Yes!" from them. I looked for voices to validate my already-made

decision. That was it.

With the struggles my mum was going through in her health and finances, I also felt getting married was a way of helping the family. As a young lady, that was my thought! Even though I was into contract jobs, like offering ushers at events for some corporate organizations as well as printing branded t-shirts for them, I felt funds coming in from those sources were not enough to take care of our needs and all that we wanted. Sure, I had my initial dream of the kind of man I wanted to marry and the values I wanted my marriage to be built on, but somehow, I got carried away by peer pressure and my desire to satisfy my pressing material needs. I was not thinking. I lowered my standards and forgot my ideals, principles and values by so doing. Things I was supposed to probe and find out before walking down the aisle, I never did all because I was in a hurry to wear a wedding ring and show off to my friends. I threw objectivity out the window, and I didn't know it; neither did I even care.

My marriage failure was 100% my mistake, and I have decided to own up to that fact. I messed up big time. So, in this book, you won't find me throwing blame at my erstwhile partner. I always like to believe –and which is true- that I goofed, as that's the only way I can retain the power to make a lasting change in my own life. I don't know how my dad would have felt about it if he was alive, but I am sure he wouldn't have felt good, knowing that his Chi-Chi Bekee,

his only daughter, and surviving child, made such terrible mistakes in marriage. However, I am sure that he would be proud that today I have chosen to own up to them, learn from them, and be willing to share my story with the rest of the world, so that other young women out there won't be a victim of circumstance, or have to face a similar experience of all what I went through. Having the consciousness of touching the lives that might be so vulnerable to make the same mistakes and decisions I made and even those outside marriage, I think it's a part he'd love to read if he was alive. With this, young ladies and single women will find an appropriate solvent to saturate their solid and rigid desires.

There is a popular saying here in Nigeria, 'if you rush in, you rush out'. For the single lady reading this, please note that marriage is not something to be rushed into; neither should it be something you do to meet up with societal expectations. Marriage is one of the most important decisions you would ever make in life, if not the most important, so be sure you take your time. Please don't rush to make an indelible mistake, a mistake and terrible decision that will end up shortening your life which you will find difficult later to forgive yourself maybe in the nearest future or soonest. Singles need to know that marriage is a covenant and commitment to love an imperfect individual UNCONDITIONALLY for the rest of their lives. Permit me to x-ray the keyword "unconditionally" for a better

understanding. It simply means to love without condition. In all circumstances, come what may, you must still love this person. Irrespective of the flaws that would surface later in your partner's behaviour, you must still cherish him or her. The reason why couples are made to go through what looks like a swearing-in on their wedding day by saying the common but mighty words like, "to love in health and in sickness." Yeah, someone is going to get sick, this isn't a curse. "For better for worse," trust me, worse is coming. "For richer or poorer," things are going to change, no doubt about this. Couples don't seem to understand until they get married. I have been in this institution called marriage, reason why I am here to beseech all singles out there to really take their time before entering this citadel of learning called MARRIAGE.

Singleness is not actually what people take it to be. We all think the opposite of being married is being single. This is way far from the truth. Being single is nothing to be ashamed of. Singleness means to be separate, to be unique, it means to be whole. To be fulfilled. Singleness has nothing to do with marriage. God created the period of being single for yourself, and I will show you several reasons why you should be happy if you are still single or unmarried. Singleness is a period of time when one sits down and thinks of what to do with his or her life. A time when you are supposed to truly discover yourself (finding your true

purpose in life) and then take a bold step into your future. There are things you need to build now, values you need to incorporate into your life and the ones you need to discard, to make your life. I also want you to know that the period of singleness is the moment you learn to enjoy life on your own, find out the things that excite you and make you happy. Being single does not make you a nonentity or a stupid person, it makes you see yourself, make adjustments about your life and also prepares you for the future, and then you will see that you are less likely to jump into a relationship for the wrong reasons. The mistake most people make is thinking that marriage makes one complete. I made that mistake myself, no doubt. You see, you are not complete because you are married. Before thinking about marriage, one needs to check for certain things in his or her life. You need to check if you are financially in line, socially relevant, physically in shape, mentally alert, and morally sound. You don't expect all these things to fall in line just because you are married. No, I am telling you things don't work the way we usually expect them to work. Love is actually not a feeling, but most of us are ignorant of this. The truth is; Love is a CHOICE. You see, it is better hoping to be married than married hoping to be single.

It has been scientifically proven that marrying the wrong person reduces the quality of your life by 62%. In fact, it is a decision that can either make or mar you; it is hard to argue

against this. There is a saying that, a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage. Yeah! There are signals (red flags) that you will see while in a relationship that shows you may be in a wrong one, but because you are blinded by so-called, love', you may refuse to see it, and even if your attention is pointed at it, you may refuse to change. It is true that every man is not perfect, but there is a man just perfect for you. I made a terrible mistake, allowing my personal bias, the trend, peer pressure, and what I felt was my immediate desire, affect my ability to think long-term and focus on the things that mattered most. Please do not make the same mistake. Many things can lead one to get married to the wrong person. Many times, young people fall victim to getting married just for the wrong reasons so as to meet up with our most pressing needs. In some cases, it is to avoid loneliness, for sexual gratification, pity, appearance, money, one-time help offered and some other reasons which make a marriage ship wreck beyond repair. Some young ladies get attracted to just physical looks and material things when choosing whom to spend the rest of their lives with.

The truth is that many young couples confessed to me that they felt the person they were dating/courting was great, but then, they were not really attracted to them physically, or they wished they had a certain physical feature. There was a certain lady who had always wanted to marry a guy who was tall and light-skinned. However, the guy that pursued

her effortlessly was dark-skinned. Although later on, she developed deep feelings for him, they hung out together, but then, she was still concerned about the kind of partner she had always wanted.

She was advised to see a marriage counsellor on how to deal with the issue. The counsellor was able to make her see reasons in the dangers one could face in marriage, if one should choose a partner based on physical look. It may end up failing. She was able to get a clearer picture to weigh what was more important to her. What were the things she saw in him that made her like him? Is he even attracted to her? Well, the answers were based on finding out where her main priorities were, so with that, she could actually make a wiser decision. No one could make that decision for her; she was in the best place to do that for herself. The counsellor could only advise her and help her see if her approach in choosing a future partner that she would be spending the rest of her life with was a balanced one.

The problem she had was that, within her, she knew the guy was someone she would want to spend the rest of her life with because obviously, the guy was a good fellow. But then deep within her, she was still contemplating about meeting another good guy who is light in complexion- HER DREAM MAN, in the future even after getting married. The truth is that the temptation for her to cheat in her marriage is somewhat high since she is yet to fully deal with

her obsession for light-skinned men. This kind of mindset constitutes a large part of the problems and reasons for early divorces in many marriages nowadays.

Let me make something clear here, in case you are in the category of people that are scared of seeing someone you will find irresistible in the future, someone more like your dream partner, please know this, there will always be someone who will be better looking than you and your partner - no truer statement than this. Just like you know, no one is perfect. If you should keep looking around for a perfect individual, you will never find, not even one. As a matter of fact, you are not all your mate wants in a mate either. My point is that MR AND MRS PERFECT DO NOT EXIST. They are very far from the realities of this planet earth. Perhaps other planets possess incredible beings that are without flaws, but I don't think they exist in this world that we are in. It is the reality and don't be fooled by the basic and general nature of simplicity and adjustability of free will.

It is highly imperative for you to ensure you are not choosing the minor things over the major ones. Take for instance, when it comes to choosing between sex and compatibility, what would you opt in for? Which one between the two would you advise someone to consider first? Make your choice within you, but do not forget to choose wisely. It may interest you to know that the things that make for good intimacy are mostly intangible - things people do

not really consider before choosing their partners. Fine, physical attraction is good, we all know it is the peak of attraction, but then, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, attention, love, and tenderness are some of the things that count better. These simple but highly influential attitudes and actions are more important than physical appearances. They influence decision making and show how safe you are with whoever you wish to be with.

As we all know, nothing is constant in this life, including our physical look. Looks are transient and deceptive. No matter the surgery done on the face, it can never stop the effects of time and aging. Moreover, things happen in life—people get scars, go darker, there would be potbelly to deal with, beauty does retrogress, breast do sag, people get thinner, some get fatter and so on. It is disastrous to make permanent decisions on temporary ones. You see, things that matter the most should have more priority over the ones that do not matter much. You need to check out for certain things. If you really want to settle down with this person, you need to go beyond the surface. By going beyond the surface, I mean; you need to check for the values of this person, know his or her worth. I am certain no one is after a worthless fellow. You need to check out for the character; the temperament should also be put into consideration. Speaking of temperament, I believe we all know how important it is to know your temperament as well as that of

the person you are planning to spend the rest of your life with. It is really important for both of you to do a compatibility check in order to ascertain if you'll gel well together as a couple. In any case, it is certainly not about money alone, because in as much as money is powerful defence, it shouldn't be the only determinant or yardstick for going into any relationship. Money should be seen as a tool that embellishes our relationships and not a factor of judging an individual's strength.

Another very important factor that one needs to be sure of is the genotype compatibility. As a matter of fact, you need to know your genotype even before starting any serious relationship that can lead to marriage. I wish someone would have given me this information earlier on in life, because, unfortunately for me, it was after I was already married that I discovered that my ex-husband and I were both AS genotype. I knew I was AS all along, but he thought and told me he was AA until we later found out that he was actually AS like me. Having discovered this, there were several nights I couldn't sleep; all I did was to think about my life, think about how ruined it felt. I couldn't tell anyone that I was blinded by affections to not critically tackle the issue of our genotype before it became too late. What does it cost to visit the hospital to confirm our genotype? It'd cost me nothing, but I was so carried away by my emotions, as well as my desire to be seen and known as a married woman. I just

relaxed and believed what he told me about his status to the point where it didn't bother anymore even though I knew he wasn't so sure, and that there was a huge possibility that he might even be wrong. When the truth about his AS genotype status eventually came out, we were so far gone with a baby already on the way. But going forward, getting pregnant became a thing of fear for me because we were always worried about what the genotype of our unborn baby would be. This eventually led us to not having more than two lovely daughters together because I was always scared of having an SS child.

This makes me remember what one of my friends said one day while discussing this genotype issue with him. He said, and I quote, "People don't really consider genotype like that before starting a relationship. 99% of youths won't marry who they are dating now, and because they feel that the chances of marrying the person who they are presently dating is very low, they end up not taking the issue of genotype seriously. His statement blew me away, but as funny as it may sound, most people in relationships are actually not mature enough to be in one. I actually gave that friend of mine my own opinion about what he said above. I told him it appears to me as though most people are just wasting their time. They are actually in the relationship just to have someone they are having premarital sex with since this seems to be the order of the day in our world of today.

But come to think of it; *what really is the point in dating someone you can't marry?*

In the same vein, another thing that baffles me is some Christian couples who, despite knowing that they are both AS genotype, decide to go ahead with their wedding with the belief that their faith in God will change their genotype in order for them to live happily ever after. Don't get me wrong, it is a good thing to trust in God, but then, when it comes to genotype compatibility, one needs to be very careful not to be religiously foolish about it. That reminds me of a common saying during my primary school days when one of my teachers used to say heaven helps those who help themselves whenever we were being unruly in class. You see, the motives that spur human beings to examine and/or study their environment(s) carefully are many, and strong among them is the need to feed and satisfy our curiosity as higher mammals. This made it possible for people to make research on the high rate of stillbirth in the olden days. I believe God wanted us to carefully and thoughtfully consider the issue of genotype before marriage, and that's why He empowered many researchers and provided a lot of information on the subject-matter in order to reduce mortality rate through awareness. Besides, if you have ever witnessed an SS child continuously have health issues and writhe in pain for something that is no fault of the innocent kid, then you will surely know that it is so much better to be safe than sorry.

However, the bitter truth is that some people, even after checking their genotype and are aware they are not compatible, still go ahead to get married - All in the name of LOVE.

Don't be like them. It's high time you know and do what's best for you and what will last you long, and even forever. It's a matter of choice, but I want you to choose rightly knowing that there is nothing bad in being a good example for many others to emulate. It will cost you time, patience and dedication, but in the long run, it will be for your own personal development and betterment. You see, marriage is a reality that God wants us to get right, that was why He revisited Adam, "the first man" in the beautiful garden to provide a suitable partner that will think like him and adjust to his flaws. Well, I must admit that because I was attracted to physical looks and materialism myself, I didn't really understand the concept of marriage, so I got it all wrong. Looking back now in retrospect, I can see how foolish and uninformed most of my marriage decisions were. In fact, I now believe that I was totally off the marriage track that God ordained for me because I focused on all the meaningless things and entered into marriage for all the wrong reasons. While I agree that desiring a handsome or wealthy partner is not on its own bad, I will like to state that those two qualities are never enough to make a great marriage. So, when making your choice, don't get carried

away by his physical looks or the size of his pocket. Don't get carried away by what he promised he would do for you when you're married. Don't make a fool out of yourself to believe what's not feasible and real. Don't try to manage him or hope that he would change. What if he doesn't change? What if he never comes to the consciousness of changing things that hurt you? What if you keep waiting until nothing changes? Will you then have the power and energy to say no? Whatever the case is, your answers to these questions will still be irrelevant because, at this point, you are already far gone in your married life. So, in other words, you need to be sure that you are both compatible in values. Do not deceive yourself with the whole expectation of "Oh, I will change him when we finally get married." This is just a very huge risk to take because you can't teach an old dog a new trick, and a tiger will never change its stripes. Cliché as it may sound, there is a reason why there are so many anecdotes on the inability to change. Encouraging your partner to become their best self is a remarkable quality that you should have as a helpmate and support system, but trying to grudgingly make your partner change can do more damage than good for the both of you. This was another lesson that I had to learn the hard way. You see, my ex-husband lived a life that I didn't live when I met him. Apart from the fact that he smoked and drank a lot, he wasn't close to God at all. I saw these things while we were dating but felt I could change

him. Unfortunately, things got worse to the point where he became so aggressive and started to hit me. I can still remember the sounds of spoons falling down the very first day he hit him in the kitchen while I was making dinner. I immediately packed my load and left with my daughter to a friend's house, but after I spent a few days and he didn't even bother to look for me, I still carried myself back home and continued to live with him despite the abusive environment. I always used to think that it is natural for couples to want to change and grow for the better in their marriages, but in my own case, I was dealing with a partner who did not want to change and work on improving our married life together. It was just a sad situation. Every day, it was a different kind of fight or trouble until I eventually got fed up.

Now I know that going into a marriage relationship with the assumption or hoping that your partner will eventually change is really a bad idea and a pipedream because it has been proven that people don't necessarily change because you want to 'change' them, they change when they are actually ready to change on their own. Your nagging, criticism, threats, tantrums, accusations or blames won't make your partner change until he is ready to do so himself. In fact, the only person you can change is yourself, and that includes how you react to how your partner behaves. So, if you know you can't deal with his weaknesses or vices before marriage, it is better you don't go in. It's far better for you to

find someone whose character traits and habits complement yours in many ways than not while also being prepared to accept some of his or her personality flaws which might never go away because, by definition, they are unchangeable. For this reason, you must learn to adopt a sort of 'love em' or 'leave em' mentality when it comes to checking your partner's behaviour in order to determine whether or not you will go into a serious relationship - It is that simple.

Furthermore, you have to be very careful of those you listen to within your circle of influence. Be careful of people you take advice from. Be careful of people who can't use their life experience to motivate you. People who talk based on the papers they read. People who talk based on the qualifications they have in terms of academics without scaling through the school of union. The school of marital maturity. These sets of people are the sets of classical individuals who we look up to in the society but fail in their marriages. Take good advice. Meet people you think their lifestyles could be of help to you. People who don't cope and endure their marriages. People who don't deceive themselves and the gullible ones that seek wisdom. Then go for marriage counselling. Always surround yourself with people who can tell you the hard truth; in fact, when you hear hard truth, your subconscious mind tells you the real fact about it, but most of the time, you carelessly pay attention to it. You believe it, but it doesn't suite or correlate with the things you want. This is actually the beginning of

saying NO to reality - the beginning of self-worth and priority. Self-worth and priority are good features of living a standard lifestyle, but when it comes to marriage, you pay more attention to reality. You focus your mind on the things that will help you, and on the standard that will give you a sound body and mind. However, more importantly, be humble enough to listen to their wise counsel, even when you don't like what they say. Humility is important. Of course, the choice of whom to marry will ultimately be yours, but then, the people you surround yourself with can have a positive or negative influence on such a decision. Therefore, as you have your roles to play, they too do. They too can influence it in a bigger way. Take time to reflect on things you have heard, pick a conclusion there as your decision and take it further to someone who you think qualifies to handle it better. This is called wisdom. It is practically applicable.

Frankly, if I had a chance to turn back the hands of time, I am very sure that, with what I know now, I would make a better decision as it pertains to marriage. But of course, I can't, and there is certainly no empowerment in wallowing in regrets of yesterday because regrets are essentially unproductive if they remain as nothing but regrets. For sure, you can reflect on your pasts for a few moments so as to learn from it, but it will be utterly wrong if you perpetually negatively dwell on your past. You will achieve nothing but depress yourself even further. However, feel free to express

yourself, share your experiences and grief with someone who you know has the wisdom to listen to you and not criticise your past mistakes. This is a wise thing to do because holding on to unexpressed grief may be hurtful to your health and general state of mind. So instead of dwelling on the bad experiences of my past married life, I have chosen to take full responsibility for my many mistakes, learn from them, and move on with a daily commitment to make every moment of my life count. It was a tough process, but I pulled through. If you are a single mum like me reading this book, just like Bruce Lee said, if you have the courage to admit your mistakes and learn from them, then you can always find that special space of forgiveness from life – forgiveness both to you and by you. Stop allowing your mistakes of the past hold you back from rising to your full potential. You can always do something meaningful and worth-while when you're still breathing, and since you can't change the past, you should adjust in the present to build yourself a better future. So refuse to be stuck in your past, blaming or beating yourself up for the way things turned out, knowing that it's important to let go and admit you were wrong in order to take full responsibility for your actions going forward. Perhaps, you are still living in denial or blaming your erstwhile partner for all your mistakes, and it is preventing you from taking responsibility to grow yourself to a whole new level. I did all that at some point, so believe me when I

say, that is needless. Today is a fresh day to make a new start. Take charge and make the most of it. You can and you should for it is time to brace up and move on.

For the record, I believe that marriage is a great institution, and I'm so thankful to God for having been able to experience and learn from it. A significant part of the lesson I have learnt is that some critical mistakes are made in marriage over and over again to the point where one or both spouses gives up hope of fighting to keep the marriage afloat. While I would not want to dwell or elaborate on the mistakes made by my ex-husband during our years of marriage, I would like to share some of the ones I made with some thoughts on how you can avoid making them as well.

Here are 7 Marriage Mistakes I made;

1. **PUTTING SEX ON THE BACK BURNER** – You see, apart from the fact that I've always had a very low appetite for sex, having sex after childbirth can be very demanding because of the need to attend to your kid(s) almost round the clock. What this then means is that you will hardly have time to satisfy your partner sexually, and the deeper you fall into this 'no-time-for-sex' syndrome whether because of your low sex drive or the challenges of parenthood, the harder it becomes to reignite and/or rejuvenate your sexual intimacy. Let's face it; often avoiding sex can actually

lead to divorce because without a good sex life, it's easier to give up on marriage, and as it is, my background and upbringing did not do much to help me fully understand that the intimacy of sex is a crucial part of marriage that is worthy of embracing at any time possible. Now I know that I really made a mistake by putting sex on the back burner a lot because all it did was make him to further drift away from me such that whatever bond we had managed to build started to become weaker and weaker with each passing day until our marriage could not be salvaged anymore. Although there is nothing I can do about my past mistake in this regard, you can always use sex as a solid tool to improve upon the physical and emotional intimacy between you and your partner.

