***These are 100 lessons I have learned since leaving home at 17, and the stories behind them***

***Introduction***

In the Summer of 2019, we took our first trip as a family to South America to the country of Ecuador. That year, our oldest son, Ike, was on a Spanish emersion experience at the Nazarene Theological Seminary of South America in Quito; and our youngest son, Ingam, had just graduated from high school and was on his way to Olivet Nazarene University near Chicago. While in Quito, I started thinking about the fact that both boys will be in school and away from home. As I thought about all this, it became apparent that I had not given my boys everything that I had learned from the time I left home as a 17-year-old. The more I thought about it, it occurred to me that I could put down some ideas on paper to give to them. At first, I thought I would put down about 10 lessons, but I ended up with 100 lessons. I laminated them and gave them to each guy. It was later that I was urged by my wife, Rachel and other family members and friends to add the stories behind each of the lessons and publish them. What you find in the following pages is the list of the lessons with the stories behind each lesson. These are my personal stories, but I hope you can glean something from my experiences to help you in your own life’s journey.

Respectfully, Dr. Acha Goris, June 8, 2022.

Dedication

I dedicate this little book to the original audience for whom these lessons were intended: Ikanwie Acha (Ike) and Ingamnwie Acha (Ingam). You both are the best boys a father could ever want in the entire world.

1. *There are lots of good people out there but lots of bad people as well. So, choose your friends wisely.*

We all long for connection and good friends provide a very good way to connect with others. Friends can make or mar your life because they have the power to influence you in ways you may not even notice. Remember the saying, “show me your friend and I will tell you who you are.” If you don’t want to be like somebody, don’t make them your friend because before you know it, you will start to be and act just like them (saying and doing things you never imagined you would do). In my teens I listened to an older guy that I thought was my friend only to find out later that his advice would have led me down the path of perdition. Only Christ delivered me from going down that road. I might not be here doing what I am doing now if I had gone down that road that my “friend” appeared to launch me on.

1. *Never assume that someone in authority over you is harboring bad/evil thoughts towards you - the devil thrives in creating imaginary conflict between people. Learn to dwell on the good until someone gives you reason to think otherwise.*

While it is important and safe to be discerning and intuitive in trusting your hunches in general, be careful about misinterpreting others’ motives. Learn to interpret behavior and not motives. Sometimes it is important to directly ask someone about their motives instead of assuming that you know their motives. In relationships, especially work relationships, there’s a lot of room for misunderstanding but it greatly reduces when you refuse to assume evil/bad motives. I worked at an organization one time, and for some reason I started feeling that the leader might be harboring some bad feelings towards me. I did not have any proof, but for many days I felt that I was being judged. Finally, I decided to reject the thoughts since I did not see any reason the leader would have ill will towards me. To my surprise, I went to visit and never mentioned anything about how I had been feeling. Our relationship was as good as ever and there was no hint of a rupture. That day I learned that my mind is capable of fooling me into destroying otherwise good relationships.

1. *Besides education, it is important to learn skills. You will never be stranded in life if you have a skill or skills.*

I have learned to do things with my hands, and this has been greatly helpful to me at various instances. Learning how to be an upholsterer has been a blessing to me in many ways. I had to rely on it for the first two years of coming to the US when I could not use my education. I used it while I was in Nigeria to finish school. I used it when I was in Chad to try to raise money to get back to Nigeria to go to school. I still believe that education is the fastest route to the top. However, it is important to learn and master a marketable skill outside of your field of study. This can give you an outlet and another avenue to make a living if things do not pan out with your chosen field of study. Sometimes you could step away from your field of study and come back after a season.

1. *Make friends with people you can influence but also make friends with people who are smarter and wiser than you and let them influence you.*

Over the years, I have had friends that were smarter than me and I enjoyed sitting down and listening to them share their wisdom with me. Many times, when I have a bright idea, I usually would share with one of these people and their questions would usually be something I probably haven’t thought about. I have also had people that would depend on me to help them in various ways. I have learned from both groups. You need two kinds of friends, those who look up to you and those you look up to. A good balance in this regard will make you a good friend indeed. If you are a good learner, you will be able to help others learn. Good students become good teachers; good supervisees become good supervisors etc.

1. *Respect everyone regardless of their status. Someone who is down today may be up tomorrow.*

When I was in college, one of my fellow students who came to school after me was able to graduate and to go ahead to get a graduate degree and come back to teach at the school. I had dropped out due to circumstances. When I returned to complete my degree, I had to take a class that he was teaching. It felt very different because once upon a time, I was ahead of him in school. When I returned to school, I never looked back. I went on to get my doctorate before he decided to go back to get his doctorate. You see, we went back and forth in our educational pursuits proving the point that “no condition is permanent.” If you are up today, do not look down on those who are down, because that might be you tomorrow. Throughout your lifetime, you are going to see this play out so many times with so many people. This calls for total and unconditional respect for everyone. You never know who that person way down there will be tomorrow – plus he/she is created in the image of God and deserves your respect.

1. *Do not break bridges behind you; you might need them later.*

I remember leaving one employment for a new opportunity. Before leaving, the Human Services department wanted to interview me to have my take about the organization. I had worked there for a few years. We were programed to have a 15-minute conversation and we ended up talking for over an hour. What the HR director told me afterwards was that it was refreshing that we had a very positive ending because her experience was that many of those who had left had so much anger and hate and could not give any feedback. She said those meetings only lasted five minutes or less. You are going to have opportunities in life to start and end relationships, either professionally or personally. There are certain relationships that you need to cut off and throw the keys away – especially when someone is trying to take advantage of you. However, with this exception, you need to not make unnecessary enemies. If you quit a job, there is no need to make enmity with the former employer. Your paths may cross again on the journey of life, and you don’t want your past bad attitude to come back and hurt you.

1. *Never play the dating game of dating more than one person at a time. Maintain strong boundaries with a friend who is dating someone else.*

When I was in my early 20s, I went to prayer meeting one night and we were asked by the prayer leader to pair up and share prayer requests and pray for each other. I happened to be paired with one of the older ladies in the church. She talked the whole time and we never got to pray. She informed me that she had a daughter that had some difficulties regarding marriage because of the misbehavior of some brothers in the church. Then she told me the story of this well-known brother in church who approached this girl and asked for her hand in marriage. The girl responded with the traditional, “let me pray about it and get back to you.” Unbeknownst to her, he repeated the same process with several other girls in the church. Needless to say, she and all the other girls were heartbroken and disappointed. She said that when you do that you create confusion, hurt people, and bring disrepute to the name of Christ. She said that when you ask a girl’s hand in marriage and she tells you she is going to pray, wait until you hear from her and come to conclusion before any move towards someone else. I really took it to heart because the brother in question was one of the respected leaders in the church. I took a vow that day not to repeat such behavior when it came to choosing a wife.

