



BUILDING HEALTHY AND POWERFUL FAMILIES

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About The Author



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He is currently the Chief Strategy Officer for Deloitte West Africa and also leads the largest team of cyber security consultants in Nigeria. Tope has provided assurance and advisory services to over 30% of the companies quoted on The Nigerian Stock Exchange and 85% of the commercial banks in Nigeria. He has served 75% of the GSM companies in Nigeria, several multinational manufacturing and oil & gas companies as well as government institutions. He has worked in Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, South Africa and in the UK and has also serviced clients in 16 countries.

Tope is currently the President of ISACA Lagos Nigeria, the largest association of IT governance, IT risk and cyber security professionals in Nigeria. He is also the co-champion of the Science and Technology Policy Commission of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG). Tope has published several technical papers in the dailies and also delivered keynote addresses in 6 countries.

Tope was previously the Talent Leader for Deloitte Nigeria. In this role, he led the Talent & HR team to establish and sustain world-class processes, leading to the firm winning the Best Company to Work For in Nigeria 2015 – an award by Great Place to Work Nigeria. He has also received several recognitions, one of such was the Information Management Personality (December 2012) by RIMA (Records & Information Management Foundation of Africa).

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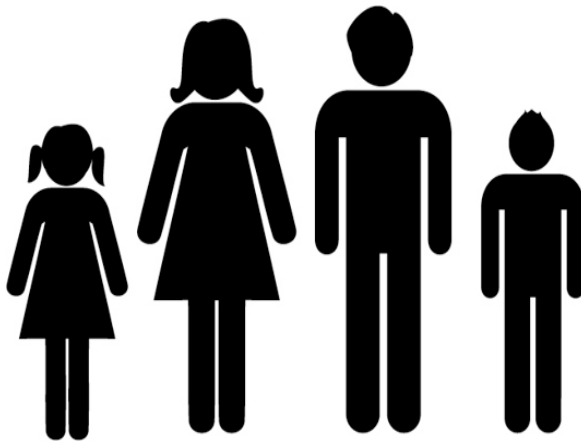
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Part One

When Does Family Ever Come First?



A very experienced nurse once shared her observation that one of the two most important things that many patients on their death bed are usually concerned about is family. This is so because at such a critical time when one has only a brief moment to remain in this world, one cannot afford to spend even a second worrying about mundane things. They want to see or touch most of their family members one last time and for as long as they can. They want to be surrounded by their own relatives, wishing they could buy a little more time. They would forgive long-held grudges in an instant, with tears flowing freely and an outburst of emotion. All of a sudden, they realise that they should have spent more time with family when they could. Family now comes first on their death bed. Unfortunately, it would be the last time!

A very busy man was once asked what his motivation for hard work was. He responded by saying that he needed to provide for his family. Because of that he was heavily consumed with work, hardly ever having time for the same family he was providing for.

From God's perspective, a thriving ministry or career with a weak family is absolute nonsense.

Nothing can replace your family. It comes before whatever success you may hope to achieve. It is good to have a lot on your monthly planner and daily to-do list, but do you also have plans for your family on them? Do you have these things on your schedule: A weekend outing, taking your wife to the swimming pool, a bed-time story for your kids, calling on Grandma, your daughter's birthday, family Bible study, dinner-for-all, family games, your son's homework, and so on? Is your home like a playground or just an enclosure?

From God's perspective, a thriving ministry or career with a weak family is absolute nonsense. I Timothy 5:8 (GNT) gives us a peek into the significance of families to God – “But if any do not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever.” Yes! The family unit is very important to God, and we have a primary responsibility to build healthy and powerful homes. It is apparent that God strategically placed each believer in a family that will mold and shape them to help achieve His purposes. Ironically, our generation has given attention to every other thing but the family unit. Today, many are trying to “make it” at the expense of making their families.

When should family really come first? On the death bed or every day?

Part Two

Your Family As a BRAND



Any venture that will go far and have a lasting success must have a vision. A vision guides every aspect of the organisation, and it creates a certain culture that permeates every detail of the organisation in all ramifications for which the brand is known. Whether it is a Fortune 500 company or a ministry with a global impact or a thriving economy, having a vision is at the centre of their progress.

“Mr. & Mrs. Daniels O.” (You can put your family name here instead.) What do you now have? Say it again. What does it sound like? Does it sound like a company? Yes, of two people...for a real family business. One issue many homes face is that they don't have a goal/vision for their families. We do for our work, company, ministry, career, but not for family. How sad? This may sound absurd, but it's the truth. What is the vision statement for your family? Set the vision and direction for the family. This vision should align well with God's plan and purpose for your family as revealed in His Word.

Your family was made by God and for God, and until you understand that, your marriage will never make sense.