2. **NOT REALLY BEING OPEN AND TRANSPARENT** – Secrecy or lack of openness and transparency often creates room for mistrust and myriads of misconceptions and negative perceptions about the real situation and/or condition of the challenges that most couples are facing. In fact, the absence of openness and transparency in marriage is largely responsible for the many dangers and grave implications that are causing my marriages to crash worldwide. In my own case, it got to the point that my ex-husband and I could no longer build any

meaningful bond because I was keeping a lot of secrets and hiding my true self from him once I realised that he was equally doing the same. Unfortunately, by so doing, I missed the opportunity of using transparency as a tool to honour God and even my ex-husband by extension. If I had known better, I would have kept being open and transparent regardless of whether my ex-husband reciprocated or not, because I now strongly believe that that transparency is one of the ingredients for a successful marriage, and a large part of why God calls to be faithful to one another in marriage for His own glorification. In truth, God wants every spouse to be as open as possible to the other because the more secrets you keep from your partner, the less opportunity you will have to build real intimacy in your marriage. For instance, the issue of genotype that I mentioned earlier messed up a whole lot of bonding activities and went further to gradually kill the intimacy between us once we discovered that we both have an AS genotype. The truth of the matter is that this could have been easily avoided by being completely open and honest with each other from the get-go. So my advice is that you try as much as you can to be open and transparent in your before and during marriage knowing that this particular action will continually bring every dark

thing into light for a strong, stable and successful marriage relationship.

3. **EMOTIONAL UNFAITHFULNESS-** Emotional unfaithfulness in marriage is when one or both of the partners involved invest more of their emotional energy outside their marriage in order to receive emotional support and companionship from the other relationship. Another way to say this is that emotional unfaithfulness is an emotional connection with someone of the opposite sex that you keep a secret from your spouse. Let me not lie, I was emotionally unfaithful while married to my ex-husband because it got to a particular period in the marriage that I felt completely neglected by him. In order to get back at him and recover from the several sexual affairs I knew he was having then, I channelled my emotional energy, time and attention into someone else. Although I often felt guilt-free whenever I was emotionally unfaithful to him because it never ever got to the extent of having sex outside my marriage, but looking back now I believe that my being emotionally unfaithful was equally damaging as having a sexual affair. The truth is that much of the pain and hurt of emotional unfaithfulness emanates from the lies, deception, and betrayal that is associated with it. With this in mind, my advice to you is not to

be emotionally unfaithful to your spouse because any part of your life that is essentially kept a secret from your partner is dangerous to the trust that already exists between you two.

4. **ALLOWING FAMILY INTERFERENCE** – There is a change of allegiance that comes with marriage that is inevitable. Before marriage, your allegiance is to your parents, but once you are married, your allegiance should shift to your spouse and no one else. Moreover, the Bible is clear on how you are to relate to your parents after your marriage – 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). Based on this scripture, it is clear that God's model for marriage involves 'leaving' your parents and holding fast to your husband or wife. Every married couple should be able to fight off the temptations and pressures of allowing their parents or family members to interfere in their marriage by establishing proper boundaries. It is okay to get some advice from people outside your marriage occasionally, but allowing them to interfere fully is never a good idea. As for me, I failed to realise that the marriage was between me and my ex-husband, not our moms, dad, aunts, brothers and sisters. Like my ex I was also guilty of bringing in extended family members to come meddle and help us

resolve our private issues. Both families were too involved to the extent where they knew so much about our private life. I will always tell my mum personal stuff about him while he will always tell his brother about me, so things always got messy because of their interference. In my defence, I could say that I was so helpless and vulnerable at the time that I could not help but confide in my mum, but if you really look at, no one has more power, insight, knowledge, experience, or say on your marriage relationship than you and your spouse. In an ideal marriage situation, you just have to form a united front to make your union a priority while you keep your parents, siblings, aunts, friends, etc. at bay and in check even if they don't agree with this approach.

5. **I HATED COOKING** – Recently I came across an article where one married man said that having a wife who cannot cook is worse than having a wife who is unwilling to have enough sex to uphold her marriage. This really got me thinking and wondering how my ex-husband must have felt all those years about my hatred for cooking. Yes I know it sounds very un-wife-like to hate cooking for your family, but after working for many hours in a day and coming home to also take care of the kids and other household chores, cooking freshly made meals was the last thing on my mind. In

fact, for me, cooking has never been a thing of joy but a chore that needs to be done at the expense of just doing something else that I found more enjoyable. I mean cooking always felt like so much work with little satisfaction at the end for me, it takes so much time and effort to prepare a fresh meal, and then it takes few minutes for you to devour it until it's all gone just like that. To make matters worse for me, apart from the fact that my ex-husband wanted a fresh meal made on a daily basis, he is also a pretty good cook himself. So no matter how great I felt my meals were, he always had something negative to say about them in many ways that broke my cooking confidence even more so. I can't even begin to count how many times I had to accept defeat and cede control of my kitchen to him just to allow peace to reign. However, I know that I was absolutely wrong not to have stepped up my game to prove him wrong by perfecting my cooking skills and keeping my head up by so doing. In Nigeria, we have a saying that the path to a man's heart is through his stomach. Of course, that is not all there is to it, but therein lies a glimmer of truth that is powerful enough to make or mar your marriage. Ignore this statement at your own peril.

6. **I GAVE MORE THAN I RECEIVED** – Giving more than you receive in your marriage might not

look like a bad quality to have on the surface, but if you are the one doing all the giving and getting little or nothing in return from your spouse, then your acts of giving is bound to backfire sooner or later. I always knew my ex-husband was not a real giver even before I married him, but because I'm natural giver, I thought that my desire to always give would rub off on him and then he would change with time. So I had no problem with giving more than I got at the earlier stages of our married life, but a few years down the line, resentful feelings and frustrations started to build up when it became clear to me that I was the only one trying to fill up most of the blank spaces in our marriage. It just felt like he had this sense of entitlement and was not willing to give me as much as I was giving him in order to make our marriage work. In many instances, I was the one who always came up with the bonding activities we could do together. I was the one who communicated more often and suggested some creative things to do or try. The long and short is that I did whatever it took to make my ex-husband happy, even if it made me somewhat unhappy. Unfortunately, I was only deceiving myself into believing that we had a good relationship because eventually, I became grumpy, annoyed and tired of it all. This led to some of the many fights we had those

days because I started to draw comparisons between him and me. Well, after all said and done, I now realise that being a 'giver' is my issue and not his, so I should have just focused on giving more to myself, developing my own passions and becoming a better version of me.

7. **UNSPOKEN EXPECTATIONS** – Most times, we tend to only communicate what we expect from a relationship after we might have been disappointed or let down by our partners. There are no two ways about it; unspoken expectations will surely grow into unmet expectations because how on earth do you expect your heart desires to be met if you don't communicate them early and clearly enough to your partner. I mean you cannot keep quiet or speak vaguely about your needs, wants and problems then still expect them to be met by your spouse when he or she is neither a magician nor a mind reader. In my former marriage journey, clear, concise and consistent communication was constantly missing from our relationship, so there were a lot of unmet expectations from both of us. In my head, I would be expecting him to know what I wanted to either give me or do for me. Likewise, there were loads of things that he was expecting me to do or give him in different areas of our marriage, but because we both did not

communicate our expectations from each other clearly enough for the next line of action to be taken, we always ended up being disappointed and expressing frustrations of unmet expectations towards each other. For instance, I was brought up by my parents to deal with misunderstandings immediately, while he was someone who needed more time to calm down before dealing with them, so while I would usually want to address issues straight up, he needed more time to process issues, and this did not really go down well with me back then. I just expected him to take charge as the head of the family and immediately handle things the same way my dad used to do, forgetting that we were both coming from different backgrounds. Truth be told, most married people usually have a similar story like mine because most of us entered into marriage believing that we really know and understand our partners only to discover later that there were many unspoken expectations – like how to handle our finances, pursue of career goals, satisfy our sexual desires, number of kids to have, the type of cars to buy, where to spend holidays, and many others too many to mention. In any case, unspoken expectations can be a Silent Killer in our relationships, so it's best you do yourself and your partner a favour by talking about your expectations

ahead of time in order to avoid a lot of heartbreaks down the road.

Important takes:

- Who and what are you listening to when you want to take significant decisions? Your emotions or logic and reason?

Emotions should not lead the marriage-decision. Emotion clears off fast and leaves you in the reality of your conditions. Do not allow yourself to be carried away with things that seem pleasant at the moment; those attractive things with limited ends. They seem good and desirable, yes, they are, but they will not last to take you through the real journey of your life. They may promise to be there for you when you're going through your hard moments, but let me tell you, you will learn your lessons, and I pray you won't learn them in a terrible way. Emotions will make you take decisions you will many times later regret because as time flies, those things become clearer to you, and if you're not careful, you won't be able to correct them. Don't allow your emotions to draw you briskly to your grave when you're not preparing for it. I am not saying you shouldn't be emotional, of course, you will, and you should, but be careful not to make drastic decisions

when you're not yourself, when you're in that moment where you mostly think below reality.

- When you have made a mistake, the first step in solving the created problem is your full admittance of responsibility. Do not stay and remain in the place of regret and self-pity. It does not help. Nothing good will come out of it because I was once there, and it was full of pains and sorry. Self-pity is mere excessive and self-absorbed sad moods over all your worries. It is a psychological state of your mind that makes you think low about yourself and your personality. As a matter of fact, your self-pity focuses more on interpersonal relationships with others which allows you to be emotionally down and feel pity for yourself when you are with people. You mostly think and respond to others with the desire and goal to create attention, help, and sympathy. It will not help you to break forth. Do not look outside yourself, take enough time to look through yourself for the source of the problems you are going through because the truth you are looking for outside lies within you and your issues. This is the beginning of the solution you need to embrace and set for yourself to get the most genuine help and way forward you desire. Self-pity will always lie to you in your eyes about who you really are and

eventually steal your happiness from you. It will oftentimes keep you immobilised in order for you to have this belief that the future ahead will likely be the same with your past. Never allow self-pity to break you. If you think you're going through many things, painful moments, try to change your way of approach, and if you think you can't find meaning to it because it looks insignificant, make it meaningful, create your own beautiful meaning around it. All the powers to make a difference lies with you, and you don't need to doubt yourself. Keep doing what's right and be positive about yourself and the way you're living your life. You just have to live it right and make a difference.



CHAPTER 3

Build Self-Confidence...

Women have the tendency of having low self-confidence. This is due to the African mentality where every female child is regarded as a second-class citizen, baby-making machines, a soothing companion for sexual pleasure (the other room) and whose assignment is majorly in the kitchen. A woman is seen and not heard, her whole duty is ascribed to only satisfy the husband at the expense of her own health, bodily outlook and things that will bring her joy. It is very obvious that in the dispensation before now and in this century that we have found ourselves, women are more vulnerable to health challenges, thus making them look older than their age as a result of how they package themselves. It is high time we left that generation and became empowered so as not to be left out in this fast-growing global changing world. One of the approaches to empowerment is building self-confidence.

Self-confidence is a life skill that is expected of every individual. It is a skill needed to face challenges of life. Self-

confidence is the ability of an individual to evaluate and critic his own social and personal standing with respect to his environment and still has the capability to derive fulfilment out of it. These factors can either bring about positive or negative implications. In a favourable environment, you as a confident person will be able to exercise your abilities and talent beyond expectations. You will get an opportunity to set goals, forget the mistakes you have made in the past, and also have the privilege to learn new things. Self-confidence is influenced by a variety of factors like home background, work environment, and commitment directed towards pursuing a cause or career. Building self-confidence depends on your perceived ability to manage an action. Every woman should build her self-confidence because it helps you draw courage and resolution when the going gets tough in life. It helps you to keep things in perspective and back yourself when everyone else says that the task ahead is nearly impossible to complete in the stipulated time.

A confident woman has enough ability to understand her limitations and knows how to make up for that with her resolve and strengths. However, note that self-confidence and self-esteem go hand - in - hand, and having both as a woman is very important, especially in your relationship(s). They are very crucial to build your true nature and personality over and over again - as most women question themselves from a very courageous perspective. In fact, it is

the ultimate decision to make when you want the best for yourself even when you're trying to recover from a situation you least expected to have found yourself in – like going through a divorce.

GOING THROUGH A DIVORCE is never a comfortable experience. Life after divorce is an unpalatable experience. It has never been something exciting. It brings different types of emotions for all members of the family, including the children. Most times the children are at the receiving end, like a Yoruba adage that says, when two elephants fight, the grassroots suffers. Among many feelings that everyone gets are; anger, confusion, anxiety, depression, and so many others one could think of. The hardest period in divorce is the first year because so many things and many changes do occur in the family, and everyone is expected to adjust to them. The emotional disorder divorce does create is nothing to write home about, especially for the children. For them, things can be strange, scary, frustrating and confusing.

So if you really want to build confidence for yourself and your children during this period, the first thing I'll advise you to pay attention to is knowing that you can and should only look inwards and within you for the confidence that you seek. Most people find it hard to believe that building confidence is a matter of how you task yourself to maintain your real self-worth in spite of the circumstances you're

going through. It's not about something you get to gain on the outside world. It's not seated in the colony of any other person you can imagine. You will never find it outside yourself because it has to start and flow from your within. Whatever the case, self-confidence is really knowing "WHO YOU ARE," your core nature, your true colour and makeup, even though you're unable to tap into it at that moment because of the hardship you are currently facing.

Therefore, if I were to give you one piece of advice that can at least help to bring your confidence back, it's that I will like you to focus more on yourself. You're not looking for something on the outside world as much as you always think. Focusing on drawing strength and courage from within will help you let go of those troublesome external forces and things that you really cannot control, to focus more on reconnecting with your inner-self in order take charge of that part of you that has and will always be under your full control. In fact, by looking inwards and counting on your inner abilities to build back your self confidence, you will not only be able to see the real value of your self-worth, but you will also be able to find an inner peace of mind that is key to making notable improvements to the outer parts of your life - slowly but surely.

You also need to have compassion for yourself. Yes, this is true because self-compassion will help you to be kind to yourself, rather than harshly judging yourself for your

mistakes or shortcomings. In truth, having self-compassion provides a stable sense of self-worth that helps you separate the bad decisions you made in the past from your present well-being. This is very important because you need to have the ability to always forgive and be kind to yourself, especially when you make mistakes or feel ashamed. Admitting your mistakes and forgiving yourself for making them is crucial on the road to regaining your lost confidence, and having self-compassion helps you understand that your self-worth should always remain solid and unconditional, whether in good or bad times. So with this in mind, it is time for you to forgive yourself for not being perfect. Nobody is born with the answers to all of life's questions. Nobody is perfect to have the courage to face all the challenges of life, but experience will make our understanding broad and better. This is why you have to look within yourself to discover the best part of you that will make you adapt to any circumstances you find yourself. It's all about building your self-confidence, and this change comes through your inner determination.

Another critical thing is to recognise the main reason why you're being beaten up by your circumstances. Do you feel like if you beat yourself up, you will keep yourself rational? The answer is, "NO." There are many women in the world today who find themselves in the same shoe. Women who are going through relationship problems. Perhaps they have

more serious cases than yours. They keep limiting and hitting hard on themselves because they think that by so doing, they will find a solution, which is a big lie. As long as you keep blaming yourself, you create a vacuum for emptiness and loneliness, which becomes another problem. Later, you'll discover you're creating more problems for yourself. No matter how you see yourself, you'll always have an open wound. You'll never have that willingness to go out there and make things happen. So, please try to replace punishment with self-love. You can always be that positive person you desire to be. Leave the past in the past and face where you are now and the future ahead will definitely unfold in your favor. Remember you have a purpose, and if you allow dejection and low self-esteem to kill your dream, it would have become worse when you realise you're the true problem of yourself and even your broken relationship. Think about what you can do to develop your self-confidence more and more, knowing that when you become truly confident about yourself, you are less likely to depend on others to validate your self-worth.

With that being said, the strain and dent that going through a failed marriage puts on one's life and self-confidence is usually overwhelming even though our society of today romanticises and glamorises it as easy. Also, remaining in a marriage that you derive no fulfilment from, is also emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausting. I say

this because I spent enough time living in both worlds; and neither was a pleasant experience for me. Besides the unpleasantness, other elements of divorce are important to state here too -the societal element. Most African societies frown at divorce, and the women are stigmatised when they reveal the collapse of their marriages. Hence, when it happens, the divorced woman has at least two sure battles to fight and win; the struggle to deal with her recovery process and the struggle for societal acceptance. The latter is often much longer than the former and, for some, does not ever completely happen. This is one of the primary reasons why many women today, after going through a divorce, lose self-confidence and gradually begin to withdraw from social life. For them the personal shell of being alone is the best and less painful “comfort.”

My case was no different. It was somewhat worse. I will explain.

Since getting married was a huge part of what defined my pride and something my friends and I used to rub shoulders with back then, it was a terrible blow on my self-worth when my marriage eventually collapsed. The whole experience was a burst to my bubble. I thought they said marriage was supposed to last forever or ‘till death do us apart,’ I told myself; but here I was, just after seven years and two daughters, already a divorcee with a shattered heart. I felt like a clear loser.

I didn't know whom to talk to. I was alone and lonely. My dad, whom I would have run to, was already gone to be with the Lord. I didn't want to bother my mum, as I felt she had been through a lot and, besides, she had done what any mother would do for a grown adult like me. She had comforted and advised me through the ordeal. Slowly, it dawned on me; those that warned me not to rush into marriage were right after all, and I was wrong not to have listened to their candid advice. The consequence of my mistake was staring right at me, but I didn't have the guts to stare back. I was so ashamed of myself that I hardly spoke in public. I withdrew from social exposures. Many times, I would lock myself in the room, crying and asking myself why I made mistakes the way I did. At some point, I stopped praying and believing that anything good could come out of my life. As far as I was concerned, I was done! That I was the only daughter of my parents even made matters worse. I felt I had failed them. Then, I found myself sapping easily at people. Slowly, I began to slide into depression. It was like the slow but sure descent a parachute takes as it floats downwards, to the earth.

Now, just before I continue, let me quickly say this. Marriage is a beautiful thing if you get it right. It is one of the most precious gifts given by God to a man and a woman. The conjugal relationship between a man and a woman in a state of mutual love and fulfilment is indeed something I will

always cherish and give my endorsement to. At least, as a little girl, I used to admire the way my dad and mum lived in love and shared values – something I wished to experience for myself too. Unfortunately, that didn't work out for me, and that gave me an extra reason to feel angry at myself. For several months, I beat myself up and found it hard to engage in any meaningful social interaction with people around me, all because I had lost my sense of self-worth. Life for me then became a triangle: my room, school runs, shopping, and then back to my room. At some point, I buried myself in social media, not necessarily because I had any serious business I was doing there, but because I was bored and depressed and needed some quiet activity I could hide behind.

Just like me, are you currently feeling lost, and your self-confidence is at ground-zero? Are you stuck in the tunnel of a failed marriage that all you see around you is the darkness of woe and gloom? Maybe you had high hopes for your marriage; everything seemed perfect when it all started out. I did. Maybe before you said, "I do," your partner looked like someone you could spend the rest of your life with. I did too. I never thought we could have issues. I was so carried away with the affection of love that was born through my inexperienced desire for what looked too good to create pain for me. It was the greatest hit on me, and I felt I had lost everything, things my parents suffered to build on me. I felt rejected, and I knew I was going to be terribly damaged, but

God took me from where my imagination could reach. Maybe things are different today with the evaporation of the hopes and dreams of marriage and the failure of that marriage. Perhaps he wasn't the right person for me. Maybe he's meant for someone else, and I couldn't see that too soon before I gave my all for him. Maybe what you have left are similar memories and the ashes of pain, regret, and self-torture. Or, maybe anytime you find yourself in social gatherings, you hardly reveal that you are divorced, that you are a single mum because you feel you would be labelled. It's the norm we always avoid because we have lost our confidence. We think we don't belong to society anymore because we've failed in marriage. You don't have the confidence to face your neighbours. You can't even talk to anyone about how you feel because you think you will be judged. They would say you caused it, that it was your fault, and reel out a long list of mistakes you made. Or, maybe when you open up, they would start a pity party in your name and bring back tears to your eyes. But then you have heard enough of that, and you are tired of people reminding you of your mistakes. You are now in the business of picking up yourself. You are now interested in those things that will change your story and make you feel you want a better version of your true nature. You simply want to take back your life, move on, and be the best version of yourself. You have tried, but the fears still prey on your mind leaving you

stuck to a cycle of gloom and regret.