Treat with respect every person who shows interest in you until he/she gives you reason to cut them off. When you have more than one person interested in you, take your time to sort it out prayerfully and perhaps talk to your parent(s) or a trusted adult/friend who can help you sort things out. Don’t decide under duress – you are looking for a life-partner, so diligence is key. Once you make up your mind, stick with that person and exclude others till you have a reason to move on. If you have a friend who is dating someone else, make sure the boundaries between you are very strong. Do not put yourself in compromising situations in such cases. If the other person loses their head, do not lose yours – he/she will respect you for it.

1. *True love is when you are both drawn to each other. If either of you is working too hard and the other is not, then don’t do it.*

When I was 20, I had a girl soundly reject my interest as I was exploring a relationship that would lead to marriage with her. She thought I was not her type and she told me. It really hurt because I thought I was good enough for her, but she didn’t think that of me at all. To put it mildly, I felt so humiliated and disrespected. Fast forward to a few months later, there was a sister in church who thought I was sort of cute. She really tried to get my attention, but I was not having any of it. She was nice and humble, but I could not see a future with her. I was not openly disrespectful but cannot tell how she felt. The above scenarios have happened to me more than once afterwards and the experiences taught me to be balanced in seeking true love which is that both parties are pursuing each other. Therefore, my advice is that you should avoid one-sided love relationships. If you want to marry him/her because you feel sorry for him/her, you will end up resenting him/her. On the other hand, if he/she marries you because he/she feels sorry for you, he/she will equally end up resenting you. So, be sure you are both invested and working for a good marital relationship. In other words, make sure you are both facing in the same direction.

1. *Always wash while you cook. Don’t wait to the end. It will get overwhelming.*

When I was in my teens, I served as a house help for two families. I lived with one of the families, which meant that my job was 24/7. One of the best lessons I learned during this time in my life was that cooking time was also cleaning time. It was amazing that while cooking in the kitchen, we did not pile up dirty items to be washed later. Any utensil used was quickly washed and put in the clean dish bin. In that way when the cooking was done, the cleaning was automatically done as well. It was often common to hear someone say, “I am done cooking,” and then madame would come into the kitchen and pay no attention to the meal but the state of the kitchen. If the kitchen were in bad shape, she would often say, ‘go back and complete the cooking.’ In other words, a dirty kitchen meant that the cooking wasn’t complete. So, learn to clean as you go; you will be surprised how second nature it would be. Learn good cleaning habits when cooking, so that when you are done cooking, the kitchen should also be shining and smelling as good as the food you just cooked.

1. *If you go to the kitchen and don’t see a clean dish to use, take your time and wash one to use*

I think that my upbringing and the experience of tying cooking to cleaning has made me a certain way. The piling up of dirty dishes in the kitchen has made me more uncomfortable with clutter in kitchen than in any other area of the of the house. As keeping the kitchen clean is a never-ending chore, make it a habit to always clean when you are there. Sometimes you may need to clean and use a plate or bowl. The sink area needs to be decongested so many times a day to keep the kitchen looking and smelling good.

1. *Don’t date people that think they are better than you or who are too popular.*

I related the story above about the girl who soundly rejected my interest in her. It was okay to say “no” to dating me. What hurt so much was the Statement that she made that I was not her type. How I interpreted it was that I was somehow deficient, not good enough or even unlovable. Finding a life-long marriage partner is going to be like finding a diamond in the forest, so you want to take your time. If someone thinks they are better than you, that means that their eyes/heart are probably somewhere else. Don’t waste your time trying to make them look at you. If that girl/guy is meant to be yours, cutting him/her off quickly will cause him to sit up and start behaving. If not, God has someone better for you.

1. *Never date two guys/girls at the same time. Make sure one relationship is COMPLETELY over before you start another one.*

On number seven, I related the story about the older sister in church who advised me to not play the dating game of trying to date more than one girl at the same time. This came very handy when I met my wife-to-be, Rachel. It happened that there was a sister I had been talking to back in my native Southern Cameroons. When we talked a few months earlier, she had promised to pray and let me know her decision. I waited and waited, and she continued to delay her decision. When Rachel came into my life, I was not open to a romantic relationship because that other relationship was still on. So, when I related with Rachel, it was completely platonic. Even as our relationship grew, I never showed any interest in fostering a romantic relationship. In my mind, I was simply not available. I was seeing our relationship as one that provided encouragement to each other. I knew she was lonely at the time, and I wanted to make her feel included in everything we did. Being the children’s pastor and youth leader, I assumed it was my responsibility to help her in that capacity. I did not have a personal agenda. Things started to change when we were practicing a love song to sing at the wedding of one of the staff members at the college. I tried to keep things professional between us, but it seemed there was no denying that something was going on inside of me for this girl. Despite my feelings, I still refused to open that door because I was waiting for the situation with the other sister to be completely ended. When she finally wrote me a letter almost five months later, I was really beginning to ask why she was keeping me in suspense after several letters (This was in 1990 before email or cellphones). I was expecting her to prove that what was going on between Rachel and me was truly platonic. Secretly, I must say that I was wishing she would maintain the “we are just friends” line she had often repeated to me. Honestly, I wanted God’s will and marriage with Rachel was a long shot anyway. The letter finally came, and I opened it without delay to find what I believed would be God’s will to help me either shut the door to what was brewing in front of me or explore it further. In the letter, she maintained her line and said she had prayed and believed that we should continue as friends. I breathed a sigh of relief for the new adventure that awaited me. But I was also not oblivious that I could be completely misunderstanding all that was happening between Rachel and me. I had to find out. So, I drafted a reply quickly and sent it essentially saying that I accepted her decision and respected it, thus putting a complete end to that relationship. From that day on, I was now free to explore the possibility of this new relationship that seemed to be happening in front of me. Explore I did, and the rest, we know, is history.

What I learned from this experience is that you cannot serve two masters when it comes to dating. If you try, you will be disloyal to both. You don’t have enough space in your heart for two people at the same time. If you do, it will confuse you and you might miss your true love. So, decide to end one relationship properly and completely before starting another one. If you are not sure how to proceed, be patient until you are sure.