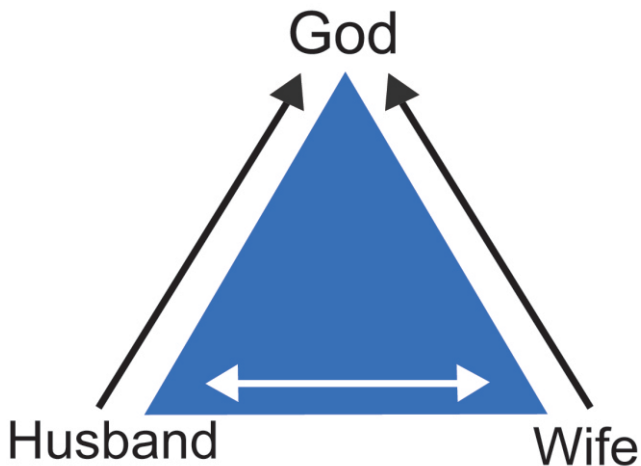
Why do people start a family, anyway? Is it because they are approaching 30 or the hormones are flowing or they need someone to delegate the duties of a cook and laundry to? Or they have found a vision to pursue and need a companion to help fulfill that purpose? After creation, God gave the first man the task of tending the garden, to have mastery over life, and to populate the earth. The first woman was to help him realise this vision. Today, the vision of the Christian couple is the ministry and to have a significant impact in life together. God gave man a helper—the woman—because there is a vision to be realised by the couple—the brand. O man, but how can she help you when you have set no vision—having nowhere to go? And O woman, have you become the centre of the universe instead of understanding your role as a vision-supporter?

We need to set high standards and stop taking on worldly standards. Your family was made by God and for God, and until you understand that, your marriage will never make sense. Your family vision should be aligned with God's purpose for your existence. Don't let your marriage be anchored on romantic feelings, because after a while, the sun will rise over your marriage and reality will set in; as everything normalizes, feelings settle. What will sustain and keep the union going will be the vision that has been clearly stated and written for each party to see, understand and run with.

If you do not yet have a vision statement for your family, make sure you do so!

Part Three

Lesson From The Marriage Triangle



Imagine you and your spouse were each standing on the two ends of the base of a triangle, and you started climbing up to the tip of the triangle from your different points. As you climb higher to the tip of the triangle, you would find that something else is happening—you are unwittingly getting closer to each other to the point where you can both reach out to touch each other. What you noticed would be that the higher you climb up the triangle, the distance between each of you decreases.

The tip of that triangle is Christ! And the two of you are at a certain distance apart from each other right now. What is the proximity between the two of you today? When the two of you are each aiming for the tip of the triangle—Christ—your marriage can only get better because you are becoming a better Christian; you are each becoming more and more like Christ. Hallelujah! Two “Christs” under one roof!

**You are first of all a Christian before you are somebody's
wife or husband**

Someone taught me the story of the marriage triangle while I was a teenager and it has really been an inspiration to me. I once told my wife before we got married that we ought not to quarrel as a family. The idea first came when I asked myself what kind of union we would have if two “Christs” were living together. The mutual and unconditional love, the high level of tolerance, the understanding, the cooperation, the singleness of mind and purpose, and every good thing. The fruit of the Spirit – Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control would be in surplus.

Here's the thing: You are first of all a Christian before you are somebody's wife or husband. In fact, in heaven where you are going, you don't have a marital status. Many of us are praying for and desiring the fruit of the Spirit in our home, but our roots are being sapped by the world. Many are neglecting quality Bible study, prayer, attending good fellowship and living the Word and are struggling to display the Christian virtues they see in others. We are running after the quick fixes psychologists and marriage counselors offer on the Internet, but things don't seem to work because our roots are not receiving nutrition from the right place. Trees don't struggle to get fruits on themselves; they just get their roots to the ground for proper nourishment. It is fellowship with Christ that ensures we get our nourishment from the Spirit. No wonder He says, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)”

The most potent way to transform any family is for the couples to daily become like Christ. Start aiming for that today, and in a short time your progress will be very visible.

Part Four

Love and Submission in the Family - Not A Transaction



Unless you went for window shopping, whenever you walked into a shopping mall, you definitely had things to buy. As you walked along the aisle, putting things into your cart, you were well aware you had cash in your wallet or purse, or you had your credit or debit card with you. The cashier handled your payment and issued you a receipt. Now everybody was happy. They had your money, and you had their goods. Transaction completed.

The above scenario is a familiar one, and somehow, we have come to see life mostly as a transaction—“give and take” or “take and give” and that attitude has been brought into marriages since two parties are also involved. The Apostle Paul gave a set of instructions for Christian households regarding relationships in Ephesians 5:21–33. Two phrases that readily come to mind are: “Wives, submit to your husbands…” and “Husbands, love your wives…” Many people have misconstrued these two injunctions to be a deed of partnership and have reduced marital relationship to a mere transaction.