Yet, you just want to build your life back. Move on with your life and start to look for a way forward because none of the pains you've gone through has really become a solution; rather, they make life more miserable for you. You realised it was time to say NO to regrets and pains. Many times, you feel you want to get out by force, but you couldn't help yourself, and you cried pitifully in your pains and challenges because you're powerless and too damaged to find the courage to stand again. If this describes you, then know that you can do precisely that. You can take back the type of life you want to choose again. You can always be the better version of what you used to be to live above every issue you've ever gone through before. You need to be truly ready to walk out from all your worries and pains safely because if you aren't ready, the change you envisage will remain a dream that never comes through. One important way to start is first to build your confidence back. Low self-worth or incapability to address your issues and be realistic to yourself will kill your vibes and makes you remain at a spot. You need your confidence the same way you need your breath to live through each day. Getting your confidence back, from my experience, begins with an intentional willingness to see yourself differently. Let me explain: The first behaviour most people face when they experience failure in any endeavour in life is to begin to see themselves through the

prism of that failure. Hence, they see themselves as failures. They find it so difficult to let go of those things that push them back. The fear of failure and the fear of recollection of past negativities. They take the experience of failure and turn it into their own identity. Also, as long as they take on the identity of failure, they can be sure it will affect other aspects of their lives. Getting confidence back in yourself means that you realise that failure is an experience and not a person. If you go through failure in your marriage, it does not mean you are a failure as a person. It only means you experienced failure, but there is some good news: As you experienced failure, you can also experience success, if you do things differently. This true and important realisation helped begin the confidence-regaining process for me.

How you see yourself in life can either liberate you to be your best self, or it can imprison you from rising to your full potential. This is important after a divorce. Your self-confidence plays a critical role in your ability to rise back from a divorce; hence, it is imperative that it is worked on. If you can build your self-confidence, it will take you a long way and change your life for the better. If you are confident in yourself, you feel loved, good, happy, secured, less anxiety, less disappointed even when rejected and you can take up risks as you will be willing to take up opportunities alongside the challenges that you will encounter.

Do not allow yourself to slide to the realm of self-pity or

self-blame. Believe you can succeed; the ability is in you. Activate it! You are stronger than you think. To face life after divorce, you need to overcome fear, especially fear of the unknown. That you are a divorced, single mum doesn't make you less a human or a misfit in the social space. You can be a single mum and be self-confident and happy. You can be a single mum and still live a life of purpose and success. At some point, I had to brace up and challenge the voices in my head telling me that I was a failure. Rather than sit at home and wallow in pain, trying to change yesterday, I chose to take on the gauntlet of creating the tomorrow that I wanted.

In the continuation of regaining confidence in myself, I actively sought avenues where I would hear a different story of myself and life. I started reading the Bible, watching motivational tapes, and meditating on God's Word on a daily basis. Gradually, I took charge of my internal dialogue. I started saying positive things about myself, rewriting the code in my brain, and re-focusing my mind only on those things that empower my faith to get back up. It was a long process, but I was consistent. I stayed focused on regaining my self-confidence, on finding my true self-worth.

Forgiving yourself has a lot to do with lifting up your vibration, confidence and self-esteem again. They have a lot to do in moving you forward in anywhere, any situation you find yourself. You cannot lift up yourself if you fill up

yourself with negative words every day. So, replace self-punishment with acts of self-love day in, day out. When negative thoughts come to you again, try to fight them. Express what you want for yourself. Say it loud for the devil to hear you. Let God see a change. Let God be confident to say she's improving.

As a matter of fact, you need God's validation. You need God to back you up this time. He won't do anything if you refuse to accept positive changes in your life. Even though He is willing to help, if you don't make the decision to help yourself first and foremost, He will always keep quiet as if He doesn't exist. Make a move, and God will show you the way that leads to your ultimate freedom.

Even though I had a couple of external support from few loving people who were kind enough to stand by me through those trying times, much of the work of rebuilding my self-confidence was my personal decision and responsibility. No one will help build your confidence, but YOU. You can only be encouraged or persuaded. When you go through tough times, there are some people who would stand by you to see that you come through better. Some would not leave you until they have seen changes they had aspired to see in you. These are angels in human form – folks who are willing to provide you with the support system you need to re-discover your light. However, you must realise that rising above the failure you experienced will always be your ultimate decision,

responsibility, and willpower, and you must be consistent at it. Each morning that you wake up to face the day, spend some time alone to reinforce your positive belief about who you are and whom God has created you to be. Stop listening to people who are only out to remind you of your failure, people who are just there to add more insult to injury, people who will create a negative atmosphere for you whereby you begin to feel bad and terrible about yourself. I advise you to flee from them. Begin to hang around positive people who uplift your spirit – people who share your aspiration of a better future. I will talk more about this principle in the chapter: Finding Social Support

For the single lady thinking of getting married, here are some helpful lessons. You might want to learn from my experience with regards to building self-confidence. A successful marriage requires the combined effort of two loving adults who are both confident in themselves as individuals - an amalgamation of two people who believe in themselves. Only if you are self-confident, then you can earn respect from your partner, thus, making you more attractive to your partner.

As a lady, most often, men may respect you when they haven't opened your pants, but immediately they do, they start misbehaving, and if you're someone who doesn't value and believe in integrity, you quickly lose your respect. At the same time, men may have sex with you and still value you

like the air they breathe in to sustain life. The difference lies in your self-esteem, your self-worth. As a matter of fact, people will take you for granted if you think less about yourself. You have to believe in yourself and the kind of personality you embrace. You don't want to be in a marriage where your self-image or self-worth is constantly being belittled or battered. Timidity in marriage is a sure recipe for frustration and failure. In fact, if you're the type that always gets scared of your partner, you will be subject to embarrassment and shame. Your partner should be someone that sees the best in you and is willing to work you through your weakness in love and respect.

Both of you must understand each other more than anyone. A marriage that will last is a mutually inclusive one. A marriage where one shares his or her ambition, and the other person embraces it with cheerfulness. I am not saying every opinion is worth embracing, but when you have someone who understands you more than you do, he or she knows how to assess and address opinions that won't help you. It will come in an easy way where you will be able to think from their own perspectives - and make sure you don't place too much concern on your own priorities.

Most of the time, we end up the other way around. Priority is good; in fact, it's an assessment of your self-worth. It will help you to make the right choice most of the time when you are building personal and strong self-esteem.

However, many extreme priorities have killed potential marriages and relationships. When you put much concern on those things that are not realistic, you will end up destroying your amazing relationship. Pay more attention to things that seem important and that will help your relationship to grow. Not everything will eventually turn out to be a truly amazing goal worth pursuing. There are some priorities that will surely not work for you. Even though most of them are working for your friends, you don't know exactly what they are going through deep inside in their relationships, and they will never tell you. You can't really trust those things that don't encourage a smooth connection between you and your partner. Many at times we see those things and realise they won't work, but our selfish nature will always push us when it seems we are not content with what we have. Priorities and the reality we have at hand are two different things. We might end up burning our priority list when reality has opened our eyes. Work on what you have and embrace it with utmost cheerfulness.

Again, focus more on those things that are really necessary. Ask your parents questions. If you have parents that have smooth relationship experience, seek their secrets. Long for insightful ideas and help to build your own unique and fresh relationship up. If you have parents that actually missed it too in one way or the other, seek their wisdom also. They will tell you the reasons why they missed it. They

wouldn't want you to end up the way they did. They will try their best to release the truth to your ears, and if you are lucky to have amazing parents like mine, seek them for wisdom and understanding. Let them walk you through the true journey of a sound and long-lasting relationship. Please ask for help and the bitter truths about marriage that might look terrifying to you, but helped your parents maintain a healthy relationship in the marriage from their day one to their old age.

Create time for them to sit you down and talk some sense into your life. Humble yourself and keep your personal philosophies and theories aside. Always be ready to unlearn and relearn more cutting edge knowledge about marriage that will be highly beneficial to you in the long run. For instance, one thing I have been able to learn from carefully analyzing my failed marriage is never allow ego, pride, peer pressure and social gyration to carry you away from the realities on ground. Love what comes to you at the right time. If you're waiting, make sure you are waiting patiently. Wait for the right person who deserves your true love. Someone who will be there for you when others are not. Someone who will always strive to adjust and strike the right balance to accommodate your personality. Someone who knows and appreciates you for who you are. Someone who feels worried because you are not happy.

Marriage is all about finding that person who is willing

and able to help you become a better person beyond how he or she met you in the first place. There's more to love and marriage than just physical attributes like having six packs or a banging body. There's more to a fulfilling home than material possessions. There's more to marrying someone who truly loves you than just ending up with someone who has all the money you want and need. There's more to marrying someone who is educated and willing to be educated in marriage than someone who has the perfect philosophy. Don't get it wrong with someone who flairs up on little things. Take your time and work on developing yourself before deciding to pick a life partner.

In short, when you start to think of going into marriage, know who you are and what you truly want from your life partner. Be open to questions and criticisms. Don't think you will always be right. Know that real people will come, and fake ones will also show up as well. Understand what works for you without pretense, and that there are instances that you might get it wrong. Always be realistic and factual in dealing with a lot of things. Say your little prayers and let God work with you. Commit everything into His hands, and He will direct your path.

Thankfully, these things are very visible if you are observant. Your partner should bring out the best in you and be teachable. You should also be teachable. He should be someone that speaks positive words into your life and helps

you nurture the right self-confidence that supports your growth. The same thing also applies to you. You must also be that same person to him and not someone who erodes his self-confidence. If this is missing in him or you, then you might want to take more time to rethink your decision to walk down the aisle with this person. The success or failure of your marriage lies in both your hands, because like I said earlier, working together in a relationship must be mutually inclusive. When you are wrong, admit you are and be ready for corrections. When the other person does something bad as well, try your best to make it known to him in a simple and understanding way. You can't pretend as if you aren't affected, whereas deep inside you, you are terribly injured. Open up to each other and understand each other's flaws. When he knows what gets you angry, he pays more attention to it and be ready to fix it with you. If he doesn't know or probably doesn't get full awareness of his actions, try and call him to order. Tell him what happened actually affected you and you don't want it to repeat itself. If he's someone who has a good heart towards you, he takes it at that spot and apologises and looks for how to stop it from happening again. There's a lot of fun in marriage. As they say, marriage is a beautiful thing. Indeed it is. It is something that adds to a fulfilling life.

As a woman and young lady, marriage will make you happy even when nothing gives you joy. Staying close to

your man and seeing your children grow; will always bring joy to your heart. Anyone that tells you that marriage is hell on earth is only saying so just because he or she decided to see it as hell on earth. They got it wrong like I did, but in your case, if you are resolute and determined to get it right, no amount of negative words and outside opinions can hinder you. Take up your courage and be ready to win your marriage. The game has principles, work and walk with them in confidence; and you will surely see the beautiful side of marriage.

Right then. Let's delve into the subject which many avoid but (quietly) agree is important: Money matters.

Important takes:

- A good marriage is a beautiful thing – and you should know that it is a blessing from the creator to man. It is something you will want to keep enjoying as long as there's respect and love in it. It is the divinely ordained institution by God which is made up of one man and one woman to live and enjoy their lives together. As a matter of fact, marriage should be the ultimate relationship between a man and his woman so as to demonstrate the true reason and benefits of why God initiated it. It is the centre of God's wholeness because He is full of love and marriage is one of the practical demonstrations of His love towards

man. It will forever be a beautiful thing because that's the main reason why it was initiated in the beginning and even if for one reason or the other you are being hurt, don't think it's a bad thing and it was never meant for you. There will always be a way out of all your worries. It may take time, but be careful and be ready to help yourself.

- A successful marriage takes the combined and sustained effort of both partners and, more importantly, must start with the right foundation of shared values. For you to have a successful marriage or relationship, when there's fight, you need to learn that almost all your arguments are worth considering(valid); it's a complete shared responsibility that both of you should consider that both parties must have a valid reason for whatever you see to have made your points. It must be a shared parenthood responsibility, and both of you should be happy for whatsoever responsibility you're taking up. You must also be the best of friends you could ever be to yourselves and never hide anything from each other. A successful marriage is the product of the works of many things centred toward both of you. It has never been the effort of one person. Someone said, and I quote, "A good husband makes a good wife." As a woman, you should be your husband's number one encourager so that he would try his best to give his all for your relationship, and he will return the favour by being your greatest motivator to keep you moving and believing in

yourself. The equation must be a balanced one and a partially solved one.

- When one has gone through any form of separation, self-confidence takes a hit. It needs to be built back because it is on it that a new growth begins. The way you think about yourself mainly determines the way other people react and how they relate with you. If you want to be unstoppable and successful, you need to believe in yourself and let your self-confidence be active and alive. The best and most profitable way to regain your self-worth is to start doing what you are always scared to do, things that are ordinarily terrifying to you. There are several ways to make your self-confidence alive, and one of them is to believe in yourself and never look down on people, most especially people who you love and cherish. Most importantly, you need to be yourself, be original and never try to copy anyone or your friends who seem to enjoy their marriage. You don't know the kind of issues they too are going through; it pays to always be real to yourself. Do not doubt yourself; doubting yourself kills your self-confidence and dreams than failure does.



CHAPTER 4

Money Matters...

What influence does money have in a relationship?

How does it influence marriage?

Why is it very important in marriage?

MONEY IS ONE OF THE MOST essential ingredients for building a successful marriage. Unfortunately, this is one area that many couples or would-be couples either shy away from discussing or lack proper education to deal with its many intricacies. There are many marriages today that have collapsed, not because the two parties don't love each other, but because the issue of money tore the home apart, of which both parties just refused or did not know how to handle.

In marriage, money is very crucial, and it shouldn't be something couples would pay less attention to. Marriage is a responsibility - a full duty of both parties to meet some basic needs. Meeting needs requires different resources and materials - and the major resource and basic materials

provider in every home is the level of financial buoyancy.

As a responsible man, it is required of you to be able to provide and meet your family's needs. It is a full responsibility you must accept. A man that cannot feed himself with three square meals per day hasn't grown enough to be a responsible man. If you can't feed yourself adequately and you're thinking of going into a relationship with someone, as a man, you've missed it already. Let us put love aside a bit and be realistic. Your man must be able to take care of his family financially. Even when he earns less than expected, he should be able to manage and work through some adjustments to make sure there's food on the table. However, there are instances whereby the woman earns far better than her man. This is actually possible, and there are several cases in the world today. It takes wisdom and grace for a marriage where the woman takes more responsibilities, perhaps financially, than her man to last. I am not saying it's a bad thing if the woman realises and is willing to assist her man. In fact, women are helpmates to their men partners as is rightly declared in the Holy Bible. This fact doesn't justify the fact that a woman should be fully responsible for her family's financial sustainability. It is the full responsibility of her man to feed the family. However, on several occasions, circumstances and reality of life will always disapprove of these basic rules and principles. In marriages where both couples earn the same amount of salary or monthly income,

they will be equally responsible for every need of their family.

All these things tend toward trust, understanding, and maturity. When these three things come into place in marriage, believe me, anything can happen. Basic rules and principles will be rightfully ignored, and every other thing will definitely be fine. When you trust your man, and he does as well, no matter how small he earns per month as salary, you will always be happy and content. You know he won't lie to you. You know that he's always trying his best and you will want to support him. That's just the simple fact behind, "TRUST".

If you want to chip in understanding, it's an aspect that most couples find difficult to deal with. Probably the two parties are very arrogant and egoistic to come down to the simplest level of complete reasoning about what's happening to them. "UNDERSTANDING" is very important, and it's very strong when it comes to dealing with financial issues in marriage. You don't need to go to the university to have a basic understanding of how money works and how it would help solve marriage needs. It is common wisdom and its application which is knowledge to overcome the problems money causes in a marriage. If the man refuses to be responsible, there will be consequences - likewise, the woman. If the woman fails in the aspect of relating with things on ground, like being practical and factual, she might end up losing her marriage. Basic understanding of financial

literacy in marriage is as important as the marriage itself. We often think that when we love someone, whether he is financially buoyant or not, we believe we will always be fine. That's not true, and in fact, it's a big lie. When you love someone, don't fail to be factual about it. When it comes to the level of going into a relationship, don't fail to ask serious questions that will help solve the monetary aspect. Money isn't everything as we will generally agree and be plain about. There is more to money, but a marriage that lacks financial literacy will definitely face a lot of issues. Make sure your financial understanding about marriage is balanced and not something you hope to cope with in the process and long run.

The third point I will talk about is "MATURITY." Maturity in marriage is very broad, and it should be treated with patience. Age doesn't really count in marriage, but maturity does. How vast your level of maturity is, in your marriage, will determine how long and lasting your marriage will be. Maturity covers everything, and all other aspects are subordinates. They take less control when it comes to handling issues that marriages face. It is when you are fully mature, that your partner will be able to trust you and have a better understanding of your move and direction. When issues arise as regards financial aspects, your partner will have no second thought about it than to think in your direction. There are several problems money can cause in marriage, and

when care is not taken, such marriage will eventually collapse. Let your level of maturity surpass your intelligence, ego, pride, peer pressure, social pleasing and hatred. When all these things are rightly balanced, you will be able to fix your marriage financial problems without the help of a counsellor.

However, too much attachment to the idea of "I WILL COPE WITH IT" will most times not be helpful. It will only worsen things because when faced with certain financial challenges, you will be shocked at their ability to put your relationship or marriage under severe pressure. I never really put the financial aspect of my life in place before I went into marriage, and it became a major part of what affected the marriage over time. In fact, I really had some unpleasant experiences with bad finances in my marriage, which is why I want to use this chapter to share some of the issues I encountered and learned from with you, as I firmly believe it will help you avoid making similar mistakes, whether as a single mum or as a single lady that would get married someday.

My advice is that you pay close attention to these things and work towards not letting them happen so that your marriage can be free from unnecessary fear and anxiety. Matter-of-factly, if you do, you will be able to take charge of your own finances and be happy in your marriage even if your partner's financial strength is not 100% solid.

Whatever the case, money is an essential resource of life that can make or mar any marriage. Do not believe anyone who tells you that money is not significant in marriage. That is not true because you can achieve a lot of meaningful things with money, as it is a fuel that can help move your marriage vehicle forward and further to your desired destination. So, money is crucial in marriage and will always be. Although for many people, money is always very touchy and sensitive, which is why many couples would rather avoid it than invest their time to discuss or learn about it. However, if you want to grow in life, you must have a very sound knowledge and wisdom about money, and it all starts with you first changing your mindset toward the subject.

I have seen many single ladies who would rather avoid discussing the subject of money with their would-be spouse just because they fear they might offend him or come off as someone who is materialistic, but that's a misconception. You should be able to have the money discussion with your partner before and during marriage. Both of you should be able to clearly define how you intend to run the finances of the home. Never make the mistake of thinking that money doesn't matter. It does matter. With money, you can deservedly afford the good things of life. With money, you can provide quality education for your kids, good meals, shelter, and travel on vacations, finance your personal development, start a business, take care of your health, give

back to your parents or siblings, or even support a worthy cause in your community. If you don't consider money as necessary, the chances are that you will struggle with managing and growing your finances, and that can trickle down to affect other areas of your life, and in as much as both of you are coming from different homes with different backgrounds and experiences, you must have a united front and singular purpose when it comes to the issue of money as it affects the family. Remember, two can't work together unless they agree.

In my case, I was very poor at dealing with money. Even though I was enterprising as a young lady back then in Enugu and I made some money from the little businesses I was running, I had a terrible money-management habit. Whenever I made money, I simply spent it all and then went back in search of more money. I hardly saved, and it was a vicious cycle.

I carried this habit into my marriage, and it turned out to be one of the significant issues that affected my marriage. For example, whenever I got money, I liked to spend everything on just about everyone. I was what you call a spendthrift. But such a gesture wasn't reciprocated to me; hence, I felt cheated, and it became a severe bone of contention in my home. My money challenges in marriage even got worse when I was not working in the earlier years of our marriage and had to be restricted to the shopping list drawn up by my

erstwhile partner – nothing wrong with this, but it made me literally beg for money for things I could easily get by myself. I also started being overly fixated on his spending and giving habits and had a problem with it, especially when I viewed it as "stingy." Then I started working, yet things did not seem to significantly improve, due to my poor financial habits. Unfortunately for me, I only got to realise how terrible I was with money when it finally dawned on me that I could not take care of myself during the separation from my former husband.

Imagine I was so broke that I had no single dime in savings. It was such a painful experience that I will never forget. I felt so lonely and tired. It's not so good to be broke, especially when you were once financially buoyant. It's an experience that can lead to depression. I couldn't even afford the necessary things I needed to take care of myself and my kids.

In fact, I remember one fateful night, I was having my menstrual period, and I did not have money to even buy a sanitary pad. I had exhausted all my money on lawyer's fees for the custody of my children, and there was nothing left. I was full of tears that night that I just had to pull out a book and started writing to forget the shame. I felt absolutely rejected and dejected. Deep inside me, I knew I was suffering, and I couldn't run to anyone to share my burden. In fact, there were no friends to share my pains and burdens

with. I was only left with the option of giving up, but deep down inside of me, I never wanted my mother and kids to be broken and remain in a lifelong sorrow because of me. None of them put me in the financial mess I was going through. I felt that my predicaments at the time were caused by my selfish interests and greed. I often cried to the point where my tears became the only liquid that quenched my taste. Nothing in the entire universe gave me joy anymore. Each time when I looked at my kids, I felt pitiful and sorry because I knew they were suffering for a sin they did not commit, and I had no solution to alleviate this undue pain. So, I lost hope, I lost confidence, and I lost the courage to think of something reasonable to do with my life. Things got so bad that I started pawning my jewelries.