1. *After you find your true love, close, and lock the door and throw the key away - all others are like trees, elephants, or giraffes etc.*

I don’t really remember where I was, but I do remember that someone preached on the passage in Genesis chapter 2, where Adam named all the animals but there was none that could meet his own needs for companionship until the arrival of Eve. I left service that day and decided that that concept of commitment to the exclusion all others was going to be my guiding principle in marriage. By God’s grace, I still hold that in my world; there is only one woman. All the others are like the different animals that Adam named. Having that mindset helps me to keep my focus on the one woman that God has given me. When you make a choice to love one person in a marital relationship, you are equally making a choice against ALL others. So, lock your heart and take yourself off the market in your thoughts, words, and actions. Do not give room for someone to doubt that you are off the market or for someone to think that you may be available.

1. *Never marry someone whose parents are in opposition. If you believe it is God’s will, wait patiently and respectfully win them over, however long it takes.*

One of my spiritual mentors (Zacharias Fomum) first introduced me to this concept many years ago. When I decided to pursue a romantic relationship with Rachel Maxey, I knew that it was going to be an uphill task. I just didn’t know the extent of the challenge it was going to be. Up to that point, I had such a good relationship with both of her parents that I did not envision such a level of opposition, but I was ready for the challenge. I grew up hearing the story of my aunt Martha’s husband (Uncle Phillip) having difficulty to get my grandpa’s consent to marry her. Grandma told me many stories of Grandpa sneaking out the back door when Philip was coming to plead one more time – this happened several times, but he persisted. Grandma said Phillip was patient and till his passing, he was Grandpa’s favorite son in-law. Grandpa had several daughters among his 28 children. It took us four to five years to be given the green light by Rachel’s parents to get married. We first met in 1990 and finally got married in 1997 (seven years, like Rachel in the Bible). Our patience to wait for them to bless our union was something I was determined to never miss. Looking at our relationship today, there is no doubt that patience paid off big time. This experience confirmed my belief that parents’ blessings are important for your relationship. Marriage is serious business, and you need all the help you can to start well. His/her parents can give you a lot of insight into how to deal with your spouse. Your would-be mother-in-law/father-in-law may be the closest person to him/her, so do your best to honor her/him because there are secrets about your spouse only known to them. If you disrespect them, you will miss out on all these family secrets that will help you connect well with your spouse.

1. *Never make enmity with your in-laws - don’t cut the bridge to them; you will always need them. Remember your wife/husband will always be part of them. You are indebted to them for life – so consider them as your family.*

During the long years of waiting for my would-be in-laws to give me consent to marry their daughter I was tempted to take matters into my own hands or even disrespect them. However, I couldn’t go down that road because I kept reminding myself of the story of my aunt Martha and uncle Phillip. Consequently, instead of looking at the opposition as anything else, I chose to look at it as parents trying to protect and care for their daughter. Rachel had and still has a very strong relationship with her father (which is something I never had and desired deeply). I didn’t want her to ever lose the special bond; I wanted to be a part of it. Looking back over the years, I can truly say that we have grown to have such a good relationship with her parents for the most part. This experience only solidifies my belief that marriage is a family affair. You can never replace his/her family regardless of how good you are. Never ever try to take his/her mom’s/dad’s place in his/her life. Rather encourage your spouse to honor them. If your spouse honors them, they will also learn how to honor you. You can have boundaries without creating enmity with your in-laws. Care genuinely so that when you do set boundaries, people can respect them. But if you create a hostile environment, they will resist your boundaries.

1. *If possible, have more kids; they are always a joy to watch as they grow with different personalities.*

I remember talking with a pastor friend who has four children. The last child was not necessarily planned. However, she brought so much blessing to them. When I asked the wife what she would do differently, without hesitation she said she could have had one more child. I have heard this from a few others, and I think there must be something to it. I have personally always loved children and somehow it seems there is something mysterious about creating new life. Children are a blessing from the Lord. Sometimes it is difficult to have kids; however, if you are able, have kids. There is something mysterious about raising them and watching them grow and make decisions to impact their world. When you think you need to stop but are able, have one more. (Uncle Acha will babysit.)

1. *Be self-reliant, but also know when to ask for help.*

When I was a teenager into my early 20s, we had Bible study at my house. My friends would come over for us to have meetings at my place. On one of those meeting days, I did not have kerosene in my little lamp that we used for the meeting. Instead of telling the group I didn’t have money to buy kerosene, I tried to sneakily cancel the meeting without giving any logical reason. I was not a good liar, and it was easy for the others to suspect what was going on. They confronted me and offered to buy the kerosene. I objected but they would not take ‘no’ for an answer. When I continued to resist, they rightfully accused me of having selfish motives. They reasoned that if giving blessed the giver, it was right to reason that I wanted to be blessed by giving to them but did not want them to give to me and be blessed. From that experience I learned that I needed to be a giver but I also learned how to let others bless me by their giving. Self-reliance as a philosophy of life is good because you tend to help yourself and others. However, it can be negative if you get to the point where you think you cannot accept help from others, thus preventing them from being blessed by giving to you. So, my advice is that don’t be so dependent on others and wear them out; and don’t be so independent that you cannot accept help from others. However, deny help when someone openly disrespects you. Remember people generally will NOT respect people who do not respect themselves. Set your own price high and sell yourself as such; also learn to accept help when you need it.

1. *Be a giver rather than a taker. Remember you make a living by taking and you make a life by giving (lesson from Winston Churchill)*

When growing up, my grandma who was my hero growing up always gave to others and instilled in us the importance of selfless giving. In the same vein, I saw my mother give almost everything away to serve other people without thinking much of herself. Somehow, I have adopted that lifestyle and I feel that when I am giving and serving other people, I am living a fulfilled life. When I was answering the call into the ministry, one of the statements that stood out to me was a statement I read from a Christian magazine that to answer the calling to serve the Lord I had to be willing to pursue meaning in life rather than money in the bank. From what I have seen regarding giving and receiving, there are generally two kinds of people in the world - those who give and those who take. Learn to be a giver because it enables you to live a happier and more fulfilled life. Giving makes you like your heavenly Father. Giving helps you to realize that ultimately everything belongs to God and not to us. As alluded to above, don’t be such a giver that you cannot take from others – that is selfish. On the other hand, don’t be such a taker that you wear people out.

1. *Do (good) things for people without strings attached*

I watched my grandma and mom do things for people who would never pay back, and I could see how much it made them look in the eyes of the person who was being helped. My mother would go out of her way to defend the underdog. As a child these actions made a huge impression on me. Over the years since leaving home, I tend to gravitate towards people who are selfless and by osmosis, I have tended to look at things that way. I have learned that a good philosophy to live by is to help any and everybody without discrimination and to expect nothing in return. You never know who you might be helping.