The Husband is the Chief Loving Officer (CLO) and the wife, the Chief Submission Officer (CSO) in terms of overall responsibility, but each one has “love” and “submission” in their job descriptions

So you hear men say, “I cannot continue loving this woman if she doesn’t submit to me,” and women, “I will submit to my husband if and only if he proves to be loving.” This is not marriage; at best, it is a transaction – “Pay Before Service!” Where marriage is seen this way, the problem becomes that of who gives first, and this further complicates things. Paul started his discourse on marriage by saying in verse 21, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” and the Bible also commands us almost everywhere to love one another. You see? The Husband is the Chief Loving Officer (CLO) and the wife, the Chief Submission Officer (CSO) in terms of overall responsibility, but each one has “love” and “submission” in their job descriptions because they are first Christians before they are couples. For example, Titus 2:4 says, “…Teach the young women…to love their husbands…”

The principle of love and submission is to be done by both husbands and wives. They should both be loving and submitting. I cannot stress the importance of loving each other enough. There are also times when a wife can have a superior idea or make inputs in grey areas that the husband didn’t take note of from the outset.

Love each other. One of the most striking things about God’s kind of love is that you can teach yourself to operate in it. Carnal love is completely motivated by the emotions or senses, but God’s kind of love comes from the heart, and although feelings are definitely affected, they don’t motivate or deter God’s kind of love. God’s kind of love is a choice you make on the basis of what God said, and then act on it in faith until it becomes a reality in your spirit, soul and body.

Make a commitment today to always be proactive in putting love and submission on the table in your family, and you will experience a home after God’s heart.

Part Five

Managing Your Own Government



God willing, you may become a president of your country or the CEO of a thriving company or have a ministry with a global impact, and that comes with a lot of responsibilities. The expectations are enormous. Obviously, not everybody reading this will venture into politics or try their hands at a start-up or be led into full-time ministry. But just in case you think you have a better idea on how to run your country or manage the company you work for or transform the ministry God has placed you in and wished you were in charge of things, look no further. If you have a family, you already have where to start from. You already have your own government.

The family is the smallest unit of society, and the Christian family is a microcosm of the church. It deserves no less attention and management than any other sphere of influence that God has called you into. Paul asked a rhetoric question in 1 Timothy 3:5: “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” It’s striking that he uses the word, “manage,” because the family needs to be managed much like any other organisation—the church, a company, or a country.

You cannot get too spiritual to the extent that you do not pay attention to your spouse’s physical and emotional needs. Satisfy each other

The family is the zone where all the elements of man (that is, the spirit, soul and body) get sufficient attention. Make provision for the spirit and soul of every member of the family, without neglecting the body of everyone. Take care of yourself and your spouse. You are both emotional beings. You cannot get too spiritual to the extent that you do not pay attention to your spouse’s physical and emotional needs. Satisfy each other. Pay attention to your children, especially before their teenage stage. Make the effort to instill godly characters in them while they are still very young. Eat together as a family. Have close family fellowships where you can break bread together. In such gatherings, everyone can discuss a topic, and grow together.

Part Six

The Best Legacy For Your Children



You have heard many people say that the best legacy to give your children is education. That is wrong and not biblical

You have heard many people say that the best legacy to give your children is education. That is wrong and not biblical. The best gift you can ever give to your children is Christ. That is the best legacy you can leave your kids with. To give them Christ, they need your attention. With the right values, your children will fulfill their purpose in life.

We should stop raising devilish technocrats in our homes. When kids are young, say before teenage age, they crave our attention, and if we don't give it to them, we will be the ones craving theirs when they become teenagers or older. When you come back from work and the kids want to play with you and tell you stories of all the events that happened during the day, that's an opportunity to shape their mindsets and habits. Grab it! But that's when we are tired from the day's work. We shut them down and play some cartoons for them. They are going to learn what is right and wrong from the TV and Internet if we are not there to train them.

You are the first role model to your kids. They learn from how you live your life. People learn about things by hearing about them, but they learn how to do things by watching people do them. Model Christ in front of your kids daily because they pick more from your actions than your words. It is the habits they pick up from you today that will govern their lives tomorrow. It appears our lifestyle today is tailored to only making a living. The devil has lied to many that as long as you give education, that's okay. The devil is the god of this world and can easily penetrate the educational system. In fact, in some lands, he has successfully removed the "church" from schools. There is something more important than education. Teach your kids the Word, and they will excel anywhere they find themselves.

Watch the growth and progress of your children. Ask them questions about their views on Bible truths or how they would face different types of challenges or situations, and use that as an opportunity to teach them what you have learned from the Word. You can use role-playing also. This activity will help you decipher their motivation and help you mould them.