I remember a particular gold pendant I had, oh how I loved that pendant, but I had to sell it off in order to buy groceries to feed myself, my mum and two daughters. I just had to look for a way for us to survive, and because I just couldn't tell them there was no money, I had to bottle things up and bear the cross on my own. Forced to look for means to survive and take care of my household each and every day, I had no choice but to start taking any menial job that was available to me. I really needed the money, so it didn't matter to me whatever name the job was called, provided it was a paying job. These jobs became my last resort, and I depended fully on them. This just goes to show you what a painful

experience one wrong decision could lead an innocent person into. It was actually the result and consequences of my past actions and wrong decision in choosing my former partner.

During this same period, I saw myself thrown into heavy debts. I struggled to pay my bills, and my rent was overdue. Any little money I made went straight to paying bills, and the cycle continued. The support I got from people was slim, so every dime I received from anyone mattered greatly to me. I remember the Christmas of 2014. I only had £5 with me and nothing more. Thank God we had food to eat at home, but I couldn't afford to buy Christmas gifts for my kids apart from the ones they got from close friends. It felt really horrible, and I was so ashamed of myself. But then later in the church that Christmas morning, a friend of mine, Osato, decided to bless me with £100. I didn't ask for it, but it was like God saw my shame and told her to gift me the money. I was so elated that I didn't know when I began to dance to celebrate £100. On reflection, it was so funny, but then this goes to explain to you how badly I needed that money. It was a huge relief, and I took my kids to Boxing Day shopping the next day.

However, that did not solve my money problem. It was only momentary, and I was not satisfied living on handouts. I needed something that was mine, something more sustainable. Relying on other people's benevolence to

address my money problem was not going to take me anywhere. I was still stuck. Like a rat in a rat race, I remained a rat. Every day, there was one money trouble or the other that I had to worry about that I began to lose weight and feel really sick. Lack of money, for an adult, eats away dignity; hence my self-esteem was eroding fast, and I was losing a good amount of sleep. The truth is, not having money comes with a level of stress, but worrying about it triples one's stress level. As a single mum, it was one of the most excruciating periods of my life, as it seemed I was being crushed under the weight of my rising bills and falling hope. My two daughters didn't know what their mummy was going through and they didn't have to, because I believed I owed them a duty to provide. I felt so sorry for them. And I believed and hoped to get over the issues soonest to clear my mind. My kids are adorable, and I am so fortunate to have them. Even why they knew things have changed, they never felt bad and asking strong questions of disapproval. I knew I'd make it up to them. At some point, I had to step back a bit and began to ask myself some really tough questions about the subject of money. What I failed to learn before and during marriage about money, life had to force me to learn during divorce and single motherhood. Most single mums go through financial struggles due to lack of money education couple with the heavy burden of trying to cater for themselves and their dependents. I think in hindsight this

explains why some single mums work themselves out to exhaustion in order to provide a solid, stress-free life for themselves and children. In most cases, they do this so that their children do not have to go through the same pain they went through due to financial difficulties.

So as you can see financial literacy is very important in marriage. If you are a single woman, whether you're in a relationship or not, whether you intend to get married or not, it's important that as women, we accept the fact that we are women and have a firm handle on our finances. Firstly, as singles, there are some key things you need to have in place to make sure that you are financially secured. Things I failed to realise while I was planning my relationship and even after I got into it officially. Allow me to chip in briskly and release some piece of advice I thought about before eventually consulting experts. I believe they will also go a long way in helping you get things done right. Take it or leave it, you must make sure you take the bull by the horn and go the extra mile when it comes to saving up or putting up some money aside for emergency situations, or for the rainy day, as they say. Your emergency savings are basically your fall-backs which are going to be there to give you a soft landing or act as a buffer support through your life journey.

For instance, if you lose your job or let's say your car breaks down or you need to buy an emergency business plane ticket which is worthy of consideration despite the short

notice, you can definitely fall back to your emergency savings. Your partner may not be buoyant, ready or even be there to support you at that moment, but the thing is that you will not even need him if you already have some cash saved up on the side. So, educate yourself on how to always save up a significant amount of money for emergency situations in order not to suffer the same consequences as me.

A good amount to have saved up as a single mother could be an amount that can actually take care of five to six months of your basic living expenses such as food, drinks, transportation, light bill, gas refill and quick needs for your kids. In other words, little expenses that you are willing and able to take care of without having to wait for the involvement of your spouse. I know that when you think about saving the amount of money related to five to six months, it may sound like a whole lot of money, but you can start small to set your first goal of getting your emergency savings to a thousand dollars little by little, provided you have a side budget that will work for you when you need things done urgently.

And let's say you leverage on your emergency savings and use it up for something important that comes up, then you should make plans to start replacing it by building it into your budget over again. As a single lady, you want to fall in love with budgeting, I did too, and everybody should love

budgeting. I repeat if you're single, you must have your budget on lockdown because apart from the fact that it helps you plan your finances well, it also helps you set some money aside for emergency situations. Moreover, budgeting helps you plan for both your short and long-term goals in the way that it ensures that you spend less and save more.

In any case, money management is one subject you must take seriously as a single mother. If you do not plan your finances, chances are that life would be tough. When you get your money habit right, it reduces your stress level, helps fosters happiness, and gives you the means and opportunity to spend quality time with those you love and in places that you love. During those periods of struggling to pay bills and catering for my kids, I had to make a commitment to myself that something had to change. I could not continue to spend the rest of my life paying bills or living from hand to mouth. I wanted something much more. I believed there was light at the end of my tunnel, and I was determined to walk towards it. I wanted to be that single mum that not only got herself out of debts but also lives above board and serves as a source of financial help to others. With such determination, I succeeded in improving my money habits and dealing with my financial limitations, and today I am proud of what I have achieved financially.

Here are some practical steps I took to achieve financial freedom, and I hope they would help you too as a single mum:

1. I SOUGHT PROFESSIONAL HELP.

The first thing I did to solve my financial problems was to look for a qualified financial expert to educate me. I believe the solution to a lack of money is not more money. The solution to a lack of money is education. Education will point out the problems and help you start a more sustainable and disciplined financial lifestyle. With the right education I received from a financial expert, I was able to adjust my financial habits and develop new ones that helped me attract and effectively manage the kind of money I desired. Now, what did I really do after seeking professional help, what were the basic steps I took that changed this? It's very simple, and I want you to pay close attention to them.

I pulled out all my financial information and created what I called my personal net-worth sheet (PNS). I made a list of all my income sources for a month and a list of my monthly expenditures. By drawing up the list, I was able to track and gain better clarity of how my money was coming in and going out. With the clarity I gained, I started taking control of my finances and forced myself to be more disciplined in my daily choices. If you are a single mum, I would advise that you take financial education seriously. There are experts out there who would be willing to teach you at minimal amounts. Invest in good financial books or audio programs, attend seminars, and get a financial coach or mentor to help you towards your financial goals. Don't

assume that you can solve your money issues by just working longer hours or taking more jobs. You can do all that, but if you have a flawed money habit, it would just be likened to you pouring water into a basket. It only leaves you exhausted, empty, poor and in the rat race.

2. I CREATED FINANCIAL GOALS.

In seeking a financial expert, I learned how to set financial goals and then designed a plan on how to achieve them. The mistake most single mums make is to live without financial goals. Setting financial goals is critical if you must succeed as a single mum. Don't leave that aspect of your life to chance. Faced with a failed marriage, an empty pocket, a life ridden with debts, two children and a mother to take care, I had to ask myself: how do I want to make, manage, and multiply my finances? I knew I couldn't just afford to fail them this time. I had to come to the point of realisation where I saw myself as a responsible woman. As someone who has targets and a must to meet them. I wanted a better life for my children, and I knew it wouldn't start if I refuse to take steps to come out of my financial constraints. As regards to the insight I gave earlier before I realised I needed help. I understood I had to change the way I think in relation to money matters. When you've gotten to the point of no return, you will turn to experts for help if you want to help yourself. I became conscious of my goals and how to meet

them. I became a thinker. I became a goal setter and a goal getter.

I started writing out my financial goals. This was something I was not used to, but I was desperate to change my situation, so I had to force myself to do it. As a single mum, you must realise that writing down your goals is an important part of taking charge of your destiny, as it will give you a clear vision of where you want to be. I made my goals to be based on my dreams for myself and my children. I wrote them using a positive mindset. If you're setting goals, big goals, you need a positive mindset towards them. You need to be optimistic about them. You need to see a positive reason for setting them in the first place. You need to be confident that they will surely come through, even though they may take time, but they will eventually come through. This was my whole idea about my goals and how I got them. Many times, I feel scared about how big they are, yet I knew deep within me that I would see the end of it all. Either good or bad, I was ready to go forward. I was ready to look past my worries and fears. When you're resolute about a thing, something special to your life, you will want to do everything to make it come through. I locked up my anxiety and kept dreaming big.

Someone said, and I quote, "when you know your resources and capabilities, nothing will stop you unless you want to stop yourself." I did not allow my doubts get in the

way. I made sure my goals were realistic, but I made them big enough to stretch my faith. I remember I wrote down a goal to buy a house of £450,000 on an income of £40,000 a year. It sounded ridiculous, but I was focused. I started saving towards the mortgage deposit in 2-3 years, and today I am proud to say that as at the time of writing this book, I am already in my second year of this goal, and I have saved up the money as planned.

I knew I couldn't give up this time. Even though my goals seemed unreachable as regard my income, I knew time flies, and I was determined to fly with it. I did my calculations and how long it would take me to fulfil it. It was the first powerful dream I have ever had since I became a single mother. And it eventually became a dream come true because I set some financial goals for myself.

So as a single mum, set financial goals and make sure you give yourself deadlines for achieving them. Set both short-term and long-term goals. After writing out your goals, another thing I would suggest you do is to paste them where you would see them every morning before you start your day and always read them out loud to yourself daily. Use them in your prayers or meditations. I did all these, and they really worked for me. For example, I noticed that anytime I spent time meditating on my financial goals and reading them out loud, they put me in the right frame of mind and strengthen my focus for the day. They were an excellent reminder. You

can try that too. It worked for me, and I believe it'll also work for you if you are ready for change. Change doesn't come by mere saying; it comes through determination and the steps we take to achieving our goal. It's never too late for you to start something. It's never too late to take that step of confidence. Perhaps it's the best and right time to make them happen. You can try something out today; it's never too late for a positively determined person.

3. I ACTED ON MY SET PLANS

Nothing happens until you take steps into making them happen. Unless you act, you won't experience any change. The third law of motion states, "Action and reaction are equal and opposite." Without your reaction towards your goals, you won't experience any transformation. This is a universal law, and it's applicable to every aspect of the human race. When your actions lack motivation, push and drive, you will find it difficult to actualise it. You will give it up halfway.

This is a push for you to tighten up your belt to say no to ignorance and limitations. Believe me; nothing can stop you unless you choose to stop yourself. Your limitations aren't in your fears; they are not in those things that seem big and unrealistic to you. Your fear is, "YOU" and you're the only one who can stop it not happening. That's all about my take in this aspect. I had plans, and I wasn't too scared to face

them. I became confident, and I set everything out. After setting all my goals, writing them out, creating a plan, and reading them to myself, I went to work. I decided to get busy.

I knew I needed to start creating multiple streams of income and pay up all my outstanding debts. Of course, I did not want bad credit ratings, as that would have negatively affected my chances for things like getting a mortgage. So, I called all my creditors and together we worked out a repayment plan. While that was going on, I dedicated myself to further personal development. I signed up for coaching classes and then later qualified to start coaching people towards living a better life. I started earning income from that. I also went on to upgrade myself in my career by going for a short course as a Business Analyst. Now, remember I said earlier that the solution to lack of money is not money but education. So, improving my education was a critical part of the plan for changing my financial situation.

Over a period of time, I got a 9-5 job, started two companies, and started helping individuals and organisations write good business plans. I also became an event compere and got MC gigs for private and corporate events. I used social media to advertise my services and started getting more paid clients. That helped to take care of my monthly bills, pay up my debts, build up my savings, and have funds for investments. It was a tough process, but I was determined to

make it work. I allowed myself no excuse.

As a single mum, you must always remember that life can never leave you empty-handed. There is always something inside of you that you can use to turn your financial situation around. You have all it takes to be free from anything you're going through. If you refuse to do something, things will get worse for you. If I was able to say no to the limitations of my financial problems, you can too. You can start something reasonable right where you are, with what you have and how to make it happen. People fail because they fail to plan. It's like a student who wants to sit for an examination without preparing for it. Such a student will fail. It's a principle of success. Success doesn't come anyhow, anywhere, and at any time.

You plan for success, work on it, and make it happen. Success positions itself for people who know its worth. I knew where my success was, I focused on achieving it, and it came just as I have planned. You have all that it takes for your success to come like mine, just make sure you wait for it in the place of planning and then act accordingly. I focused on the skills I have, strategized on how to maximise them, and they became an income funnel for me. I want you to tell the same story. Your skills may be different from mine. Mine was coaching, speaking, creative thinking, and being able to help clients plan their businesses. So, what is that gift, skill, knowledge, or talent inside of you that you are yet to make

use of? That may just be the key to unlocking your financial freedom and greatness.

4. I STAYED FOCUSED

Of course, all of the things I listed above would not have been possible if I wasn't focused. As a single mum, you cannot achieve much if you are someone that is easily distracted. You have to be careful because many people would come to get you involved in one activity or another, some would even do it as a way to 'help' you, but that is the period of your life you must maintain a high level of focus and discipline. And be consistent at it. Focus is the magnet that attracts success. If you really want your efforts to be rewarded with good success, focus more on the important part of the story. Focus more on your inspiration and motivation. Put aside any form of distractions. The journey may look confusing to you, don't pay attention to the confusion, rather seat down with your determination and let the power of focus be your drive. You can't miss it if your focus is intact. Make it your daily response to your goal and be sensitive to it. Allow it to work wonders for you by accepting its reforms. It may come with pains, accept it. It may also come in a way that will stress you, don't get tired. If you're thinking of giving up, think about why you started in the first place. Think about your kids. Think about people that depend on you; you can't just fail them.

Being a single mum comes with its own level of multi-tasking, so you want to make sure you are always devoting your time and energy on things that are a top priority. Initially, I wasn't a focused person. I usually got distracted and had so many spontaneous ideas that I was chasing here and there, yet I wasn't achieving much. So, I had to streamline. I created what I called the Trinity Principle (a term I coined from the Holy Trinity), where I made it a personal philosophy to only focus on three major priorities in my life: my 9-5 job, my business, and children. I avoided anything that didn't align with those three priorities, and that particular decision helped me to achieve a lot, not just in my finances but also in other areas of my life.

So, here is my advice to you as a single mum. Avoid frivolities. Cut down the spending. Learn to say no to activities that don't add value to you. Dream big but stay undistracted. Invest in your financial education. Train your focus, do the work, and concentrate your energy on only those things that matter most to you. And be consistent at it.

Important takes:

- Whether married or not yet married, managing your finances is one of the keys to successful living. Learn it and live it. You need to start putting full consideration into your finances. Start talking about it and keep

working until you make something meaningful out of your plans. If you are yet to be married, discuss it very well with your partner as early as possible. Know the kind of person you want to go into a relationship with, be aware of his financial literacy and how tightly he holds money. Try to write your goals down and make it known to him. Make him know what you're up to and your achievable financial plans. As I have said earlier, build an emergency fund for your family where you can use when you need things urgently.

- For single parents, this becomes only the more imperative! There are child/children to take care of, possible dependents, bills to pay, etc. The quicker you manage your money, open up income sources and live within your means, the quicker you reach the point of happiness which you desire. Don't live above your means; always live within your budget. Make sure you understand how money runs through your hands, how you spend and buy things. You don't need to go into debt before you can get what you want, you should always limit the amount you're allowed to spend, probably on a monthly basis or daily. You can even start to reflect on your previous' month expenses to know where you are getting it right or the other way around. Believe me; it may not be perfect at the moment. You will need to keep working on it to make things right. You can always adjust

because it doesn't have to be 100% at the start, work more on it to reach your goal. Note that debt can damage one's image, so you have reasons to plan for your financial life.



CHAPTER 5

Consider Spirituality... And Develop It!

MY PARENTS WERE VERY RELIGIOUS, so as a child, it was easy for me to be associated with the things of the church. Of course, we just go to church for going sake, because we don't know who we serve, what He has done, what He can do, the price He gave, giving up everything He had for our sake, the value of grace we enjoy, the gift of the holy spirit and ability to boldly pray to God. Just because my parents go to church, I attend church too, not knowing the spiritual implications that only a relationship with God is a deviation from religion. Religiosity is only a frame of practising religion. It brings about a wall of partition, a form of barrier that takes you far away from God while thinking you are close to him. Since I was the only surviving child of my parents, perhaps my late dad must have thought getting me close to the church was a way of showing gratitude to God. Going to church was a routine for us; it was also fun, and as a family, we had a culture of holding daily prayers together at home.

I thought this was going to happen naturally in my marriage, but I later realised I was wronged. It turned out to be a struggle. I'll write more about this struggle later.

I believe we are all created by God. We didn't just fall off the sky or are mere products of sexual exercises between a man and a woman. We are far more than that. From the beginning, God's intention for creating man is for fellowship. When God created man and placed him in the garden of Eden, He did not just create him for the fun of creation, but Man was created in the likeness of God to have a communion, fellowship, friend - to - friend, father – to – child relationship and a direct link of communication with him via which we can actually have conversations with him, God didn't want heaven without us. However, after the fall of man, everything changed, things turned otherwise, and the link between man and God was cut off.

Man had always struggled to converse with God the Father except those He had predestined to be His prophets and priests. On the long run, Jesus came into the picture, reconciled man back to God as a sacrificial offering for the whole human race because God has always wanted to commune with us, so we are no longer enslaved to sin, gave us victory over death through His resurrection and now we can be called sons because He paid the price on the cross. You can see how loving and amazing God the father is. His plan and purpose concerning man from the beginning were

quite different. God's own principal goal concerning man was to live a dominion life with full control over everything he has created. Even when man had been placed in the garden of Eden, God didn't abandon him in the garden all alone without ambition and purpose. God created man with full responsibility and placed before him in the garden of Eden everything he needed to fulfil his purpose. He also gave man a choice to choose whatever he wants to do. That's the first freedom of freewill. He created us with the ability to make a choice to be superior to all other creatures He created. His demonstration of love was the reflection of the capability he gave to man.

God must have gotten to a point in His thoughts to come up with the concept of man because, among all other things He created, man is superior to any other creatures. You need to know and insightfully decode the concept very well the initial aim of God before you were created, this will give you a better understanding on how great your destiny is and how far you can go in the journey of life. He's a purpose-driven God, and whatever He chooses to create or make, He does full work of perfection on such person to make sure he's unique and to be called the work of His hands. Therefore, don't limit how far you can go in life because you're specially made through the one who's unique and perfect. He is so loving and amazing. We are created by a loving God and our relationship with Him is very essential in creating a life of success and meaning.

For without any relationship with God, man becomes useless and thus living a meaningless life, but God has placed us here on earth to serve Him and fulfil the various assignments He has for our lives. Solomon, the son of David, made it clear that the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments.

Our lives should not just be lived just the way we want it to be, it should be God-centred and involve him in every aspect of our lives. So, just as we work to take care of every other aspect of our lives. It is equally important that we take care of our spirituality because the spiritual controls the physical. There is nothing that happens in the physical that has not been concluded in the spiritual realm. It takes a spiritual person to deal with the things of the supernatural.

A spiritual and a carnal person may face the same challenge, but there will surely be a great difference between the two because the spiritual person will surely overcome, for man do not wrestle against flesh and blood but with principalities and power, rulers of darkness. It takes a spiritual to successful conquer in a spiritual battle because they cannot be seen with the naked eyes. It should be noted that spirituality is different from religion. One might be doing religious activities, warming church benches, without knowing the owner of the work (God). There has to be growth from within, that is to say, the inner man should be active, nurtured to maturity, if one wants to be successful.

Without a sound spirituality, we tend to live an incomplete life, cut ourselves off from God, and become vulnerable to the manipulations of the devil. The devil is not our friend; he is the real enemy we are warring against; he walks around seeking whom to devour. Without God in our lives, we will just be a prey, easy to be attacked by the devil.