1. *Never allow yourself to be overcome by evil; rather overcome evil with good! In other words, do good to people even when they have not been nice to you.*

Before leaving the village, one of my relatives (whose nickname is Simple Man) appeared to cut off someone in traffic – even though the other driver was driving aggressively. The other driver followed us and was hurling insults at him. Instead of cursing this guy back, his response was “thank you, that is my name.” The other guy would say “you fool” and he would simply say “thank you, that is my name.” I was taken aback by that response. I expected him to confront this guy who was obviously aggressive, but he chose a completely different response. That day, I learned that though people are going to hurt you and do some bad things to you, you must decide how to respond. You can choose to act positively regardless of what or how the other person behaves. When I went through a protracted relationship in which I was regarded as the villain, I decided to act in ways that demonstrated that my motives were pure even when it appeared I was being judged harshly. There have been several times that this lesson has come handy in my life, and it is backed by scripture in Romans 12 “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” Romans‬

In life you are going to have people who will hurt you and do bad things to you. Learn to never pay back evil for evil. Rather, learn to go out of your way to do good to people who have done things to hurt you. It is God’s job to judge, and He loves everyone, even those who do not openly love Him.

1. *Pray about everything; you will be surprised how God directs your affairs including mundane things like finding keys.*

I have learned over the years since I became a born-again Christian that God is watching over me. Many times, I forget and take things into my own hands. I find that when I do remember to pray about anything and hand it over into God’s hands, it is amazing how God’s presence becomes real to me. I find myself praying for everything from when I take an exam to when I lose my car keys. Nothing is too small to pray for and nothing is too big to pray for. So, bring God into all your endeavors in all spheres of your life. He sees the big picture; you only see a little bit at a time. Live a life of dependence on his wisdom.

1. *Memorize scripture and teach your children. God’s word stored in your heart comes in handy when things are dark and tough.*

I started really memorizing scriptures when I was in Bible college, and I have continued to add passages and chapters to my repertoire. I was first inspired by a young lady who impressed us by reciting a short chapter in Isaiah. She recited it with conviction, and I thought to myself that if she could do it, so could I. She was not even a Bible college student, but here she was committing the word of God to memory and giving it out in ways that were so inspiring. This must have been in 1990. Before then I would memorize a verse here and there. Since then, I started to try to commit whole chapters to memory. When my boys were younger, I would teach them scripture as we drove to school. We started with Psalms 23, psalm 1, 1st Corinthians 13, Hebrews 11 etc. Even as adults now, they still remember the scriptures that I taught them many years ago. Now, I have attempted to commit the longest chapter in the Bible to memory (psalms 119), the book of Philippians, and John 3. I am currently working on the sermon on the mount. It takes a lot of time, but it is rewarding to commit God’s word to memory.

Psalm 119:11 highlights the importance of storing God’s word in our hearts. (I have stored your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ESV). Usually when you memorize scripture you get your thinking and your life influenced by the word of God. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God (Proverbs 1:7). To learn how to fear God, you need to know God’s word. You inoculate yourself against falsehood when you know God’s word. So, spend much time in it.

1. *All demands on me are God’s responsibility - that’s why I can pray about every and anything. (Lesson based on Isaiah 43)*

When I was first attempting to leave my native Southern Cameroons to go to school in Nigeria, I had a lot of questions for which I needed the Lord to give me some answers. I had lots of needs which I told the Lord were obstacles for me to go into full time ministry, knowing that those things were still hanging over my head. I took three days to go fast and pray and seek the face of God about how to proceed. I felt the Lord directing me to Isaiah 42 and 43 during that time. As I meditated on those two chapters, I could sense him saying to that he would take care of me with all my myriad needs. And that any demands and needs I had then and would have in the future, he already had them covered. Over the years, this has been true and he has come through countless times. So, when I have been faced with an obstacle, I have referenced this lesson. I have learned to depend on God for everything. When I go through hard times or when things are going well in my life, I remember to acknowledge God’s handiwork in my life. When I am scared, I remember that God is always at work to see me through the fires and rivers of life. Sometimes He might show me a completely new way to handle certain problems like the Israelites in Bible times crossing the Red Sea. So, I try to pay attention to what he is doing and learn to rely on him especially in difficult times. I know that the enemy will want me to run away to try to solve such difficult problems by myself which usually doesn’t end well.

1. *When you make friendships with the opposite sex, respect yourself and maintain very strong boundaries. Be very careful in such situations. Whether you are related or not, treat him/her with respect as a relative - never have sex with them - remember you are preparing someone else’s bride/bridegroom. If you do a good job, his spouse will thank you and you might be family friends for life.*

When I just turned into my teen years, my grandmother sat me down for “the talk” because one of my relatives had impregnated a girl that he lived and served with as a house boy. It is interesting that eventually, I served as a house boy for two families growing up. When she found out what happened, Grandma sat me down and gave some great counsel. Basically, she said that if you live in the same house with a girl, consider her your sister whether you are related to her or not. She emphasized that it is dishonorable to do such a thing as my relative had done. I took it to heart and as a matter of principle, I consider every girl that I am in close contact with as a sister and address her as such. In that way it is obvious to both of us that we cannot be romantically involved. I have been tempted over the years to go back on this principle. However, temptation or no temptation, this has been a valuable lesson and has saved me from lots of heartaches and troubles.

Sexual temptations are always knocking at the door. Do your very best to keep all your relationships pure. View each person in your life as a potential opportunity for God to use you to be a blessing to them and their families – present and future. Also, see them as potential problems that could lure you into sexual sins. So always be careful. You never know what the future holds. Sexual sins break relationships and create enmity. David’s son Amnon thought that sexual relations with his half-sister Tamar would make him happy. The reverse was the case – hatred was the result. (Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, ‘get up and get out!’ 2 Samuel 13:15 NIV). If you don’t want to be treated with hate and disdain, say no, and stand firm. The other person might respect you later when he/she gets their senses back.

1. *Don’t fight about everything; choose your fights wisely with your spouse, with your children, with your friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Many fights are unnecessary in hindsight.*

In married life, I have learned to overlook little offenses. At times when I look back at some of the conflicts that we have had in our marriage, some of them were totally unnecessary. I still remember us having a heated argument because I refused to accept that we needed to sit in church together. I never saw that modeled when I was growing up and going to church. I did not consider how that affected Rachel who grew up with sitting together as a couple the norm. After the fight that day, I changed for good. As I look back now, I don’t know why I decided to fight instead of just seeing and respecting her point of view. The only explanation is that as humans we have the tendency to be stubborn and at times defend the indefensible.