I like the Chinese proverb that says – "the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." It doesn't matter how long you have been missing the point, start giving your children the best legacy today!

Part Seven

Managing Diversities In The Home



If you ask a single lady what kind of man she wants in her life, you would know in an instant that she's in some kind of dream land if her checklist looks something like this: "Very Tall. Dark. Handsome. Six packs. Rich. Lives in Banana Island. Drives a Porsche. Very caring. Does not complain. Very Tolerant. Virgin. Amen." Where do you hope to find a guy like that? Such guys are even scarce in the Bible. Most people know this list is funny and unrealistic. But it is surprising that we are almost like that when it comes to our expectations from our spouses in many regards. We have this self-made idea of what our ideal spouse should be like and we try to work it inside them. If we ever achieve anything from this expectation, it is that we have succeeded in chasing away peace from the home.

One very bedrock your family needs in order to fulfill purpose is peace in the home. For in the long run, you will not amount to much if there is always trouble in the home. Peace is very important and that's why the devil is trying to take it away, because he knows that the lack of peace makes you vulnerable. Proverbs 21:9 says, "Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife." You may say that's not too fair for women. Now for men: "Better to live in prison than share the house with an insensitive husband."

A major cause of issues in a marriage is the clash of personal preferences. Each marriage partner has his or her idiosyncrasies which may have been formed by different background, culture, exposure, fantasies etc. and these give varying worldviews. We are wired differently and are now united in the bond of marriage. The worst is, the world is trying to define to us what love is or how love should be expressed. A peck in the morning. Joint account. Lunch box for your husband. Rush to the car to welcome him from work. Dinner out every other week end. And so on. So where these things are not done, love may be waning. No! As nice as these activities appear, they are really our personal preferences, not scriptural references.

If you find things you want adjusted in your spouse, communicate to them and give them several years to adjust, because, after all, they probably have been like that for many years

Many of us get into marriage with a long list of "nice things to have," and they are only found in the mind, most times, not in reality. If you find things you want adjusted in your spouse, communicate to them and give them several years to adjust, because, after all, they probably have been like that for many years. We can be diverse in terms of our background and personal traits, but we can stand united. Remember, the husband and the wife is one. Let everybody be who God has wired them to be. Let peace and unity reign. So, as a rule of thumb, whenever you face any clash of opinion in your marriage, take time out to ask yourself: "is this my personal preference or is there is a scriptural reference to this situation?" You will find yourself beginning to calm down and it then becomes easier to become flexible about things. Your spouse is not your competition. Win-win!

Part Eight

Lesson From The Most Memorable Time In Our Marriage



In February 2014, my wife and I attended an event tagged Couples Xcape, organized by High Flyers International Ministry. Couples Xcape is a program initiated by my friends (the Samuels) to help other couples sustain the fire of their love and strengthen their relationship in marriage. I must confess that the only reason I decided to attend the Couples Xcape was because the organisers are my friends; little did I know that the event would turn out to be very revealing and memorable.

We were requested to do some exercises during the event. Two notebooks were handed to each couple, and we were to document our responses to some questions, and thereafter, exchange notes with our spouse. One of the questions asked was –describe the most memorable thing that your spouse has ever done to you in your marriage? As I tried to figure out my answer, I realized I was more curious to know what my wife’s response would be. In fact, I started to mentally recall all the wonderful treats I felt I had given my wife right from our honeymoon, and I could barely wait to finally hear which of these treats she would choose as the most memorable. “Time up!”

My wife and I exchanged notes, and I was shocked to read her response. According to her, the most memorable thing I had done was regularly wash her underwear when she had just given birth to our second child. She was very touched because she knew I didn’t fancy doing laundry, but, during that period, I ignored my preference to help relieve her so she could rest and recover. I was doing for her what I rarely did for myself.

My friends, I was so disappointed to hear this. I thought about all the expensive treats I had given her, including times I had spent some foreign currency; I remembered all the times she had exclaimed joyfully at my gestures, and couldn’t figure out why washing undies ranked tops. But as I pondered on this, I Peter 3:7 (NLT) came to mind – “In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life.” It dawned on me that my love was ‘made perfect’ in her time of weakness. The treats were great, but my understanding when she was weak had greater impact.

Let’s stop waiting for the big bang to build a healthy and powerful family

This experience has made me begin to pay more attention to the many little things which money cannot buy that I can use to make my marriage and family the way God wants it. I also thought about how (without any penny) we are all capable of showing the love of Christ to our families and also the weak and needy in the community, thereby giving us a “memorable” platform to reach them with the gospel while glorifying our father in heaven.

Let’s stop waiting for the big bang to build a healthy and powerful family. Be willing to make a difference in your home with whatever talents, gifts, resources and abilities you have today.

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