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THE FOUNDATION FOR A LASTING MARRIAGE

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“Whoever gives one a child [to marry] has done the ultimate in conferring favours.”

— a Yoruba Proverb

In my engagements with Christian young adults around the world, I am convinced that we now have a generation of Christian youth who are super-thrilled with the *idea* of being in a relationship (hopefully with their godly, if not God-ordained, partner) but who are clueless about the fundamentals of marriage. Romantic comedies from Hollywood, Nollywood, Bollywood, and whatever other ‘Ollywood’ out there have given us the illusion that marriages are the culmination of a beautiful love story where two people fall in love (probably at first sight) and overcome all odds until they get married for a happily-ever-after life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Marriage is essentially two imperfect people coming together to do some hard work. Genesis 2:18-25 highlights the fact that God gives us all life assignments and brings alongside us a ‘Suitable Help.’ As such, it is not enough to know ‘Who’ to marry, but also to know ‘Why’ — to know what assignment you two are destined to accomplish together. In this post, I will dwell on one foundational perspective regarding the essence of marriage based on Genesis 2:25. It says:


*“And they were both **naked**, the man and his wife, and were **not ashamed**.”* (emphasis mine)

I do not intend to do a theological exposition on “naked and not ashamed” here. However, I must point out that in the very next chapter, Genesis 3, we see that the very first result of the fall was that they became aware of their *nakedness* and sought to hide.

*“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. **And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.**”* (Genesis 3:6-7 KJV, emphasis mine)

Did you see that? The same duo that had been naked and unashamed before are now embarrassed by their *nakedness*. The perfect ones are now imperfect, the fearless are now fearful, and the guiltless are now guilty. The unashamedness of their nakedness was gone and in its place came the need to hide — or be clothed. The couple opted for the former, but God graciously provided them with the latter. (This became one of the earliest references to the doctrine of atonement which runs all the way through scripture.)

Without stretching the association of physical nakedness and shame to be a universal reality as opposed to a cultural one, this Genesis 3 narrative seems to reveal a connection between a deeper-than-physical nakedness and shame. In other words, as humans, we do not go around baring our soul or revealing our innermost secrets to just anybody. Yet, there is an innate desire in each of us to, once again, be naked and unashamed — to bare it all before another what we would normally hide from others, without the fear of rejection. God satisfies that yearning in us both in His Presence, and in the context of an intimate relationship with a fellow human being, supremely



expressed in the institution called ‘Marriage.’

In the presence of God, anyone can be vulnerable knowing fully well that God sees every single one of us. He knows us in our worst state as well as our best state. He knows what we are capable of doing, both good and bad. He sees our tomorrows and every second of our past. He knows us more than we know ourselves. Yet, He loves us! He accepts us. He covers us.

Marriage is supposed to run on that same template. To be married to someone is to be invited to *know* the person — in every possible sense of the word. The man keeps knowing the woman and the woman keeps knowing the man — *intimately*. Yet, *in spite of* all that they know about each other, they still choose to love and accept each other. That’s the foundation for a marriage that will last.

The more you know yourselves, the more you will see what you would have loved for the other person to be doing that (s)he is not doing. The more you will desire a certain dimension of love communication that you expect the other party to express his or her love by, but they just seem not to get it. However, in spite of all that, are you still ready to go the long haul? That’s marriage!

In my experience with my wife of five years, we embraced this understanding that both of us can be vulnerable with one another as we progressively get to know each other intimately. The more we both came to terms with our vulnerabilities and with the fact that we could still do life together in spite of those (sometimes painful) eccentricities, we found out that each of us is (miraculously) becoming better suited for the other! For example, I cannot explain how — according to my wife’s testimony — I have become better than her at cooking certain dishes, whereas I had zero cooking skills when we got married. I certainly know, however, that being able to share the burden of cooking with her will delight her — and her acceptance of me in spite of my zero cooking skills motivated my improvement in that regard.

Unfortunately, the prevalent premarital dating culture in our generation prepares intending couples for the exact opposite of this. Two people that are dating are constantly doing their best to make their best impression each time they go on a date (and making a good impression is always never consistent with who we truly are). They keep going out together but intentionally *hiding* from one another. Worse still, many such ‘date-mates’ end up getting married and the hide-and-seek game continues. Rather than their marriage becoming a

naked-and-not-ashamed zone, they discover with time that they hardly know each other. Before you know it, they start talking about divorce. Don’t add to that statistic.

The Yorubas will say “*Ìyàwó tí a gbé lójú ijó, onílù ni yó bàá lọ*” — in other words, ‘the wife you met at a dance will eventually elope with the musician at the party.’ Of course, it is also used to speak of men – for instance, ‘a man you meet at a party will leave you at a party as well.’ Thus, ‘people cannot shed their innate habits.’ However, the comparative deduction of the analogy is striking. How you ‘find’ your spouse says a lot about what your marriage will look like. As a young man looking forward to marriage, don’t be deceived by how a lady can dance, carve her eyebrows, or paint her face and lips in fifty shades of red. Grow past sizing up ladies by the physical indices of shapes, shades, and shakes. Likewise, as a young woman with marriage in view, understand that there is more to a tall, dark, and handsome young man than meets the eye. We all have some foibles and flaws we’d rather hide. Can we be naked and unashamed with one another? Let God guide you in this regard.

Of course, all of this is not to say that both of you should not strive to make one another happy. This is not to say that each of you can enter into a relationship and remain the way you have always been since the other person is supposed to accept you the way you are. However, making those necessary behavioural or habitual changes are secondary. The primary thing is to embrace this understanding that you two will continually see reasons why it will be justifiable for either party to call it quits, but having a marriage mindset is to go beyond pressing that ‘escape’ key and going further to embrace the choice to love your partner in spite of what you keep learning and discovering about them. May God help us.



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