I have learned that conflict is inevitable when you interact with other people. The reason is because when you interact with other people, there is so much room for misunderstanding that if you are not careful, you could fight about just about anything. When you come into proximity with other people, the possibility for misunderstanding and misjudgment increases with the level of closeness. Therefore, it is important to decide ahead of time that you will choose your battles carefully. Before starting or responding to a fight/quarrel, ask yourself the following question: on a scale of one to ten, how important is this issue to me and my relationship to this person in the grand scheme of things or the big picture? If your answer is above seven, then confront the situation. If on the other hand, it is less, let it go. Many times, peace is better than war. In the story I narrated above, sitting together in church was probably a two for me, whereas it was near a 10 for Rachel.

1. *When you have difficulties at work, it is not the right time to argue with your spouse or discipline your children. You might take the frustration from work out on them.*

I am not sure where I learned this lesson, but I have seen that when I have a setback at work, I tend to be on edge at home and in other contexts. So, I try to be mindful of contexts because if I feel powerless in one setting, the temptation is to swing at the wrong person. The family becomes the innocent recipient of such frustration. I have learned that I need to consciously choose to isolate the incident. Rachel and I have found that when we share those frustrations with each other, we tend to empathize with each other and support each other and keep the center strong. My advice is that when you have been wronged or offended or disrespected in a setting like work or school by people who are more powerful than you, the danger of taking it out on easy targets like family or friends is very high. So, to take the steam out, either share it with your spouse/friend if it is appropriate or just remind yourself that your family/friends love you regardless of what others think of you.

1. *I do not see ANYTHING good with alcohol. I say run very far from it. This includes all drugs.*

My loving mom who passed away in September 2001 was such a generous soul who gave to many people. She also experienced lots of trauma in her life so that she could not deal with all the memories without a drink. Consequently, she lingered at the bottle often and it was difficult for anyone to help her in those moments. I felt powerless as she gradually wasted away under the power of alcohol. As a result, she passed away without laying eyes on my children or holding them in her hands – which is something she had prayed long and waited for. When I got that awful phone call from my uncle one early morning that she had crossed over into eternity, I felt devastated that alcohol had taken my mother away from me. She was only in her 50s. Since then, it has been difficult for me to find anything good with alcohol. I may be biased to think this way, but I have a good reason to hate alcohol.

As I see it, alcohol appears to be shiny and glamorous when you watch advertisements on TV. What you do not see are the hundreds, thousands, and millions whose lives and families have been devastated by its consequences. According to the WHO, about 3 million people die annually as a direct consequence of alcohol worldwide. This represents 5.3% of all deaths. Worldwide numbers for all drug addiction in general are about 35 million. These individuals come from families and there is hardly any family that is not affected. My advice is that you should not even get started because once addicted, quitting becomes an uphill task, and it could take you a lifetime to fight it.

1. *Feelings are important but there are times you must ignore them and do what you know to be right.*

I feel strongly for myself and for others. At times I have found myself feeling otherwise about many things. As a teacher, grading qualitative papers has always been a challenge. However, I have had to sit and grade papers even when I did not feel like doing it. In the sphere of romance, there was a time in my younger years when I thought I was in love with a particular girl. When she rejected my proposal, I felt devastated. I did move on, though it was hard. I have found that at times feelings come and go, especially when talking of romantic feelings. As a counselor, I know that a good listener is someone who can listen to both the content and the emotion being expressed by the speaker. If you can demonstrate to someone that you are understanding the emotion behind the words they are speaking, you will create great understanding. So, understanding how emotions work is crucial in building strong relationships. However, there are times that you need to push forward to do right even when your feelings are screaming for you to do something you know to be wrong or unacceptable. Learn how to deny yourself something that feels good but that may not be good for you. Feelings come and go. The way you feel today may be different tomorrow. So, you cannot build your life on feelings alone. Respect feelings but learn to understand when your feelings may be leading you astray. Learn to do right, irrespective of how you feel. Sometimes you need to go against your own feelings. If I were to have feelings for another man’s wife, I would have to reject my feelings because my feelings are obviously wrong. So, beware of deceptive feelings.

1. *God’s will doesn’t always make sense, but if He is leading you, He makes it crystal clear to you.*

When I confirmed in my heart that my marriage to Rachel was God’s will, I did not know how others were going to see it. I did get lots of people who basically made it clear that it could not be God’s will because of what in their view were a long list of issues. I knew that I could be mistaken that it was God’s will, and I was fully open to that possibility. But I also had a quiet confidence that The Lord, indeed, spoke to me. The rest they say is history.

What I learned during that process and many other situations in my life is that if I stay in tune with God and walk with him, I am going to experience His guidance and leadership at critical times in my life. So, my advice is that you should never embark on a new/major project in your life without getting clear guidance and confirmation from God. If you seek God’s will in relationships, work, and career, He will lead you. (Isaiah 30:21 “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” NIV). Learn to listen to God’s voice. There will be times when he will call you to obedience that is not asked of other people. Stay focused on what God says like Abraham going to an unknown place, or Noah building a boat on dry land.

1. *The enemy of the best is the good! When you are succeeding, don’t stop seeking and following the Lord’s leadership. He may have a new assignment for you.*

When I left Nigeria to go to Chad to live with my parents as I was needing to make my passport to return Nigeria, I started working with the Deeper Life Church in N’Djamena. Our ministry was very successful, and we got to plant a lot of churches in the city and its environs. After getting my documents sorted out, my pastor specifically asked me why I wanted to go back to Bible college when we were already in the business of God’s work. I also thought about the possibility of just continuing what we were doing. Somehow, I could not shake off the draw to go back to Nigeria. I believed that the Lord had something more for me to go do over there. My pastor did support me when I decided to leave despite the success we were enjoying. As I look back, the Lord had more things for me to do, that is why he took me away from the good thing we were doing. When Paul and Barnabas were having a successful ministry in Antioch, God called them to a missionary movement that transformed the then world. Their work in Antioch was very successful as we read in Acts 13, and they were the main teachers. Somehow, God called them out to something much bigger and as it turned out, it was the missionary movement that eventually conquered the Roman empire. The Roman Catholic church and Vatican City still stand today as the last surviving institutions of the Roman empire. As a result of their not settling to do the good thing they were doing in Antioch, the gospel message reached far and wide in the world of their time and eventually reached us. Always ask the question whether God has more for me to do than I am already doing. Someone has said that if what you are doing is not more than you can do on your own, you may not be in God’s best. You may have heard that when He calls people for difficult tasks, he also equips them to accomplish those tasks. Think of Moses, David, Gideon, Samuel, Peter and the disciples, and list goes on and on. My advice is that you should always be on the lookout because God may be calling you to something bigger. When it comes to romantic relationships, look for God to provide a better, updated version of your current relationship if it does end.