You can make all the money you want, travel the entire world, own the best of possessions, know the best pastor in the world, have the best academic grades or have a great career, but if you are empty spiritually, there are chances you won't find true happiness and become whom God wants you to become, moving around without purpose.

During my marriage, I struggled spiritually.

Of course, I was still a churchgoer, but I never had a truly personal relationship with God, and neither did my family. You would easily find me engaging in many religious activities, but I wasn't reflecting on God's love, and deep in my heart I felt a huge vacuum, even though I tried to deceive myself otherwise. As a family, we were disconnected spiritually. We hardly prayed together, and even if we did, it was passive, as if we were being forced to. Have you noticed that there is this kind of emptiness you feel when you are not serving God the way you should? That was exactly how I felt for several years, and it affected my inner peace, temperament, and attitude. This lack of personal

relationship with God eventually had its consequence during my marriage. I will explain further.

When the initiator and founder of marriage is neglected, couples get so many things wrong in their relationship. When the purpose of marriage is being replaced with our biased choices, one part is being affected. Putting God first in our marriage is the most crucial aspect of building a strong and lasting relationship that leads to marriage. Without God being involved in your marriage, believe me, you will not get many things right.

In my marriage, I would carry malice for days, and sometimes weeks, with my ex-husband. During our quarrels, we would throw various curse words at each other, not minding how the other person felt. Then if words were not enough, we would throw things at each other. Oh dear, during those times, we broke loads of items: phones, laptops, and many other properties at home. It was just like the Tom and Jerry cartoon scene you see on TV. We couldn't control our anger. I remember during those times, after our fights, to tell my side of the story, I would resort to lying just to appear innocent and attract sympathy from friends and family members. A person with an intimate relationship with God would not lie. I didn't, so the lies flowed. Interestingly, as these were happening, I was still going to church, acting all pious but unknown to me I was drifting away from God.

I think that the bulk of the quarrels and my flawed approach in handling them were my faults. I deliberately choose to say they were my fault as I think we all choose the reactions we give to people who fall before our expectations. Therefore, when we take responsibility for our actions and mistakes, we allow ourselves to gain the right empowerment needed to correct them and learn. As a person, you must always remember that people would offend you or do things that hurt you, especially people you love, care for and trust. But if you understand your place in God, you won't allow any of those human imperfections push you into sin and spoil your relationship with God and man. However, you should know that they are not the one actually afflicting you, it is the devil, only that these ones made themselves available to be used by him.

God doesn't want you telling lies, keeping malice, harbouring bitterness in your hearts, or using curse words on people. Bitterness of the heart depicts evil and can be dangerous. One who is embittered can commit murder and suicide. I made those mistakes in my marriage, and that is why I am telling you not to. Yes, maybe just like me, you were hurt in your marriage, but then I plead you not to carry evil in your heart. It is unproductive. Keep your load light. If you must grow in your spirituality and forge a healthy relationship with God, you must learn to allow Him to work in love through you.

Now before I move on, let me quickly say this.

I grew up in a praying home as a kid, but I failed to build my marriage in prayer. It sounds ironical how a praying little girl got caught up in a non-praying situation in her marriage, right? Well, it is a mistake we make in life when choosing a spouse. We overlook important things because of emotional reasons. If you are a single lady reading this, here is a piece of advice you must take seriously before you get into marriage. Be careful in marrying a man you cannot pray with—someone whose spiritual values are completely at variance with yours. Ensure you marry someone with whom you have the same spiritual values. It always lightens the burden knowing that you and your partner can both kneel down in agreement to offer reverence to God. Usually, when it is only one person doing all the prayers, it can be tiring, and this can lead to serious quarrels or frustration. Marry someone that can serve God with you, not someone you have to literally drag to God's presence all the time. Except, of course, you don't value the things of God; but if you do, then marry your kind.

When my marriage eventually collapsed, it became clear to me that I needed to get back to God. It was in those moments of pain, regret, and grieve that God began to open my eyes to how distant I had travelled away from Him. I felt really horrible knowing that even though I was close to the church, I was far away from God. It really feels bad when

you think you are on the right track and found out later that you have been walking through the wrong path on a meaningless journey heading towards the destruction. For the first time, I felt like a filthy rag. I remember crying to God several nights in my bed, asking Him to forgive me and accept me back. Those periods taught me another lesson; that storms are sometimes designed to not just bring out the best in you, but also to bring you closer to God. Nobody will draw near to God if all we do move smoothly and position according to our plans in life. Human beings tend to remember God when they are going through hard times. Even though we are creatures with choices, yet the position of God in our lives cannot be annulled, and we really need him to do better things with our lives. We shouldn't depend too much on our decisions when we are in a situation that catches us unaware because in most cases, moment of instability of the state of our mind may be critically unpredictable. That's why we just have to accept most of the results of our careless decisions we make at some critical points in life.

After failing, I became frustrated and indecisive. The eyes that were blind by love became open on their own accord without forcing them. I saw the real plight of my predicament. I began to see reasons to blame myself for my situation. However, what has happened cannot be reversed but can be adjusted. That's why I took responsibility for all my sins and asked God for forgiveness. I started spending

more time with Him and laid my burden before Him. I apologised for my role in making my marriage fail and also made a decision to forgive all the wrongs of my ex-husband. I didn't just say it to myself, but I also took the step to write him a series of notes to convey my decision of forgiving him. Taking responsibility for every wrong committed by you is a step ahead of making the wrong right, not trying to put blame on others, and making amendments where necessary. Until you accept responsibility for your actions or failures, it'll be very difficult for you to develop self-respect or even have the respect of others. The real difference between being responsible and being irresponsible is an indication of how effectively we're managing our lives when the opportunity to make a good or bad choice presents itself. Accepting responsibility is not only the right thing to do, but it'll pay more long-term dividends than you can now imagine. I believe one of the things that can hinder you from having a good relationship with God and slow down your spiritual growth is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness puts one into bondage, a heavy burden that may not be lifted, a pain in the heart that never heals, a frowning face that makes you look older than your age.

An unforgiving heart is haughty; it can be terrible at times such that you don't accept counsel, difficult to apologise even when you are not the one at fault. Unforgiveness has health, social and spiritual implications. Health wisely, you may suffer from high blood pressure, insomnia, loss of

weight, mental illnesses which may, in turn, affect the social interaction with people, unproductive, absenteeism at work and most especially, it messes your heart and mind and prevents you from accessing all that God has in store for you. God does not relate with a heavy and stony heart, a heart that is unwilling to let go, it makes it difficult for God to step into and intervene in some matters that man's wisdom cannot handle.

Forgiveness is important if you indeed want to grow spiritually. I have seen many single mums who are finding it difficult to chase their dreams and rise above their limitations because they have the weight of unforgiveness or bitterness holding them down. No matter what you have been through, you must learn to forgive. Sometimes, it may be difficult to forgive because of the occasion that warrants the circumstances, but it's better to free yourself by trying to open up to the person involved, and if impossible, pour them out to God. He is a burden bearer, yoke breaker, as soon as He steps in, every matter will be solved.

God is never happy whenever you feel heartbroken; he is always ready to help when make your case known to Him through prayer and supplication. God wants to speak to you too. He wants you to depend on Him, for everything you will ever want, anything you will ever need, a true discovery of yourself. He also wants to get involved in your destiny (your marriage is a destiny on its own; if you miss it in your

marriage, you have lost destiny already). When He gets involved in your marriage, He will aid you to you actualise destiny because there is no marriage without its own ups and downs, life itself is not a bed of roses. Knowing God in your marriage allows God tell you things that you do not know. He is always willing wants to reveal who you are, but when your heart is filled up with an unforgiving spirit, then he stays silent or even stay away from you.

This is not necessarily because of the person who hurt you, but because of you. Forgiveness releases you to be all that you are meant to be. Forgiveness ensures that you move on, on a clean slate. So as a single mum, make sure you never allow unforgiveness or bitterness take root in your heart. Even the Bible is clear on this; "forgive us all our wrongdoings as we forgive those who have wronged us," the Bible says. God wants to use you for something mighty, so learn to submit yourself to Him.

Besides taking responsibility for my mistakes and asking God for forgiveness, there are other practical steps I took to grow my spirituality:

1. I CHANGED MY MENTALITY

I believe so much in the scripture in Romans 12:2 that says:

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may

prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

I think when God wants to do a great thing in your life, He first expects you to change the way you think for out of it flows the issues of life. Your mind is the greatest tool for creating any outcome you seek in life, and that's what God searches. Everything a man will ever become comes from the mind, because as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. If God will do anything through a man, he looks beyond the physical appearance and looks and scan inwardly.

The mind is like a template or soil where you write or plant, whatever you write or plant in it, is what will sprout forth, and that is what you harvest. That is where the seed of greatness is first sown and watered. If your mind is unprepared, there are chances you won't create the transformation you desire. However, the mind is a battlefield. For transformation to happen, there is a place of renewing. Renewing refers to making something new, fresh and strong again. Renewing of the mind is a daily task that requires your conscious efforts. Remember, it is in continuous tense. Many single mums today are trapped or struggling not because they don't seek a change but because their mindsets are not developed or transformed yet. Real change starts from the mind. In my own case, I started to consciously change the way I think about spiritual issues. I invested in spiritual materials and spent quality time

studying them. To change your life, you must change the way you think. Behind everything you do is a thought. The way you think determines the way you feel, and the way you feel influences the way you act.

2. I STARTED SPEAKING IN FAITH.

Just like I shared with you in Chapter 3, one of the things I did to build up my spiritual life was to take charge of my words. Speaking of faith, it takes a prayer person to make faith declarations work. When you speak in faith, it's like commanding the unseen to be seen, bringing the miraculous to the limelight. Let me tell you, when you speak with faith, the extraordinary happens. What you say about yourself matters the most and not what has been said about you because, by true self-confession, every other word of man remains vague. I want you to understand that there is power in the word and in the tongue, especially the confession you make and profess with your mouth about yourself. When you talk to yourself every day, your subconscious mind is aware, and those words are registered and stored in there. All of a sudden, having accumulated enough words, they become part and parcel of you. I started practising daily affirmation, speaking in faith the things I want to see manifest in my life and that of my children. I used the art of affirmation to commune with God, presenting to Him in faith what I wanted to see happen in and through me.

One of the things you must realise is that God always knows what we want, but sometimes He just wants us to utter them with our own mouths. So, instead of using your mouth to curse, complain, or condemn, why not use it as a tool for worship or remind God of His various promises over your life? Why not prophesy what you want, how you want your life to be, now and in the future? Why not proclaim and declare God's word to that situation? For He exalt His word more than His name. You will see that things happen differently, an absolute turning of tides, changes from every angles and facets of your life, and all things start working in your favour. This will only happen and made manifest provided you keep declaring positive affirmative words every day of your life. I have seen it work and I trust it will work for you too.

3. I STUDIED AND DID 20-40 MINUTES MEDIATION DAILY.

Meditation sometimes is not easy as it seems because it requires the concentration of the whole heart, not tossing to and fro. The act or process of spending time in quiet thought in a quiet place.

Sometimes God leaves you by yourself so you can learn to enjoy your own company. So many times God wants to speak to us, or let me say, He speaks to us but we refuse to listen, because He always speaks and this happens over time

because there is no place of quiet time for Him or we are always in a rush, getting too excited, angry, forgetful makes us forget and acknowledge his presence.

Too many times, we get so consumed by the rush and noise of this world that we hardly have time for solitude. During my quest for God, one of the things I did was to cut myself off from the crowd and devote quiet time with God. Through meditation on God's Word, I learned to be still in times of chaos. It also helped me to deal with my anger and bitterness issues. I started seeing the bright side of life and good in other people.

During meditation, I took the time to train my subconscious mind to reflect on God's goodness as well as imagine me living the quality of life I wanted. I spent several weeks meditating on scriptures like Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 23, Proverbs 4:18, and many others.

4. I GREW MY PRAYER AND LIFE.

Prayer is a mighty weapon. Even the devil knows it, and that is why he tries to distract a lot of single mums from praying and communing with God. He keeps you so busy trying to make ends meet that by the time you even remember to pray, you are already exhausted for the day. You must guard against that. Set aside time to pray daily, God is ever ready to answer you because he said in His Word, "ask, it shall be given unto you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall

be open unto you." Prayer is a must to do every day, an essentiality of human existence, it should be a lifestyle of everyone who claims to love God, because you communicate your problems to God, He then gives answers too.

Prayer is a weapon of warfare that can never fail. The more you pray, your spiritual eyes begin to see the invincible, and then you see that you have a direction for prayers; otherwise, it may be boring. Prayer is a doing action, that should be done on a daily basis because via prayer you invoke the presence of God to intervene in your matter.

The praying place is a place casting our cares, burdens, troubles, pains, that we might be passing through. Then you realise that after praying, your burdens are lifted, and you feel refreshed. However, you cannot pray to the one you cannot trust. Prayers are only answered if they are said in faith and without any iota of doubt.

In the process of trying to build back my spiritual life, one of the things I did was engage in a series of prayer sessions. I just had to spend more time with my God to help me make sense of the various complexities before me. God has made prayers easy for us that we can pray to Him anywhere, whether in the kitchen, while at work, walking along the street, you know why? Because He is everywhere, anywhere, anytime. You can pray silently within you without the next person becoming aware, and you may decide to shout, He hears everything. We should be more

concerned about the heart praying and the intent motives behind the prayers we pray. In prayers, I would tell Him how tired I was trying to do things my own way and seek my own path. I told Him whatever He had for me, I was willing to take it. I wanted him to take the wheel from me and lead the way. I was ready to just follow. During those moments, I also learned to pray beyond myself and pray for others too. Through those prayers, I was able to strengthen my faith and find my purpose in life, and today, I can confidently say I am living it to the fullest. With God, nothing shall be impossible.

This is our everyday proclamations; it is what most of us claim but fail to work for us, it won't work if we don't take actions. If we don't seek His face in prayer, it will still be the same result. Hold on to the pillar of prayer, be a prayer person that commands result. A prayerless person is a powerless person, a person prone to the attacks of the devil. Such a person is someone who can't find refuge in tribulations. Prayer renews your spirit, strengthen your weary heart and grants hope when things go wrong in your life. It pays to pray than to cry. Turn your crying moments to your praying and praising moments and see what God will do for you.

5. I ENGAGED IN THANKSGIVING AND PRAISES

Another thing I did to boost my spiritual life was to start being thankful to God for everything I had been through and

how far He had brought me. I learned the habit of spending 20-30 minutes singing and dancing to God in my living room. I would bring my kids to join me and together we would dance and sing, praising God for his faithfulness. I realised that praising and dancing helped me to achieve a certain level of calmness and lifted my emotion from sadness to happiness. When praises go up, blessings come down. This is a principle that has been working for ages, it worked for me, and I hope if you do it accordingly, it will also work to your favour. When you're sad, God doesn't feel happy because He's always wanted the best for you and whatsoever, you're going through. He smiles when we praise and thank Him continually. An amazing thing happens when we express our adoration and gratitude to Him. When we joyfully sing praises to Him, for what He has done, what He's doing and what He's yet to do for you. He moves on our behalf and makes the impossible possible. Be a thanks giver. It works in two ways; when we thank God for all he has done, we express that excitement to Him, it brings him joy but gives us more fulfilling life than what we can imagine.

6. I INDULGED IN POSITIVE IMAGINATION.

I read in Genesis 13 where God told Abraham that "as far as your eyes can see, I shall give unto you." I think by that statement, God was not only trying to stir the imagination of Abraham, but He was also using that encounter to speak to the rest of humanity about the power of imagination.

Most times, we limit ourselves not only by what we cannot do but also by what we cannot imagine.

During those times, I started indulging in constant imagination. I started stretching my mind of what's possible in my life and committing everything to God. I started raising my standards and setting great visions for my life. The kind of visions I created during those periods were such that I would only need God to make them happen. I really enjoyed the experience.

As a single mum, never limit yourself to your current reality. This life is bigger than you think, and God has so many blessings stored up for you that you can ever exhaust in your lifetime. So no matter what you have been through, do not allow that to force you into imagining small for yourself. Stretch your dreams, raise your hopes, and let your faith in God stay unshaken. He is always capable of doing exceedingly more than you could and would ever ask for.

7. I BECAME A GIVER

From the little I had, I started helping people who were in need.

I began to live beyond myself. I gave my money, time, talents, and energy to serving others even though I needed help myself. I think one of the mistakes most of us make is that we want to wait until we have everything figured out

before we start giving a helping hand to others. But it doesn't work that way. It is in helping others that we find help ourselves.

The reason why God wants to bless you is so that you can be a blessing to others. You should be a channel through which God can reach others. His blessings are meant to maintain a certain flow. The moment you interrupt that flow by hoarding His blessings, you put yourself in a position to lose what He has given you. Choose to be a cheerful giver irrespective of what level you are in life. There is a spiritual benefit that comes with the art of cheerful giving. It worked for me, and that's why I am confident it can work for you if you do it with the right attitude.

As a single mum, God has great plans for you. Through you, He wants to bring hope and shine the light of blessings into the lives of many others. So take your spiritual life seriously and commit yourself to have a personal relationship with Him. Dedicate yourself to His will and allow Him to be your leader, counsellor, and best friend. Going to church or mosque is good, but then that's never enough. You need to also have your own personal relationship with him. Get to know your God. Study his Word. Don't be too busy for Him. Make out quality time to worship Him but more importantly, let your daily life reflect that worship in practice. Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to Him. He has all that you need to become that person you have always

dreamed of.

Important takes:

Suggestions for Positive Imagination:

- Never imagine negative thoughts because they give you complaints and worry of all the issues you're going through. Always engage your mind to imagine things which you want to happen. You are always what you think and what you say to people. If you are the type who always imagine negative thoughts, bad and terrible things will be the outcome. If you know how strong and powerful your thoughts are, you will be mindful of your thoughts and imagination.

Develop a positive attitude, and condition your heart to always imagine good things to get positive results. Put aside the thoughts that won't help you to go forward, focus more on the things that will bring out the best in you. Positive attitudes lead to greatness and happiness. When your thoughts are brilliant, you will be able to cope with all of your daily issues. Your positive imagination brings hope for a better tomorrow. You will begin to see and address life and its issues easily, and the courage to avoid all your worries flows in. If you can spend a day without complaining and allowing negative thoughts to flow through you, you will see the change that will take

place in your life. Your mind is powerful; it's the starting port of all the actions you exhibit, therefore, nurture it to be conditioned to positive thoughts for the kind of life you've always envisaged. Create the kind of life you want for yourself. The kind of life you want for your family, the kind of life you want for your future family if you're a single lady. Everything is in your hands; you have full control to dictate its outcome. If you want the best, which I believe it's what you want, you have to create it yourself.

- Do not restrict your imagination and thoughts to your current circumstances or limitations. Believe you can go beyond your immediate walls- if you want to! Limitation is not for winners; limitations are meant for losers. Most people limit themselves to those minion things they think about; you should know that you can go as far as you can see. If your imagination is very broad, believe me, you will be unstoppable. Mary Kay Ash says, and I quote, "What you believe, remember, you can achieve." Therefore, when you centre your thoughts towards growing big, you will surely be great. Greatness makes itself available for positive thinkers; therefore, join the league and be among those who will change and make this world a better place.
- Forgiveness is key for internal peace. Think deeply; get a plain paper and list the names of those who have wronged

you in the past. Now have a plan to actually forgive them. And contact and forgive them.

Forgiveness helps you to move forward in life. If you keep grudges for too long, it will take away your happiness and leave with you with sorrow and pains. When you forgive someone who hurts you, you allow yourself to move on with the remaining parts of your life, but if you allow it to hit hard for too long, you will find it difficult to forget your pains. We all feel how hard it is when we're hurt or in pain, but the pain and the hurts we feel will only make us weak and prevent us from moving forward. People who forgive others easily are the wisest and the strongest because they understand how valuable happiness is. Always remember that anytime you forgive those who hurt you, you set a healing balm on your wounded injury. And if you let everything go completely, it shows you have set yourself for everlasting growth.

When you allow God to deal with you and the things you're going through, your pains, sorrows, stress, and any other unpalatable conditions that you're going through, you will be happy with the remaining life you have left. He has a way of lifting your burden to make you see freedom and move on with your life. Let him deal with you and fight your battle for you.

Most of the times, forgiveness is an expression of love

towards yourself that gives you enough reasons to move on with your life. If you fail to love yourself, you will fail to realise where to pick up yourself. Unforgiveness blindfold your good thoughts and allows your suffering to surface. You are so unique to let your pain overcome you. It's because you're brave, that's why you need to embrace love over hurts. When you forgive, it doesn't mean you're weak or you accept what they did to you, it means you are too big to be controlled by those things they did to you. And lastly, forgiveness helps you to forget your past and the worries that surround it, but it will never allow you to forget the lesson it taught you. Therefore, open your heart and embrace your true self and make your life easy again. Reach out to those people who have hurt you or cause one sorrow or the other into your life. It may be your divorced husband, a friend, your parents, or children. Create time to meet them and be a good daughter of your father who is in heaven.



CHAPTER 6

Networking and Finding Social Support...

THE STRUGGLE OF BEING A SINGLE MUM can be emotionally, mentally, and physically draining. And one of the mistakes that most single mums make is to isolate themselves from social interactions and refuse to share their stories because they feel that they will be judged and stigmatized. So, they keep the details surrounding their situation or failed marriage to themselves in order to avoid further misrepresentations and misconceptions by other people.

However, the more they hide their problems, the more they get hurt. This is so because being a single mother is one of the loneliest situations a woman can possibly find herself. As we know, long-term loneliness can lead to major depression, which is

surely not good for anybody's physical and mental health. Many women fall victim to isolation and loneliness when they become single mothers. They deny access to friends and sometimes to family members just because they feel that their new status as single mothers negatively change the perception people have about them

For this reason, they cut themselves away from people and begin to beat themselves up in silence and misery as they wallow in self-pity and self-blame because of what they have been through, they get suspicious of trusting others, and by so doing, they move away from people who might want to help them. They often become too overwhelmed with the burden of facing the reality of what they're going through, that they get frustrated and feel that the whole world is against them.

But the truth of the matter is that when we share our burdens with other people, at times, we can learn meaningful and helpful lessons from some of them who have gone through similar challenges in life. Having been there and done that before, such people understand the realities of your situation and might

have success stories that will help you solve your own problems. So, you should look for relatable solutions where you know you could possibly find them. You know that keeping silent will not help the situation; rather, it will make it get worse every day. You need people to help you. You need experts to counsel you on the way forward. If you try to manage the pain and hope it will one day improve, it will grow beyond your power, and at that point, you will have no choice than to lose hope, which I don't want you to lose. Because I want you to know that you can be happy again as I am. Therefore, you don't have to feel ashamed of what you are going through because nobody is perfect; we all know that. Nobody is generally perfect.

We only depend on God, and He won't come physically to help us, rather He'll send someone, He will put someone in that position to have something to say about the situation.

You will now discover that you are not alone. You are not the only one going through the same problem. I was once in this situation, and I depended on Him, and He led me in the right direction. I was

able to meet other marriage counselors and experts to put me on the right track. I was once someone without hope, someone who has lost it all, but here I am today, sharing my story with you. It was a sad moment in my life. I was in real pain and suffering, seeing my marriage fading away like the sound of a confused melody.

When my marriage collapsed, I was faced with the reality of taking care of my two daughters and mum in the midst of rising bills and falling hopes, I felt like the whole world had abandoned me. Slowly, I began to withdraw from people.

I began to see everyone around me as enemies. Most times, I will pass aggression on innocent people who wanted to help, and were really willing to assist me in the way they could. The burden was too much on me. The idea of taking care of my kids and mum alone terrified me and made me hopeless. I hated people for no sensible reason at all. My kids knew I was changing gradually, and I was becoming something else. My actions and attitudes became strange and eventually put my kids in a strange mood. They no longer felt free to tell me things. It

was a complete mess; I felt I was going to keep hiding from people until they eventually let me be, so I built a prison wall around me.

This is often the natural behavior of grieving people, particularly for single mums who are still going through pains and rejections. It's a moment of frustration and rejection. It was the moment of my life that I cried most. A moment where you can only focus on your pains and how to make yourself look pitiful. At that point, I was clueless. I was blind to see the reasons why I was still alive because it looked as if I was losing everything I had, including my children. I was actually losing my kids because they found my behaviors towards them strange, I wasn't the caring mum I used to be before. I wasn't ready to listen to them. I cared less to know how they were doing in school. All these things didn't help me instead it brought me more pains and depression.

However, I want to let you know that hiding from society, holding back your story, or building a wall around yourself is not the best way to deal with pains. Of course, I understand the fact that sometimes it could be hard for you to open up; it was hard for me

too. But then, always realize that the moment when it seems like you are the only one suffering your pain and that the whole world is crashing down on you is when you need to reach out and seek the help and support of others. That's the best moment to look out for assistance from experts and people you think could help you. If you fail to reach out at this point, you might eventually regret it as your situation might become even worse to the point that it leaves you with a permanent scar. For instance, when I kept silent, my situation grew worse, and I started to feel dejected and neglected. This led to the point where depression almost ruined my life and, by extension, the lives of my daughters. I mean, it is not wise to bear your burden on your own without any form of social support. Don't assume you can fight this alone because you cannot do it alone.

Living in isolation and trying to fight life challenges all alone might even lead to suicide or some type of terrible harm to your well-being. The rate at which people commit suicide these days is quite alarming, and it's as a result of issues bordering on isolation and loneliness. In fact, one of the aspects

of depression that usually leads to suicide is the feeling of isolation and the false belief that the whole world has left you alone to suffer your affliction. Like I said it's a false belief because if you don't share your problems, how will people know that you need help and the best possible way to assist you. I would have been eaten up by my own marital challenges if I did not reach out to certain key people to help bring back some positives into my life.

I would have been a failure if I had refused to share my issues with people who can help me. It would have been a different story today if I ended up losing hope. Thanks to God who helped me, and I believe He's willing and able to help you out as He did for me because He opened my eyes and led me to people who understood my reality after I was able to share my story and burden with them. Since then, I always have this renewed confidence and zeal to share my story, knowing that it can also serve as a support system to somebody else. In truth, no matter how long your challenges persist, you could definitely get out of them one day, especially when you have been able to find a reliable network of support.

Moreover, I want to challenge the prevailing cultural notion that asking for help is a show of weakness. It is not -and I speak from experience! That is what the society wants us to believe, but that is not the case. Even the greatest leaders in the world have had times in their lives where they needed succor, strength, and help from others in order to carry on. They draw this from their wives, husbands, close friends, etc. So, don't allow anyone make you feel less of yourself for being true to your struggles. It is human. It's one of those things and difficulties you will encounter as a human. Everyone has one issue or the other worrying or disturbing them. Yours may be marriage or something else, but whatever it is, know that you are not alone when it comes to facing difficulties in life.

We live in a world that is constantly evolving as we grow, so there are lots of life challenges that will definitely grow on us as well. It's now left for you to pick up yourself from where nature or life has put you. And to do this, you must be able to listen to advises flowing through people who have been in a similar situation or in the same position before.

Listen to people who were once down but later grew out of their situation to become great today.

I speak this from experience because I was completely at my lowest point of ridicule and shame, yet I made it out safe. You have the opportunity to make it out too. You have the right to defend yourself by crying out to people who can help you. There are so many people who are willing to help you, but if you don't help yourself by seeking help, nobody will understand your predicament and help you. Not seeking help when you desperately need one is like a bad dream that sooner or later can become a nightmare because you refused to wake up to the realities on the ground. So, if you've been dreaming all this while, it's time to wake up and face reality. Everything happening to you now is real. And now is the best time to face them with all the strength and willpower in you. Even with the little courage you still got, you can fight it to the point of winning by accepting your challenges and sort for a way forward. Until I was tired of closing my mouth, I never had the courage to face my problem. I wasn't bold enough even to face people and share my worthless

story with them. I never knew they were even willing to help me. Until I woke up, I never saw the solution coming. Wake up from your long hibernation and defend yourself by facing the reality of life.

One of the things that worked for me in dealing with my pain as a divorced single mum was my willingness to accept my reality and begin to connect with various support systems that allowed me to get help from people. That really helped me to open up and find the soft landing I needed to get back my groove. There is something very relieving when you are safely sharing your story. And the other party is listening and responding in love. You just have this feeling of a huge burden lifted off you. That was how I started feeling when I found the courage to share my story with the right people. I repeat the right people! Now, please take note of this, not random people, but the right people who are in the right position to help you.

There are so many marriage counselors out there who have vast experiences in one way or the other, they have gone through a similar situation, and they came out great. Reach out to them and let them pass

wisdom to your failing marriage life. Let them stir up your hope again. Let them give you insights to see the better side of your situation. Let them give you the valuable tips that worked for them.

It was after I sought help, that I became conscious of how far I have been missing a great deal in my situation.

I looked at how long I should have helped myself while I was allowing pains and regrets to eat me hard. I never knew that I could get out so fast. It was like a miracle to me. It was as if I was dreaming. Gradually, I became confident again. I became the type of woman I used to be; even better. I was able to see more of my potentials and ability that eventually shaped my life.

There's more to life than being isolated in your private critical situation. Thanks to God that you're still alive. When there's life, there's hope. Now hope is knocking on your door, that's why you have access to this book. Are you willing to open the door?

One of the most beautiful gifts given to us by God is the gifts of quality people. And for every phase of

your life, you must learn to make maximum use of this incredible gift. As a single mum, it could be an emotional rollercoaster journey trying to find the right people to speak to. The doubts, uncertainty, and the regrets of the divorce or single motherhood begins to beset your mind. And then you feel that being alone is right. Again, I speak from experience, it isn't. Speak to people. For me, and I must confess, it was frustrating and time-consuming trying to deal with my pains and disappointments alone. But then, when I realized that there was no need hiding my pain (I mean, what is the worst that can happen?), I stepped out of my way to seek the right support network that turbocharged my change process. I never knew it would be that fast. A change will come to you if you're ready for it. I was completely ready, and I was able to overlook all my worries to make use of the best opportunity available to me. In life, there are lots of things we will find difficult to achieve if we fail to seek external supports. They are positioned to make the journey easy for us. It's high time you stopped doubting if it's necessary to take this step. Who knows, maybe the right words and strategies

you need to get out fast are in someone's mouth. I did step out as if it was my last hope, but I tell you it was the best choice and decision I ever made to change my life and my situation.

Having said this, the process of finding the right social support is something that should always start with you. Firstly, you need to be the right social support system for yourself. What I mean is that you must first be willing to seek and receive help from others before your change can begin. You must have faith that it will be better this time. You must confess positively to yourself and believe in yourself again. Seeking support from others without you helping yourself first by spurring your hope first, the change you want may not really show up. You need to believe in yourself and be ready to make it work. Before anyone helps you, you must be willing to help yourself first, and when the help comes, you must be determined to keep the fire burning. That's that fire that rekindles and stirs up the dying hope within you. It all begins with you, and if you fail in that aspect, others might find it difficult to help you. Even when they're trying their best to make things work for you,

your negative attitudes towards their strategies and suggestions will fail because you've failed to help yourself. If you aren't flowing in that same direction with them, nothing reasonable will come up, and you will keep disappointing yourself.

Many single mums who failed to help themselves find it difficult to solve their issues, and you know what? They eventually fail. You just have to see help coming to this time and hope for better things. Hope for the best positive change you desire, that's when the right social supports will be effective in taking you out fast from your predicaments. I have seen some single mums who complain about their pains and miseries but who are not ready to receive help. They just want to be pitied or have a companion who would join them in their pity-party. But you must deliberately choose not to be in that category. You must be different and be among others doing great in all they do.

I chose to be different; I chose to stop limiting myself. I chose not to be among the pity-partying single mums who only want others to pity them. That's why I was able to get access to the kind of

freedom I was looking for. I got it, and I was happy I did because it shows that I made the right decision by inviting and allowing others to help me. However, if I had not yielded to all the supports available to me at that moment and be ready to accept what's before me, my story would have been different now. I would have been among those single mums who couldn't withstand their issues and eventually become something else. My kids would have regretted having me as their mum. They would have regretted that they came through me into this world because their lives will be miserable.

You have to be that single mum that lives to achieve her highest dreams, a single mum that even when she is down, is willing to rise up against all the odds to be the best version of herself. Be that single mum who is always willing and ready to make positive changes in her life. In my own case, I was so tired of the situation I was in, and the version of myself I was becoming that I needed to change something urgently. During those periods, I never said anything good and positive about my situation, and this really had a negative effect on me. I never

knew that the negative words and self-talk I usually said were my greatest enemies.

So, my advice to you is that you should be careful of the words you use and the things you say for they ultimately become your reality. Be optimistic and positive about the type of change you're looking for, as this gives you the courage and confidence to face what's ahead of you. With this mindset and approach to life, you will find reasons to believe in yourself again. You will see the need to rise up again and be the best you can possibly be for you and your children.

Secondly, realize that the help you need to move your life to the next level is always out there in the form of good people waiting for you to show up. It is up to you to get up and be ready to make a move to find these people. Many will not come to you unless you come to them! This is the reason why you need to get up and possess what you want. Unless you make that decision to help yourself, they may not see you from afar to see what you're going through. Even though they're willing to help you, if you don't present yourself in a way to get the best support you

want, they will fail to assist you. Like I said earlier, the change you're looking for has to start from you, and once you have started to change yourself for the better, the best people God has positioned around you to help you will show up and deliver their best to make things work for you again. These good people can be your immediate family members, close friends, neighbors, professionals, your church family, or even strangers who are willing to offer that listening ear.

When my marriage collapsed, and I had my two daughters to provide leadership to, I had to become what I call the “mum-dad-mum”. It was hard for me, and there were days I felt like throwing in the towel if not for the help I received from my friends and family members, especially my mum. When I decided to rise above my pain and get my life back, one of the things I did was to take some days off to make a list of people whom I could share my pains with, learn from them, and build a network with them to facilitate my recovery. I knew they were out there, and if I fail to seek them, I will fail to be a responsible mum. My two daughters were looking up

to me. I knew the situation would grow worse if I fail to meet up to the standard and reality of the need to keep them stable. I was so sure that things will be better soon. I would say that I am also lucky to have a pretty good relationship with my mum. She was one of the persons that I first opened up to. Throughout my marital struggles, she stood by me but then wanted me not to give up. Fortunately, she was never judgmental towards me when my marriage eventually collapsed. Instead, she stayed around to listen. She gave me her shoulder to lean on, and sometimes she would sit with me to discuss at length just to help me clear my troubled mind. She also was very helpful in taking care of my two kids during those times when I would slide into my needless grumpy state. My mum was my guardian angel. Of course, not everyone is as lucky as I am to have such a supportive mum who would stand with them in their time of pain. I believe that we all have a helper nearby who is ready to help only if we are ready to search for the helper. As I said, you can find such a person in the form of a friend, neighbor, or even a colleague who is willing to play such a role as my

mum did for me. Who knows, maybe it's your best friend or your boss at work. Anybody can be in that position to give you the comforting words and encouragement you need to stand again. You will know them by their words. They say those things, and it enters straight to your bone marrow to stir you up again. They've once failed before, so I can use their experiences as a leverage to become a better person today.

No matter how awful the world may be, I believe that there are still good people out there with good hearts. There are people who would be willing to give you a helping hand when you are down. So always keep your mind constantly open. Keep it open to people who will help you. When your mind is opened, you will receive a solution naturally to some things that ordinarily, you find difficult to address. Not because you're blind or senseless to see those solutions, but the way they will present it will be the best approach to tackle the situation. There's no magic in making things happen if you fail to speak up. Nobody has the power to release and relieve you of your problems, but some do have a better way of

approach to enlighten you to see what you fail to see and how to make it work in the best way for you. I believe that when God sees the genuineness of your heart to find help, He has a way of sending the right person you need. He's aware you're going through many things, and He's always ready to provide a solution for you. He has a way of connecting you with your helpers.

Finally, I would like to quickly suggest that your first approach towards seeking help is to first be of help to other people around you. Perhaps the person next to you might be going through a tougher or similar challenge that you are able to proffer a directional solution to, and offering to help might just be the genesis of your own lasting solution as well. Sometimes our emergence in life starts when we look out for those who we can support in our own little ways. It was Zig Ziglar who said, "You will get all you want in life if you help other people get what they want." There are so many people out there who are in your shoes and even many others who have a worse case than yours. Therefore, when you are set to go out there in search of help, have it in mind that

there are many people out there that can receive help from you as well. In fact, your story might be just what they need to hear to become hopeful again. So, this is why you ought to be the best you can be and stop dwelling on the bitter sides of your situation. The world needs you as badly as you need the world.

Someone said, "It's not over until you win." In seeking out social support, you must learn to connect with people with the right attitude. Reach out to people who appreciate you and hold you accountable as you begin to walk your way through realizing your hidden potential. Groups and organizations are key. In my own case, I joined some organizations in my local community. For example, I got more involved in my local church, joined a charity group that allowed me to interact with people, and then I joined a certain parents' group in my children's school. Doing all of this brought me out of my shell, and I began to see the beauty of connecting and working with people who cared about making a difference. It made me forget my pain because I started living beyond myself. I started getting actively involved in social work with people. It kept me productively busy

while enjoying every support I got from the various connections. I believe I was able to see my full potentials, and the way forward was made clean and clear to me. My words and thoughts became powerful, and my progress was so brisk that I was able to forget so many things in a very short period. It came to me like a miracle. I knew God was willing to be my succor, and my actions didn't stop Him from helping me so fast. I completely pushed aside my worries and became a living testimony to my mum, kids, and everyone around me. It all happened because I was ready for the change I wanted. I was ready to get out of my pains, and the pains left me without considering how long I've been in it.

Another thing I did that helped me was to create a little support group that comprised four single mums in my community who shared similar desire and ambition with me. We met periodically to hold each other's hands and talk about our struggles, our goals, and our unique experiences. In the support group, we talked about almost everything. We also tried to define our purpose for life going forward, helped each other clarify our goals, and shared ideas

that would help us all grow. Working with this support group really helped me, as, after our meetings, I would always feel really inspired and motivated to be a better single mum and person. This is a unique benefit of such meetings –you unburden yourself, listen, and learn from others in a similar position. My hopes were rekindled, and I started believing more in myself and my ability to achieve my dreams and plans.

Some of the questions we often discussed during those meetings included:

- How would you describe your current state of self-esteem?
- What do you want for your children?
- Do you think you are still bitter towards your ex?
- What are the challenges you face as a single mother?
- What is your definition of a healthy relationship?
- Do you want to marry again, and why?

- What are your life's aspirations?
- What are your businesses or career goals?
- What legacy do you want to live behind?

Note that you can also ask yourself these questions and be honest with the way you answer them. Besides, these are just some of the questions we used to ask each other; though they were much more than this. Just like me, you can choose to form your own small support group or maybe join one around you, whether physically or virtually. As an advice, I would suggest that you avoid being part of any support group where all they say are negative things about others, particularly about their exes or men in general – avoid them like the plague! You do not need such negativity around you – not anymore. Only be part of a group that empowers you to learn and stay positive towards being all that God wants you to be. Not every group is bad and full of negativity, but be careful in picking one that will help you grow instead of making your condition worse directly or indirectly. There are many reasons why many groups are created, it's your duty to know the right ones and

how they can be of help to you. You need a group that will inspire you to do and be more for yourself – plain and simple!

As a single mum, you must also learn to network for success. Networking really helped me, not just in getting my career and entrepreneurial zeal back on track, but also opened up new opportunities for my career and business growth. By networking with others, I was able to build authentic relationships with real people who began to appreciate my various competencies and paid me for them. I was able to see the reasons why I needed to help others. When I began to talk to people, I was able to see how tough the situations of other people were. I saw people with different issues of life. I couldn't but get motivated to do more for others. I saw true reasons to thank God for my pain because it was better than other people's predicaments. There were people who do not receive any external encouragement and assistance during their hard times. I had to start building my capability to face many critical things in order to be able to help others from whatever they were going through. These kinds of relationships helped move me away

from fixating my mind solely on my problems. I attended career events, business seminars, and various relevant hang-outs that helped to improve my knowledge, stir my dreams, and bring me closer to people. I was able to secure a juicy contract offer to organize an event for a client as a result of my networking. That contract turned my finances around. In fact, it was at a networking event that I met one of my mentors - Madam Brylia Franca.

As a mentor, she literally turned my life around. She is a wealth of knowledge and possesses a deep well of wisdom. I probably would not have met someone like her if I had stayed locked in my little world of isolation and self-pity. If I hadn't refused to say no to my defeat, I would have missed a great deal. I'd have lost many opportunities that made me discover my full potential in time. I wouldn't have met her. Madam Brylia took me from my doubting state of mind to become a confident and positive minded person. Someone who always sees the bitter side of her situation began to think in the opposite direction to see the beauty of life. I became someone in the position to speak to others and encourage them

to see the better side of what they were going through. I became a motivational speaker that single mums and young ladies want to listen to. That was the power of meeting and talking to people who have the potentials to help us in whatsoever we're going through. That's how powerful networking with other people can be in helping us to get out of all our issues without stressing us out.