1. *Embrace failures and setbacks as God’s direction for something new.*

After I got rejected by the girl that I thought I had prayed and believed to be God’s will, I learned that in romantic or marital relationships, God’s will cannot be one-sided. I learned that both of us must hear from God to confirm God’s will. When it comes to choosing a spouse, our minds can really play tricks on us. That is why even after I prayed and believed that it was God’s will for Rachel and me to be married, I had to wait for God’s confirmation through the various challenges we went through. I have learned that sometimes when I fail at something, it is because God is putting a barrier in my way so that I can look in the direction of my calling. So, when things don’t go as planned, I have learned to lean into it, accept, and regroup to find out whether God has something different for me. My advice is when you fail at something, lean into it, accept it, and regroup to find out whether God has something or someone else for you. If that is the case, He usually has something or someone better, pointing you in the direction of your calling in life. Hurting yourself because a boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you is foolish because you might miss your dream guy/girl just down the road. God may be up to something with that breakup or failure.

1. *Failure or financial losses are the price or school fees we pay to learn a lesson to take us closer to our goal - (lesson from Tom Osborn).*

In 2011 I was planning a trip with a group from Kentucky to Cameroon for a short-term missions’ endeavor. I had called someone at the embassy in Washington DC who assured me that the visas would be done on time. After I collected the passports of all the members of the team and sent them to DC with all the accompanying documents, the waiting game began. I waited and waited and waited some more. The date of our trip came and went but our passports were still nowhere to be found. One of our team members called and threatened the Cameroon Embassy. That is when they finally sent the package. We had to reschedule our flight and pay an extra $3000. We did not have this extra money in our budget, and, so, it was such a challenge. When my friend Tom Osborn and I got to talk and process the whole situation he said, the $3000 was the school fees to learn the lesson necessary. My advice is set goals in life and do your best to pursue those goals. On the way to accomplishing your goals, you are going to experience setbacks. Never allow setbacks to stop you. With each setback, be sure to evaluate and write down the lessons you have learned from each setback. Consider any losses that occur during these setbacks as school fees for the lessons learned. My Friend Tom Osborn (who is in heaven with Jesus) was instrumental in helping me learn this lesson.

1. *Get AAA;, it is very helpful when you are in an accident or breakdown on the highway. The cost of your annual payments is repaid with one tow.*

I like to own old cars because I like to fix cars. Since we drive mostly old cars, having AAA has been helpful to us when anyone breaks down on the road. They would usually tow my car to the mechanic or back home. As gold members, we can have up to four tows of 200 miles. We each have four tows a year generally. I learned many years ago that when you have AAA membership, it helps you save a lot of money when you have unexpected car trouble. Car trouble can occur anytime, anywhere with any car. So, having someone else to take care of you in such situation is wise. I have sometimes been able to use one of my annual 4 tows to help someone stranded by the roadside.

1. *Avoid credit card debts. Those can be crippling. Use credit cards wisely. If you cannot pay it at the end of the month or a billing cycle, then you may not need it. Beware of credit cards that keep raising your limit. They want to get you to where you start to owe.*

I have noted that the credit cards I have paid on time keep raising the limit until I start to owe. I do not think this is done accidentally. It is a well refined plan to get people in debt. What I have learned is that it is important to know how to use credit cards because they help you to build your credit if you stay on top of your payments. When you have late payments, it affects your credit score negatively, so paying on time is crucial to build your credit. You don’t have to accept every raise from your credit card company, or you don’t have to spend to the limit that your card has been raised. It is tempting because the money appears to be available for you to spend. However, remember you are borrowing from someone else and will have to pay it back with interest.

1. *If you can avoid student loans, do your best to avoid them. They are very easy to accumulate but difficult to pay off. Look for grants and if possible, look for work scholarships or Grad Assistantships to avoid student loans. If you do take them, have a payment plan as soon as you graduate because they can grow on you and become impossible to tackle.*

Looking back, I could have avoided student loans altogether, but I ended up taking them. We had a plan when I first graduated. Unfortunately, things did not work as we had planned. We still pay on them, but it is a slow process because we missed the window that we had set for ourselves. If you are to take a student loan because it is the only way for you to get an education, then go ahead and take the loan. I still believe that education is the best and fastest way to the economic top of the ladder. However, if you plan well and study hard, you can get a good education without accumulating debts. There are some fields that are difficult to go through without loans – these include law and medicine. However, it is possible to get grants. You need to look in the right places. You do not have to accept all the offers given when you accept loans for your schooling. Accept the least amount possible so that you do not get overwhelmed after school. Remember it is debt to be paid back with interest.

1. *Stay active - run or go to the gym. It keeps you healthy -mind and body.*

I have found that physical exercise is of little importance in the grand scheme of things because godliness is more important (1 Timothy 4:8). However, physical exercise is very important to keep you functioning well in body and mind. When I go jogging in the morning, it clears my mind the rest of the day and helps me to focus better on tasks. Stay as active as possible to keep your body functioning well and to keep your mind sharp. It is even better to walk or run and pray.

1. *Travel is such education and makes you respect others deeply.*

I am not sure where I learned this lesson, but just the fact that I have personally traveled to so many places have given me respect for the way others live. Both Rachel and I are travelers, as such we have invested in our boys to travel and expand their view of the world. I have learned that when you travel to other areas of the world, you will be surprised how others live and it will create genuine respect for all people. The earth is the Lord’s and everyone in it (Psalms 24:1). You get to see God’s handiwork in the world when you travel to experience God’s people all over the world. You will see different cultures that will surprise you, you will also see the common humanity of us all. Experiencing the culture of other people will make you cherish your own culture. You might end up learning more about your own culture when you see and learn the reasons that people do certain things in their contexts. Also, you are going to be surprised to see that God is at work everywhere in the world.

1. *Stay connected with your friends.*

I have stayed connected with some of my friends for over 40 years. Those people appear to know things about me that I may even have forgotten. Stay connected to your friends and those of your family through the several mediums available to you. Friends will be there many times when the family is not there. Friends are those who will be there in good and bad times. Treat them like family. At times, there will tell you the truth your family may not be able to tell you because they are too close to the situation and their objectivity could be compromised. Just remember that there are good friends and bad friends – here we are talking about good friends (check number one of this advice list for what a good friend is and does).