As a single mum, always remember that when you have a strong network, you have a support team that you can turn to for advice, assistance, career or business guidance, and even mentoring. Someone once said that your network would affect your networth.

When you're surrounded by people of influence, your life will be valuable. Your mindset and orientation will change, and your thinking faculty will improve. You will see the way forward to a greater height, and people will cherish you because you're helping them. You will think more of going forward than going backward, and the life of positive transformation will be embraced in your

subconscious mind. This I have found to be true, so stop holding yourself back.

There is so much in you that the world really needs that you can't afford to continue concealing the light in you. Even as a single mum, you can still do great things, challenge yourself and others, and be all you want to be. Let nobody tell you otherwise. Do not ever think so low of yourself. They say the sky is the limit, but I will tell you that the sky is not your limit, the sky is your starting point. If you don't limit yourself, no amount of negative words from outside the world will move you. Nothing others say to your ears will change who you are and how far you're destined to go in life. Inculcate the mindset of a lion. Be a lion that's always bold to confront any challenges. Be brave always to take the bull by the horn. Say no to negative words. Say no to bad networks that cut you off from life's connection repeatedly. Say no to fear because it will never help you progress positively and incrementally if you embrace it. Limitations are the product of fear and anxiety. They aren't among those things you deserve. If you don't stop yourself, nobody will have the

courage to discourage you from achieving amazing things with your life. Take charge of your own life and be responsible for your consequences. If you have this idea and you develop it, you won't be too scared to face your challenges. You will conclude that getting out is inevitable. You will definitely see the brighter side of your desires. Allow your light to shine through. Being a single mum does not mean you stand at a point of perpetual disadvantage. Be ready to network with people who share the same ambition as you. Be ready to open up to people who are willing to help you. There are so many people who are going through a similar situation, and you just have to be strong to confront yours with the best of your capacity and the encouragement you receive from different people around who want to help you. Stop hiding in your cocoon. Be bold; be proud of yourself. There is a bigger world out there, and there are people in need of the great talents and beauty that God has given to you. To live above board as a single mum, you must be willing to rise up and reach out to that support system. And leverage on it.

Important takes:

- Relationships with real, value-adding people, pursuing the same goals are important. Seek for such relationships, grow and keep them. Meeting people who are in the position to help you is a goal you need to pursue to make yourself happy again. People with substances will help you a lot to see the better side of yourself. They've been in your shoe before, and they came out successful, why don't you seek knowledge and be informed. This idea really helped me to become a better person today because I was able to voice out to seek a solution for the challenges I was going through. You can help yourself today by reaching out to people who will help you.



CHAPTER 7

And the Children: Invested Parenting...

IF THERE IS ONE AREA of my life that gives me so much joy and fulfillment today, it is being a parent to my two beautiful daughters.

That's the best part of my life, and I won't trade it for all the tea in China. When you know the worth of what you have, you wouldn't want to lose it. My two daughters are my treasures. They are parts of the major reasons why I couldn't lose hope when I was about giving up. They are my pride, and they helped me to see my hidden potentials to have something to believe in. The love I have for them has no boundaries. They give me joy. Mere looking and staring at them gives me confidence and hope to face what's ahead of me. I so much cherish them the way I cherish my breath, and I hope to help them reach

their goals in life. My kids are my motivation. I get my courage from their beautiful smiles. Just being with them gives me great satisfaction that nothing else has been able to give me. So, my prayer every day is to stay alive to watch them grow into role models that serve God, humanity, and achieve their greatest dreams. I believe God has a good plan and purpose for them. And I believe God's plan will materialize in their lives because His plans and purpose for our lives are good and great.

Of course, every reasonable parent's desires are to see their child or children grow to become better than them. We all want our kids to stand out and shine bright everywhere they go. But then, training up a child is not like taking a sip of your favorite drink. It is one of the most difficult things that any parent or parents would ever do in life. And if any parent fails in raising up a child appropriately, such a parent has failed the most critical aspect of parenthood, which is essentially all about the well-being of the children. In fact, children are arguably the lifeblood of any marriage. They are a major reason why most couples go into a marriage relationship in the first place. But

in all honesty, there is more to raising and training a child to grow up in the right manner. It's easier said than done because children usually like to do things exactly the way they want regardless of if it's the right way or not. As they grow, they are easily distracted by many things that fascinate and captivate them to the point where they move wholeheartedly in that direction. And if care is not taken, they might just be falling into a trap because they really don't know the difference between good and bad just yet. Everything around them looks wonderful and interesting to them, and if you, as a parent is unable or refuse to show them the right path, they'll follow any path that appeals to them without knowing the consequences. So, if you want them to move in the right direction, you have to dedicate your whole self to their upbringing right from the beginning of their lives. Lead and direct them in the way of the Lord, and they will never depart from it until they become great.

As I said earlier, as a parent, you have a lot to do to ensure that your kids are growing in the right direction. However, it's not an easy task as it requires

a lot of sacrifices based on your willingness to always show up and be there for your child or children no matter the cost. As beautiful and meaningful as it sounds, not many parents can or will do this. Hence, many of us fall short of our primary roles as parents. And when we fail as a parent or parents, we must expect our children to fail as well in many issues of their lives because the apple does not fall far from the tree, so to speak. Besides, they look up to you as their role model, they watch your footsteps and lifestyle, so it won't be their fault if they fall short of expectation, but rather it will largely be your fault since they look up to you. In other words, your children's failures will eventually bounce back on you as their parent if you fail to lead by example.

As a mother, in marriage, parental care towards your children is your principal goal. It is your responsibility to teach them the best way to approach certain issues of their life. They are the dependent set of individuals who are willing to learn new things. Your primary goal as a mother or single mother is to set standards for your kids. Teach them how to relate to other people. Teach them to love and be

passionate about other people's wellbeing. They should go out there and represent you very well when they meet and relate with people and even in school. I once made such mistake, I have said this earlier, and I am trying to reiterate myself again, I regretted it, and I want you to learn from my experience so that you won't be a victim to the circumstance. I did fail in that area, and that's a big trap, and I fell into it myself.

When my marriage started having too many challenges than I could possibly deal with, I noticed it was hard for both of us to offer my kids the right parental guidance they needed. I desperately wanted to, but I could not. We were both neck-deep fighting over many things that we ignored our daughters. For me, I was always angry or sad that I lost my emotional lens, even to notice what was happening to my little princesses. It was a big hit on my emotions, and I could see it wanted to ruin the relationship between my two kids and me. I almost lost total control of my emotions because I was full of hurt. I was carrying grudges and hatred all over my heart, and I was missing a great deal by hurting myself. I almost lost

until I realized I was hurting my kids by ignoring them. When there are too many challenges in marriage, parents fail to focus their attention on one of the most important factors in marriage, which is bringing up your child or children in the right way. The best way to do this is through love and affection. If there's love in the home, both parents will understand those things that are important for them. They will realize that parental care is the core and most crucial aspect of a successful home.

When we finally separated, there was a serious legal battle that ensued over who should have custody of the kids. It turned out to be another round of war. I hated the fact that he was trying to take my kids away from me, and I fought really hard. He pulled, and I pulled back. I was able to stay forthright and resilient through the fight; it wasn't easy, but I was able to show that I knew exactly what I wanted. But then like the proverb says, "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." While all the legal battles were going on, I didn't even know my first daughter was being hurt. She needed our attention

and parenting; instead, we were both busy in the mud, fighting and throwing dirt at each other.

The whole experience took a big toll on her, and then, sadly, she started changing -in a negative way. A girl that used to have such charming vivacity and infectious happiness suddenly turned into someone who was shy, isolated, and gloomy. I started getting daily complaints from school on her strange behaviors. I didn't know what the issue was, and I did not even pause to find out what was wrong with her. I thought I was doing the right thing by fighting to prove that it is my right to have the kids, and as much as it was the right thing to do, I was approaching it in the wrong way. I thought I was fighting for my kids, but little did I know that I was even hurting them by so doing at the time. I was paying more attention to the hurt and pains I was going through without considering how my children really felt. I was completely off track when it came to paying real attention to their needs. I was blind and selfish because I was more concerned about myself and what I wanted from the divorce case regardless of the adverse effect it had on anything else around

me. At that time, offering proper parenting was the last thing on my mind. As a matter of fact, I was so busy fighting over custody and nursing my hurts that I began to see my kids as distractions. I thought I was doing the right thing, but I was actually failing as a mother.

I never knew that I was causing harm to my two daughters. I was making them regret they came to the world through me. I grew worse on a daily basis; anger was my only motivator. I was so furious to the point where some people felt how hot I was. This was strange, and it became terrible when my daughters were moving away from me. They no longer felt comfortable seeing me and staying around me. I knew I had done terrible things to them because, on several occasions, I will lose my cool and pass down my frustration on them. Just writing about this now is already making me feel terrible. Frankly, I must have been so stupid to have allowed them to go through such an awful experience. I learned my lessons, and I will never allow that to happen again.

Many children are homeless today because their parents have failed to give them the proper

upbringing they needed. They have lost moral values and are misbehaving on the streets because of the kind of home they come from. It'll eventually bounce back on the parents because they've failed to be responsible. They've failed to guide their children. They've failed to concentrate on what brings joy to their home.

Also, as a single mum, if you can't manage your temper and take control over your anger, you will tend to act in ways that will not only hurt you but also hurt your kids or people around you. Anger damages relationships, especially when you are unable to rise above it. If you fail to nip it at the bud, anger will destroy and hinder your purpose in life. It takes away joy from people that allow it to rule over them. In fact, anger causes more harm than you can ever imagine. If you give it a place in your life, it will ruin your joy and leave you with emptiness. When anger finishes with you, you will regret how stupid you are because you must have made terrible mistakes that you shouldn't have made. It won't add value to your reputation; rather, it will damage it.

Anger will not make you get what you want in time. It will create more problems than you can handle.

Anger was all over me, to the point where I felt like hurting people around me, people who were trying their best to help me. Little things began to upset me, and I couldn't control my temper. It was a sad experience for me because I knew I was failing my kids, and I couldn't help myself. While trying to get back at your ex-husband, your attitude may begin to engender an atmosphere of strife, hostility, or apprehension that your kids may pick up. Yet, the truth is that you really do not want to groom your kids in a space where tension and strife are the norms.

You have to understand that our kids do learn from us. They learn them and, in most cases, look at what we do and try to practice them. If your home is full of fight, anger, and hatred, expect the same attitudes and characters in your children. They will not only do that which they see you doing; rather, they tend to do them better than us. If it's the wrong thing they see you doing, they will modify it and do it better in that same negative way. This is who they are, and if you're not too careful to include them in

whatsoever you're going through in your marriage, in no distant time, you will see how frustrating their actions may be, and you will begin to lose them. They will begin to spoil your name outside on the streets. Children with no proper parental care develop low self-esteem. They isolate themselves from people close to them. It's high time we realized the negative effects of all our actions on our children. We need to focus our attention on them and help them to be reputable people tomorrow. Children love to do things right when everything around them is done properly. They tend to flow and relate to things around them. If they find themselves in an aggressive environment, you will see aggression in them. However, if you make them see the real value of who they are, how to live a good life, they will represent you very well when they are dealing with their issues. Don't allow anger to take your joy away from you. Encourage them and teach them moral values. Teach them how to love others and be responsible for others' needs. Embrace those things they pick interest in and help them pursue their dreams. Create space that will enable them to do

more for themselves and think big. Your kids need love, assurance, care, safety, and your utmost attention. Otherwise, you may just be setting them up to pay for life threatening errors and mistakes by allowing yourself to ignore your role as a parent. As the minds of children are quite fertile, you may be unwittingly grooming in them negative vices that they see you portray. In my own case, I was already losing it not until one day, in the midst of all my dramas, my first daughter looked at me and in her tiny but firm voice, said:

“Mum, I miss the old, sweet, dancing mummy.”

Her words hit me like a thunderbolt! I was ecstatic and flabbergasted! I was so sad on the inside. I could see how terrible my actions have destroyed the relationship I had with my precious kids. It was a moment of transition and a point of realization. The words were so strong for me to comprehend at that moment. That broke me. It stopped me right in my tracks, and that was when I knew that I had been doing everything wrong all along. Instantly, I made a vow to myself that I was going to be the best parent and win their love back, irrespective of what life

threw at me. I apologized to them for being so insensitive and made a promise to change. The apology was sincere, and the commitment to change was sincere. I really wanted to do something different this time and take up my responsibilities. I have always wanted not to fail as a mother, even as a single mother. If I would fail in other areas, not in the area of parental care because my parents didn't fail me in that area while I was growing up, they took care of me as if I was their only hope. My Dad never allowed me to lack anything that would make me happy. I couldn't afford to fail my two daughters. I began to focus more on the things they wanted us to be doing together. They wanted me to be available to play and discuss with them as we used to do, which I realized was true. In the process, I discovered I was making myself happy too. I was gaining momentum to embrace new things and the desire to think positively.

The truth is, as a single mum, raising kids can be really daunting. So, I can understand when you sometimes feel overwhelmed and abandoned. I was there too. I understand those moments when you feel

all alone, playing both roles of dad and mum while ensuring that your kids grow up to become responsible and happy adults as well. There is also societal pressure, as several research works indicates that most kids that were raised in a single home turn out bad. So, based on that, you find yourself trying so hard to prove society wrong, doing what you consider as best, and sometimes overworking yourself just to make sure they turn outright.

Honestly, this experience comes with an unimaginable kind of stress, but if you don't watch it, you may end up being unemotionally supportive, overly protective, or want to over discipline. This was my story. Because I didn't want my daughters to end up like their father or like me, I consistently wanted to discipline them to do right. I set very high standards, and that placed a lot of pressure on both of them, as they always wanted to please me even when they were not being their true selves and were very unhappy on the inside.

This is one area you must be mindful of as a single mum. I'm not saying that you should allow your kids to be misguided by their selfish and childish desires.

In fact, it'd be very wrong to leave your innocent kids to do things in the way they want. Even though you are trying to please them, you should be mindful of their decisions and the kind of friend they keep. As a parent, you know when your kids are doing the right things. You know when they desire something great. Even when you find them doing things that are different from what you've planned and hoped they would do; you would be able to sincerely direct them and give them the best advice you can offer as their mother. Many at times, they feel like doing things in their way, and eventually, they succeed if you are indifferent about the situation yourself. When you're guiding and helping your children to make the right decisions about their lives, when they want to choose what they want, you will discover that they will choose what's right because you have already inculcated that ability to avoid making bad decisions. By helping them to know right from wrong in order to discover their purpose in life, they will be well positioned to make positive and meaningful choices.

Don't try to live your child or children's lives for them. Because, "*your children are not your children,*

they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself, they come through you but not from you, and though they are with you, they belong not to you, you may give them your love but not your thoughts, you may house their bodies, but not their souls, For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you can't visit, even in your dreams, you may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you, for life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday."

Disconnect the mistakes you made from your child or children. Whatever mistakes you made are all in the past now. Learn from them but do not try to take them to the future. Never build a prison for your kids in your home to keep them protected. Your job is to be a parent, not a tyrant. As a single mum, learn to love them, teach them, scold them if you have to, but also learn to help them nurture their uniqueness. Parenting is not the same thing as trying to clone yourself in your children's lives. You must help them to discover their purpose, find their passion, and become all that God really wants them to be. Be consistent in these every day, and you will

be able to train your child in love and not in the stereotypes of single parenthood.

Furthermore, a single mum that allows herself to wallow in self-pity, negativity, or guilt cannot be a great parent. Living in such a state disempowers you and prevents you from attracting anything good because of the strategic role that a mum has on the kids, you must stay strong and purge your mind of every negative thought. You should be bold enough to make the right decisions for your kids. You should be the person your kids run to when they need help and advice. You need to change your mindset and think like you a responsible parent. Even though, your situation must have somewhat reduced your optimism about certain things of life, you should not allow your pain to come between your responsibilities. Your kids are your major responsibility in your marriage, and if you allow your mistakes to ruin your relationship with your kids, the pain will grow even worse.

When I discovered that I was losing my self-worth towards my two daughters, I realized that I needed to change somethings. I realized that I was wrongly

condemning myself in the situation I was. I realized my problems would grow worse, and my two kids will be negatively affected if I don't do something urgently.

Life might look so terrible on us most of the times if we fail to find a purpose to live above our challenges, we might become victims of our predicaments. So, let your mind be designed to communicate positivity and wisdom to your children at all times. Be free with them and know what they're going through at any time. You should be a strong pillar to your kids. While you may have had your rough times, do not resign yourself to self-torture or cause your kids to always feel pity for you. Your kids are supposed to draw strength from you and learn from your positive attitude. Unfortunately, some single mums have this habit of believing that the world owes them or is just against them.

Well, while I agree that society needs to do more in getting rid of every form of stereotype towards single mums, I believe that making decision not to allow yourself to stay down is up to you. That you are a single mum is not an excuse for you to deprive

your kids of proper parenting. Of course, I know doing this is hard, and that is why I want to use this opportunity to share with you what I did, and I am still doing to ensure proper parenting for my two kids, even as a single mum. My case may be different from yours, but I am hopeful that you would learn one or two lessons from my experience which will help you navigate your own path.

7 THINGS I DID AS A SINGLE MUM TO BE A BETTER PARENT TO MY KIDS:

1. I SEPARATED MY PAIN FROM MY KIDS.

When I got divorced, and it was just the kids and me, things turned out really rough for us. I was so scared to face my responsibilities, I really struggled to find quick help to enable me cope with the new and challenging situation. I felt the world was against me. Mere looking at my life, I couldn't think of a way forward. I felt like avoiding my responsibilities. I felt I was not going to make it. I was left with large bills, huge debts, and taking care of the family became a major headache for me. At some point, I started getting frustrated with the lack of support from the

various people I reached out to. Everything around became hostile, and I was only thinking of quitting. People I thought I'd run to when I need help turned their back against me. I became a burden to people around me because each time they see me, they see someone who needs assistance. I became uncertain of the kind of life I was living. I spent more time crying in my closet than thinking of the way forward. I always blamed myself for going into a relationship with someone like my ex-husband. I became furious at myself and my ex-husband and felt like hitting hard on him anywhere I find him. He was the reason why I was going through a hard time. Every day I remembered how broke I was, I felt an increased hatred for my ex-husband. Before I knew it, I started using him as an example to my kids of who they shouldn't be like. Whenever they made a mistake, I would scold them with negative words with reference to their dad. I would say something like: "Don't be heartless like your father," or "You are not smart just like your father," and many things like that. I kept using negative words to describe their father until one day, and it struck me that I was only using my words

to train my kids on how to be negative. I never knew I was teaching them to be hostile towards their father. I was using my strong words to damage their sincere minds to create hatred that will keep growing with them. I never knew it would affect them as they grow up. This is one of those things I will never advise any single mum or single lady to adopt because it will eventually fail.

That really hurt me, and I decided to change this style of communication.

Rather than using such negative words, I started speaking positive words. I became intentional in praising and correcting my babies. Whenever they did wrong, I treated their wrong based on what they did not on the frustration I felt towards their dad. I also created time to play and dance with them, or in some cases, we will all spend quality time in bed. I also set aside every Friday night as girls' night for us to go watch movies and eat some popcorn together. I was consistent in all these new methods in order to ensure it was a habit.

2. I CREATED A FAMILY ROUTINE

Taking care of my daughters hasn't been easy. Of course, there are times I felt stressed out while also trying to juggle other areas of my life. What I noticed was that whenever I was stressed out, I would begin to nag at them, and this created a tensed ambiance in our home, and I did not like it. So, one of the steps I took to help me deal with this was to call my two daughters, sat them down, and we created what we called a family routine for various activities. I realized that we needed something like this to help us do things together. I was hoping to completely come out of my old ways to make my kids feel loved again. I felt relieved in the process, and things began to change positively. In the family routine, we created a food timetable, bedtime routine, homework time, playtime, and some others — that way, we all knew what to expect. We had the house rules, and we shared the house chores among everyone, no matter how little. We started living with the mindset that we can help each other and not just mummy doing everything. My little daughter started washing her own plates after eating and making her own bed.

Yippee! As little as these things were, they not only taught them to be responsible, but it took a lot of stress off me as their mum. I started seeing my kids smiling and being lively again — the two of them understood what to do at the appropriate time. I had enough time to plan for myself and think about the next steps in my life. What a beautiful idea! In the space of a few weeks, I began to forget many things about my pains. The fear of failure and rejection began to fade away. I was able to think straight and focus on the things that are important to my life and the life of my children. This decision came as a miracle, and I thank God I embraced it. I became confident, and my kids were happy to relate with me again. Life is good when you're doing the right thing. Life becomes easy when there's a purpose to live it. I began to dream about the kind of future I want and the one that will help my two kids become great and responsible.

3. I STOPPED FEELING GUILTY.

Guilt is tormenting, and if it's allowed to grow, it ruins. When you constantly criticize yourself because

you're going through your hard times, you will notice that guilt keeps eating your courage and strength to come out. The moment you begin to accuse yourself of why you think you're so unfortunate to have found yourself in the situation you're going through, you should know that the feeling of guilt is taking full control of your natural being. Before now, I used to feel really guilty that my inability to keep my marriage was responsible for my kids having to come from a broken home. I was blaming myself because I could only see why I was in pain. Such feeling of guilt affected me greatly that I unknowingly started applying too much discipline on them or spoiling them unnecessarily. There was no balance, and this started with my feeling of guilt! This is a mistake no single mum should make. Even though I am not exonerating myself or celebrating failed marriages, you must learn to forgive yourself so that you can give your best to your kids. Harboring guilt in your heart has a way of affecting your kids and their outlook on life. Sadly, this can have a permanent negative effect on them.

Just like me, tell yourself that guilt will not find a residence in your heart. Keep a pure heart, forgive your ex-husband, and, more importantly, forgive yourself. When you do this, you will release yourself to be the best mum to the kids that God has given you.

4. I STARTED TAKING GOOD CARE OF MYSELF

Being a single mum is not a license for you to ignore your personal wellbeing. Not because you're going through difficult times in your relationship, you should put less concern on your health and wellbeing. Taking good care of yourself leaves you healthy and confident to face many tough issues. If you are not healthy and agile, little things will drive your attention away from many valuable things. You will be weak to confront your challenges, and if you're too careless, you will soon give up. You must be conscious of your health. You must put your health into consideration and make sure you go for a medical check-up regularly.

I know of some single mums who have allowed their health to deteriorate, and as a result, they are not able to offer the needed parenting to their kids. They can't attend their kids' sports games, take their kids to the park, or explore the world with them. As a single mum, your responsibility has increased and, in fact, doubled, because you are the only in the system now; there is nobody to share the duties with anymore. Your husband is gone, and you are left alone to take full responsibility for all the activities in the home. You will be the one to take care of your kids' feeding, laundry, take them to school, and pay their school fees. There are tons of activities and draining responsibilities that will leave you frustrated, and if you're ignoring your health, you will lack the full capability to discharge your duty.

I am sure you don't want that to happen to you.

If you love to stay alive and healthy to see your kids make you proud, then start today to take good care of your health. Do regular exercise and eat fruits and good food. Eat a balanced diet, and make sure you maintain your weight. Don't eat anything anyhow and don't eat dirty and unhealthy food.

When I was going through those hard times, I neglected myself. I paid less concern to my health, and it bounced on me in a way that I would never forget. I was too careless, and I was carried away with my issues to the point that I had to visit the hospital. If I didn't notice it and tackled it earlier, I would have been critically ill. I became conscious of my health, how important it is, and how it will help me survive in my situation. I started eating regularly and accurately. I began to pay close attention to the type of food I take.

I went to the gym twice a week to warm up my system. I was able to claim my life back, and I was strong enough to think about how to scale up financially. While I agree that you need to work hard to take care of the family, please also learn to find time to rest and pamper yourself. Learn to eat right, exercise well, and have buckets of good fun. Sometimes giving yourself a timeout. For example, in my case, I arrange for my kids to go to spend time with my friends while I go to watch a movie. Or I arrange with my mother to take care of them while I take a trip away just to unwind.

5. I ENGAGED IN PRAYERS, STUDYING, AND MEDITATION WITH MY KIDS

Just like I shared with you in my previous chapters, one of the things that helped me in my experience as a single mum is prayers with meditation. I didn't stop at engaging in both acts alone, and I inducted my two daughters as well. I started teaching them how to pray, how to study God's Word, and how to meditate. As I mentioned in the preceding chapters, there was a spiritual deficiency during the early stages of marriage. The right spiritual background needed to be built for my daughters. It was my responsibility. Now, we no longer struggle in praying and studying God's words. The scriptures say, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he's old, he will not depart from it." I want them to have full consciousness of God in whatsoever they do as they grow. I didn't want what happened to my marriage to be their own story. I wanted something different for them. I wanted the foundation of their marriage to be built on God's fullness. In fact, God has been helping them to do many great things. So far, this has been an incredible

experience, as it offers us time to bond and communicate with God as a family. Of course, sometimes their prayer points could be really funny, but I love the fact they are pouring out their hearts genuinely and learning really fast. I remember the first time they tried to meditate; it wasn't really interesting for them.

They felt it was weird.

My little daughter kept interrupting the flow, and the whole experience was just so hilarious. She could barely sit still for just 10 seconds. I had to promise them chocolate just to have them stay still and begin to think of positive things.

I knew they needed this, and I was trying my best to make sure they stay focus. Some people would say experience is the best teacher. To people who have had enough experience, they will tell you it's actually true. However, it's not the best way to live. Experience teaches in a hard way, while wisdom teaches through knowledge. The expression is deep, and it's a reflection of tough moments in our lives. Having had such experience, I will not allow my two

daughters to go through it. I needed to pass the knowledge I had through my experience to help my kids do the right things. It will be reasonable if they go through life issues through wisdom than hard experiences. That's the essence of seeking people's advice most of the time. A lot of them must have had similar challenges and are in the same situation. So, they should be qualified to be in the position to put young people through when similar issues arise in their lives. That's when the experience is useful and profitable. That's when experience; learning from history is essential and worth considering. I had gone through it, I knew how painful it was, so for me to prevent it from happening to my kids, I had to take it seriously. So, I was so sure I would do everything in my power to help my two daughters. I wouldn't want history to repeat itself in my life again. I was able to pay attention to them, listen to what they say, need, and I was so careful to respond to those needs promptly in order to make them happy.

After that experience, they have gone on to engage in more meditation exercises that they now request we do it once every week. We started from 5 minutes

to 10 minutes; now, they meditate for up to 20 to 40 minutes.

Each morning, especially when they are getting ready for school, we also take turns to speak positive things about one another and about ourselves. The idea is to constantly put them in the right frame of mind, teach them the power of positive utterances, and remind them how beautiful, intelligent, and blessed they are.

6. I ENSURE THEY HAVE A FATHER

Even though I am divorced, I did not want my daughters not to have a father. In spite of everything, I believe there are positive roles a father plays in a child's life, and I just did not want any of my two daughters to miss out on that.

So, what I have done is to make sure my kids always speak to their father and go spend time with him, regardless of whether he supports us or not. I also made sure when they misbehave, and I let him know so he can play his fatherly role in cautioning or advising them. This has helped me in avoiding depriving them of any fatherly figure in their life.

I know that this might sound weird to some people, but I don't think it is right to stop your children access to their father. You may still be angry and be hurting, but then your child or children shouldn't be punished for whatever his mistakes, wickedness, or carelessness were. As long as the father is alive and the kids know about it, they will always want to see him, and if for one reason or the other, you still feel angry, you may not allow them see him. You may have to work out how he'd see them probably in school or any other places with maximum security. You may even ask him to come to the church where people are, he'd see them there, and your kids will be happy. Your major goal is to make your kids happy. You're less concerned about seeing him unless you still have feelings for him. If you do, that's a different thing. Secondly, it shows that you are mature. It shows you've grown past your issues, and if by any means, you still recall your challenges, you quickly wave it off. The beauty of this is that you're now a grown, mature, successful and vibrant woman. No one is feeding you; you don't depend on anybody to eat your daily meal. In fact,

you will be thankful to God once you are able to support yourself and your kids even in the absence of support. You will feel fulfilled, and you will be willing to show off your status. That's the kind of mindset you will always want to have. It's the best thing you can ever desire.

7. I TRY TO ALWAYS LISTEN TO MY CHILDREN.

When you train your child as your friend, you will relate to him or her as someone you value and cherish, and they will always do things right to make you happy. They will be free to discuss secret issues with you, and if there's any help or words of encouragement you will give, they will appreciate it and be ready to work with it. It's a relationship you've built with them. They will love and trust you throughout their lives. My kids are very funny, and they love to joke with me a lot. They love staying close to me and share things with me. I have created such an atmosphere with them as they grow up; they feel free to share anything with me.

Parents, especially single mums, have this habit of shutting their kids up. Most single mums, somehow, have trained themselves to be tough, and they extend this to their style of grooming. If you think this will help your child grow well, you might be missing out on the truth. When you look tough and always take their opinion too extreme, they will begin to restrict themselves from you. They begin to hide many secrets from you. They know if they share it with you, you will take it personally. They would want to keep many things to themselves, and if they get hurt, it must have damaged them before you realize. It's good to be tough, but if you allow your toughness to go into any issues with your children, you will damage your relationship with them. They will rather get hurt and try to manage it than to share with you because they know you will make the situation worse. There are many simple ways to address issues and chastise your kids. The way to make them feel you're right and what they're doing is wrong. They respect it more when you sit them down and break things down for them. They want to

listen to parents who are calm, and they will be ready to adhere to whatever you have to say.

You feel you have been through a lot, so you have more experience to tell your kids what to do and what not to do. While I agree that you must play your role as a parent and be firm, you must also learn to listen to your kids.

Listening allows them to feel safe with you and for you to understand them better. If you are the type of parent who listens to your children, they will tell you how their day went even before you ask them. They know they will have one lesson to pick and learn from any response you give them. They've always wanted you to give them listening ear so that they could share their issues with you. Allow your kids a chance to express themselves within reason. Get to understand their perspectives on issues. By just listening to them, you can learn a whole lot and open up a healthy channel of communication that guarantees a better relationship. They must begin to see you as someone they can confide in and respect. If you have all these in place, your kids will see you as their best friend. They will appreciate you more like their mother. If

they feel you're not too good, they are the first people to notice and ask what's wrong. Your kids will not do this if you are a tough parent. They won't have the mind to ask what you're going through if they notice you're weak because you've killed their confidence. They no longer have the self-worth to face you and tell you what they feel.

For my two daughters, I decided I was going to raise them to trust me and be open enough to tell me anything. I made them know it is okay to share anything with me by first sharing my own issues with them. For example, I try to be honest with them when I am going through difficult times, but I also don't forget to remind them that things would change soon. I do that because I want to demonstrate to them what it means to have a positive attitude towards whatever life throws at them.

Now, those are seven things I have done, and I keep doing every day to ensure that I am a good parent to my kids, even as a single mum. Certainly, I know your case is unique. Therefore, my list is by no means exhaustive because every day, I keep learning new things and doing all I can and adjusting to do

better. However, I hope I have been able to stir your mind, inspire your heart, and challenge you in some way to do better yourself. My intention is to share my experience as a single mother of two kids with huge responsibilities in a difficult situation and how I came out victorious. I strongly hope that this book will help you if you find yourself in similar situation to bravely and successfully handle yourself. I want you to be strong and hope that things will get better as you journey through your odd moments. Parenting as a single mum is not a walk in the park. It comes with its own peculiar demands. But if you really want to be that single mum that stands out and raises kids you are truly proud of, then I would suggest you make a daily commitment to do the work.

I have mentioned consistency quite a lot in this book; it is important if you are to achieve what you desire and to make it a habit. No doubt, you have been through a lot, and I want to congratulate you on how far you have come sincerely. It can only get better as I said earlier, you don't have to be bothered about anything. If I was able to go through my hard

times and scale through with good testimonies, you have every possible opportunity to make yours a testimony for others to see and learn from too.

People fail in a difficult situation because they fail to see the hidden treasure in their predicaments. They fail because they focus their minds on the negative parts of their problems. They fail to realize that problems are one of the issues of life set to teach us understanding. Our minds control almost all of our decisions. If you fail to nurture your mind with blessings, courage, love, patience, and commitments, you will allow your odd moments to overcome you with regrets and pains.

My hard times taught me my greatest lessons on how to embrace my difficulties and walk through them like a king. I took the time to share my burdens with people who could help me, and I never regretted my decisions. I knew that I couldn't help myself because I was feeling hurts deep inside. You just have to share your feelings with your friends, your family members who have listening ears, and relationship experts with vast experience in many marriage issues to give you words of advice. This is the best time to

pick up yourself to say no to defeat. Even though the situation will look so consuming and energy-sapping, you've got to be courageous.

I will not deceive you; the journey is very rough, but then I also want to remind you not to lose sight of the big picture. Don't be distracted by society and don't listen to those internal or external voices that say you can't live your best life. Sister, I am here to tell you that you can. Even as a single mum, you can raise great kids, live a great life, and fulfill God's purpose for your life. Challenges are one of those things to charge your battery for greatness. Most of the time, when everything goes smoothly in the way we want them to go in our lives, we tend to feel relaxed and allow fate to determine almost all our destinations. This has been many people's approach towards several issues of life, and by so doing we feel constrained not to explore enough in this journey of life.

Rather than dream big, we limit ourselves. We like to think that we're already at the peak of our lives. It's a mindset of losers because they want things to always go in the way that looks rosy and easy without

giving room or being flexible to experience uncertainties. Challenges are meant to help you discover your hidden potentials and courage to do great things. If you think you can reach the top without stretching yourself, believe me, you've got it wrong. As a single mother or a single lady, it's your responsibility to fight for what you want and how you want them to show up in your life. Giving up isn't an option to consider when you're facing issues in your marriage or other aspects of life. You must keep fighting and encouraging yourself to move forward. Once you know where you're heading, life becomes easy and straight forward. Someone said, "It's not over until you win." It is only when you've overcome those hurdles and embraced your greatness that you can only rest. But even with this, I believe you won't do that. I know you won't stop at the peak; it should only be your stepping stone. You will expand more to be the best you can ever be for yourself and your loved ones. Try each day to see a better version of yourself and build your courage to dare your challenges.

So, go get it, girl!

Important Takes:

- Your children are very important and, in my opinion, they are more important than the adults in a separation situation. Treat them with the objectivity and importance that they need. Make them feel loved around you. Show them how important they are to your life and your marriage. That's when you begin to feel extraordinary and more motivated to push through the hurdles you're crossing in your marriage. This is the best time to focus on them in order for you to be happy with the life you have left. Note that they are innocent, and their emotions can be endangered by marriage issues if you fail to put them into consideration during this period. In fact, they are the joy of your marriage, and embracing them makes things easy for you.
- You must realize that they should not bear any fall-out of the separation or divorce. While it is hard, ensure you keep anger, negativity, and your initial pains away from them. You should be conscious of the fact that they are innocent,

they aren't the cause of whatsoever you're going through, and the only thing they respond to at this stage is love, care, and encouragement that will enable them to grow vibrantly. Even though it may seem tough and enduring, you don't have to shift your attention from them to make them feel you're going through issues in your marriage. The stage they are in is very delicate, and if you allow their brains to register negativities, pains, and anger, you will regret the consequences. Make them grow in love unconditionally without allowing your situation to interfere with your responsibility to show them the best love they deserve. Be courageous to face your kids' responsibilities, and you will see happiness.

- They are part of your big picture and an incredible part of your healing process! Show them love, care, attention, and ensure that they still have contact with their father or mother, despite the separation. In that way, they are unlikely to develop any anger towards you. This seems so hard to accomplish, but let me

tell you, it's part of those processes that helped me earn great credit from my kids' wellbeing. They realized I was sacrificing my inconveniences and pains to make them feel good and happy. Ordinarily, it doesn't sound too easy to accomplish, but because I was doing it to make my two daughters happy, I was able to push through. And now, I can see they love me as they would ever love what they cherish because I was able to think beyond my issues to put them first in whatever I was going through in my marriage. I was able to gain momentum in the process, and eventually, mere looking at them in good moods, I was feeling happiness right in my situation.



CONCLUSION

AS I BEGAN WITH an introductory chapter, it is only ideal that I end with a concluding chapter, no matter how brief! The whole idea of writing this book was simply to support people –not just single parents –through the sharing of my story and experiences. Hence, I do not want to make myself the center of this story, but the "single parents." As single ladies, mothers, single mothers, and even husbands and young men, we all have responsibilities no matter how small or big they may be or look to us, it is in our ability and capability to look through them, to take them up and do the right thing by working effortlessly to build up our courage and be strong to face and overcome all the challenges. Nobody is designed to be a superhero or superhuman, as people call them. Still, through determination and persistence coupled with the help of others, we will

not only get there, but rather, we will also be blessings to others. As long as we're in this world, challenges will always surface, and there will be routes and clues provided to make them substances and stepping stones for our success. Successful people aren't the ones who haven't struggled or been in one ordeal before, they are those people who have gone through many terrible issues and never gave up or lose hope despite their struggles and problems. Don't pay attention to the things other people are saying concerning your problems, never allow terrible decisions and opinions of others to decide your fate in your challenges. Be strong to face your challenges with realistic and practical tips, and you will forever be grateful that you made the right choice. You should always think like a leader who always solution and action oriented, and not someone who is always finding faults and dwelling on his or her problems. As a single mother, you should always understand that you are not always alone in your thoughts and decisions, God is right by your side, helping you to make the right decisions. When you have the full consciousness of God in your life in whatever you are

going through, He steps in and makes the journey smooth and easy for you.

You have to understand that as a single lady or mother, or father, you will need to learn how to build your inner strength in order to be able to deal with many life issues, and that dealing with your fear will make you a better person. Nobody is perfect, and no one is uniquely immune challenges, all that matters is to love yourself and be the best you can be for others. Always remember that you mean almost everything to your children, they are the second version of your identity, make sure that they aren't left out in your decision making, always carry them along to keep them safe. Even though we can only find a handful of support systems for single mothers, mothers, and young ladies in our world today, you should always be strong and be positive-minded, don't allow your trials to bring out the worst in you.

Many people don't care about what you're going through. This is because I do not believe single parents, especially single mums, get the right support and advice they need, especially in African societies. Asides the numerous problems that unplanned

independence that single parenting brings, there are the issues of societal acceptance, self-confidence issues, etc. The society hasn't really been helping in this matter, and single mums go through their pains all alone. They have no clue where they would run to, and rather they stay within their confined zone to suffer their problems alone.

However, there are many single parents who have gone on to lead and live successful lives and achieve their goals in parenthood, career, marriage –whatever their goals where. Thankfully, I can count myself amongst these sets of parents and hence, the urge to share this story. Hopefully, the story of my experience will help someone out there, to accept responsibility, forgive, build her/his confidence back, invest in parenting their children, cultivate a habit of deep spirituality and connection to God, win in business or career, and stay winning in every facet of life. Always remember that winning is possible and be ready to accept the challenges to make your winning possible. It will always be a rough experience, but prepare your mind, focus, and be grateful to God in everything you do and keep

achieving whatever you desire. Life is full of hurt and pains, and people fall victims of several circumstances, most especially single mothers and young ladies, who are naïve in many things they are going through in their lives, it's your responsibility to sit back and take full responsibility for yourself to fight for your freedom. Cultivate the habit of helping yourself by accepting whatever you have got and wherever you are and the things you are going through in your relationships, and always prepare to win and to face more challenges as life progresses. Always appreciate yourself because this makes you do more than what you can imagine. Surround yourself with friends who say positive words to you because you need people who can help you see the best in yourself regardless of what you might be going through. Never stop trying your best, you're not to give up when it seems there's no hope, you can only think of quitting when you know you're done, that's when you have lived your best life to the fullest. Believing in yourself makes it clear to you that any and every thing is possible if only you can be patient and preserve for it. When things look easy, ordinary

things happen, but when they are rough and tough, that's when the best you desire surface. You don't want to look back at your challenges and regret you gave up, or you regret you could have done better than what you did. These are regrets, and they are not meant for champions like you. Champions are victors and overcomers, to succeed they remained positive and hopeful even in the face of challenges, they never allowed the loads they carried to break them down, rather they chose the best methods and the best way to carry their cross. As single mothers, mothers, and young ladies who are yet to marry, learn the best method to carry your loads, learn the best approach to facing your challenges when you're left alone in it, this helps you to be the best champion you've been destined to be. I hope you will keep winning and never stop because winning is meant for you and for you alone.

I hope this helps. Thank you for reading and, yes, keep winning!

Lauretta Chinenye



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