1. *Invest in people whenever you have the opportunity.*

I have learned to invest in the lives of others. It is always a good thing to invest for the future. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 makes this point. So, investing to grow your capital is great, however, to invest in people is even greater. Giving people a hand-up is one of the most fulfilling godly acts you can do because you are letting God use you. God cares for everyone including the animals, vegetation, and everyone who lives in the world. So, any time you care for any part of God’s world and especially God’s people, you are doing God’s work. When you help others – especially those who cannot pay you back, you are lending to God. That is a better investment because God does not fail or owe anyone. If you needed to depend on anyone for your future, it is better to depend on God.

1. *Take care of your parents when they get older. Consider it a privilege.*

It was a privilege to take care of my grandma when she was older. After all that she had done for me, it was just a little bit of paying back for everything she had done for me. I never quite had the opportunity to do the same for my mom because she passed away too soon. There was a time in my life that I was completely vulnerable and depended on my mom and then grandma. In other words, I owe them my very life. I know that over the years, they may not have been as present or as caring as they could have been. As a parent now, I know that all parents make mistakes. It is true that some mistakes are so traumatic that it is difficult to move past those. When parents get older, their children assume the parental roles while the parents assume the children’s roles. Many times, it is easier to remember the traumatic events without remembering the times that we were completely vulnerable and dependent. For some people, even those vulnerable years were traumatic -if this is your story, I am so sorry. You did not deserve that. Now, however, as an adult, you can choose to be like the parent who hurt you or like the Godly person who repays evil with good. You can choose to focus on the one thing that was most important which is the life that you have and work to give them dignity because of your own life. This is direct honor to God who commanded us to honor our parents as one of the ten commandments. It does not specify what kind of parent to honor. Therefore, I can assume that it means all parents.

1. *Learn to brush your teeth for up to 3 minutes.*

I never saw a dentist until I was in my mid 30s. Growing up, I saw my grandma cry herself to sleep because of toothaches. I feel blessed to have had dental care that my grandma never had the privilege of having. Since I first saw a dentist, I have learned that dental hygiene is very important in preventing all kinds of diseases. In our cultural context where we consume lots of sugar and sweets it is critical that we take care of our teeth well. Besides the biannual cleaning from the dentist, you need to do a deep cleaning of your teeth to avoid plague build up and gum disease. Try brushing dry first before using toothpaste. In this way you remove some of the buildup before using toothpaste. There are different kinds of brushes in the market now. Look for one that works for you, but the key is taking your time to remove all residue. Brushing at night before going to sleep is also highly recommended.

1. *Use your cruise control on the interstate to keep you from going over the speed limit except when you are in a convoy. Generally, set the cruise for 5 miles above the speed limit.*

Since I arrived the United States about 22 years ago, I have driven all over the country with my family. There are very few states (mainly in New England) that I have not visited. Because I have done so much driving, I learned that police don’t’ usually pull you over if you are going under 10 miles above the speed limit on the interstate in most states with a few exceptions. At times someone may pull you over for going about eight miles over. However, generally, it is rare for them to pull you over when you are only five miles over. There are certain places, however, that this does not apply. So, my advice is that if you are in a part of town or city that you do not know, do your best to stay within 5 miles. The best way to drive on the interstate and not go over the speed limit is to drive with your cruise control. Once you set it, you don’t have to worry about getting distracted and going faster than you want to go.

1. *Never use cruise control on wet roads or in rain.*

I had a discussion with a neighbor when lived in Kentucky about cruise control on wet roads. He told me the story about an accident he had with friends while driving with cruise control in the rain. He told me he has never used cruise control driving since that day. His advice to me about cruise control was that it is good if it is not raining. When it is raining, remember to put your headlights on and be gentle with breaking or turning sharply as this could cause you to lose control. When driving in snow, be mindful of the same thing. Drive slowly to be able to maintain control of the car. ABS brakes usually help the car to stop. If you do not have ABS brakes, then you need to pump the breaks slowly for the car to stop.

1. *When pulled over by an officer, remain calm, be friendly and avoid arguments. Remember he/she has a gun.*

When I first arrived in America many years ago the police pulled me over. I got out of my car to see why he pulled me over. He ordered me back into the car and thankfully didn’t pull his weapon on me. I have since learned that you do not get out of your car when you are pulled over. You just need to sit tight and follow the officer’s instructions. I have also learned that it is a bad idea to argue with an officer who is carrying a weapon. Sometimes, he/she may be completely wrong in pulling you over, however, you will never be able to argue your way out of whatever you are being accused of. Your life is more important than the increase in your insurance premiums. So, my advice is that you should be friendly and polite without giving the impression that you are scared. Some people revel in exerting unnecessary power over others that they see as prey. So be professional and personable at the same time.

1. *When you get a ticket, check for an attorney to help you pay for it without letting it add points to your license. You may pay more but it will keep your auto insurance premiums from going up.*

I have learned that I can avoid having points added to my premiums by simply paying more (by using an attorney) when I get a ticket instead of just paying the amount on the ticket. It is the best way to maintain a good driving record which you need for many situations including certain jobs or even the privilege to drive. There are some jobs that will require for you to have a good driving record, so you want to avoid unnecessary points to be added to your license. A simple google will show you which attorney in your area will help with traffic tickets. The attorney will charge you more than the ticket is worth, but it will help keep the ticket from getting into your driving record, which usually takes 3 years to get off your records. If you can avoid getting tickets in the first place, that is even better.

1. *Pay cash for a car if possible and avoid the car payments. It will save you a lot of money.*

Since I have been in the United States, I have not had any car payments. Not everyone can do that. In my family, we do not mind driving old cars. I try to maintain my cars so that they continue to serve us. If you do not have an idea about how to maintain old cars, this advice may not be for you. I have learned that though the smell of the new car can be intoxicating when you drive it off the lot, it loses a lot of its value immediately. If you can afford it, a new car is good because you don’t need to worry about it for a long time. However, if you are buying a used car, think of saving money enough to buy it. Car payments, tend to make you pay more for a car than you would if you bought it outright. When you buy it outright, you save a lot of money – car payments always include interest, and when you add it up, it can get high.

1. *Many times, it is better to fix your old car than to buy a new one - especially if you are buying a used car and you don’t know much about cars. You’ll probably inherit a different set of problems.*

Sometimes I have left my old car and bought another old car only to discover that I have inherited a new set of problems. Used cars are a gamble especially if you do not know much about cars. I also learned that before you trade, sell, or junk your car in favor of buying something new, always get it checked well by someone objective and neutral. Not the salesperson at the dealership or an unqualified mechanic. If you buy a used car, it is difficult to know why someone got rid of it in the first place. So, you don’t want to swap problems with the existing car to get another person’s problems. Always check to see if fixing your old car that you know its history is better for your situation.

1. *Be helpful and generous with your neighbors. In a sense they are your extended family - they live close to you.*

I have lived close to many neighbors over the course of many years. I try to treat my neighbors well because I believe that they are closer to me than my family. One practical way I do that is by making sure that when mowing my lawn, I would usually add a piece of my neighbors that’s close to my property. Sometimes when I walk around in the neighborhood and find little strips of lawn sticking out when the other’s lawn is good, I think it is a wasted opportunity to connect with the neighbor. All my neighbors have been appreciative of my gesture – except one. This neighbor in question was just not wanting any kind of relationship and so we left them alone. I have learned that you do not choose your family members and often your neighbors are like the family members you did not choose. Maybe God brought them into your life to bless them through you. Be sure not to disappoint your heavenly Father. Make yourself available to be neighborly and friendly. They could in turn be a blessing to you. Help them out when it is in your power to do so.

1. *Demonstrate the grace of God to others - forgive even before you are asked.*

I have found that when I forgive before being asked, I grow a little bit spiritually. I think I learned this lesson from a friend many years ago. Forgiving is a habit that I have tried to learn and to practice so that it could become second nature. I am still learning. I have learned that when I keep a grudge against anyone especially family members, it only eats me up. Our heavenly Father forgives us a lot more than we could ever forgive anyone, so we need to imitate Him. If we don’t forgive others, our heavenly Father will not forgive us as well (Mark 11:25-26). So, my advice is that you should learn to forgive before someone ever comes to ask you for forgiveness. Forgiving before you are asked is a great way to practice the habit of happiness.

1. *Get a good night’s sleep before a big event or test. This really calms your nerves.*

I learned this lesson many years ago. I find that when I have a big exam, instead of studying all night and arriving tired to the exam room; I study a little bit and then have good night’s rest. In the morning of the big event, I get a good breakfast and go in with relaxed mind. I have learned that it is important to try to relax as much as possible before facing the big day, whatever it is. I find that when I get a good night’s rest, I tend to perform better. When I am not stressed out, I tend to think clearly and more productive. My advice is that it is important to get a healthy activity that reduces your stress and calms you down before a big event. For me, it is a good night’s rest.

1. *Never stop learning. It is never too late to learn new lessons. Make yourself a lifelong learner.*

I first encountered the idea of a lifelong learner when I first went to college. I have been in school for very long and each level of education I have attained has brought new insights and expanded my horizons. As a teacher, I feel that I am always learning to help my students discover new horizons. The saying that “when you stop learning, you start dying,” is true. I find when I do pursue knowledge, my life feels richer and it affects my teaching positively. There are many ways to learn, either formal or informal. My advice is that you pursue learning whether formal or informal. Formal learning is going to school while informal learning is every other kind of learning that increases your knowledge and experience. You can learn from anyone and anywhere. Nelson Mandela once said, “I never lose, I either win or learn.” Be always ready to learn from any and every situation in your life, both positive and negative.

1. *A great way to demonstrate your love for your children is to respect and honor their mother/father.*

I think I learned this lesson listening to Dr. James Dobson in one of his radio shows. I have tried to live by that principle, and it has been good to see the respect that my boys have for their mother and vice versa as we both deliberately honor each other. My advice is that when you have children with someone, you are tied to them for life. The children are also part of that person, so be very careful how to manage any kind of conflict between the two of you. Remember the African saying that “when two elephants fight, the grass suffers.” Since the children’s DNA is made up of 50% from each of you, learn to keep your fights between the two of you and not destroy the children’s world. When you speak evil about their father/mother, it indirectly affects 50% of the child’s own personhood. So, learn to honor the other parent even if you do not see things the same way.

1. *Do not challenge your husband/wife in front of the children - especially about parenting styles. Talk about your differences in private and present a united front to the children.*

As a young child I still remember hearing my mom and grandma quarrelling about me. It appears that they could not agree what to do with me. They each had two different visions and could never agree which path I needed to take. As I result, it was very confusing to me growing up and trying to chart my way through life. In fact, as I look back, that is why I decided to strike out on my own at 17. At that point, it seems that I ditched both of their plans for me.

So, my take is that if you have some strong disagreement, try to resolve those in private and present a unified position to the children because it can be disorienting to a child.

1. *Parent authoritatively! Don’t worry about being your child’s friend. Sometimes you may have to offend them to be the parent instead of their friend. They will appreciate you later.*

As I look at my childhood, my grandmother with whom I spent most of my developmental years had strong boundaries. She was never trying to be my friend if she made me do the right things. Stories abound about her trying to make me grow up responsible and not follow bad influences. One thing that stands out was when she consistently refused for me to go to the market and push trucks (a way to make some quick money) like other children my age did. Till this day I do not really understand why she did that, however, it appears that her reasoning was that she wanted me to be focus on what she considered important. I did eventually push the truck in my 20s and it was quite an experience. By then, I was mature and could see her wisdom.

1. *Grandparents have an important role to play in the raising of your children. They know certain things that you do not know - they raised you, despite the flaws that you see. Tap into their wisdom to benefit your children.*

I grew up with my grandparents. It seems that Grandma had made her mistakes before I came along. In my eyes, she was perfect. My aunts and uncles think that I met the very mellow version of my grandmother. I learned so much from her telling me stories from her childhood. She seemed to have a strong opinion about everything and every person. She was such a great judge of character. I thought that she was the wisest person in the world. I didn’t see any of her faults until my teen years – of course. Even now, I still think that she’s the wisest person I ever met. I did not have much of a relationship with Grandpa because as a polygamist with about 28 children, he had no space in his busy life for me.

1. *Don’t get rattled by obstacles - view them as challenges to overcome. Many people are stopped by obstacles. Perseverance pays!*

I have been faced with many challenging situations over the years. Perhaps one experience that required so much perseverance was waiting 7 years to get consent to marry the love of my life. That experience follows many other experiences in which I had to persevere. When I finished primary school at 14, I wanted to continue my education but was prevented by lack of money. It took almost 11 years for me to find myself back in a formal classroom. As I look back now those 11 years were challenging but very rewarding years. I learned so many valuable lessons that I would not have learned otherwise.

1. *Never give up on your dreams.*

I dreamed of being a teacher when I was a young boy. I didn’t know in what capacity I would be teaching. I remember gathering children and pretending to mimic teachers at school. When I left Southern Cameroons in 1988, the dream was to go to Nigeria, train to come back and start a training college in my native Cameroons. During the 11 years I was out of school, it appeared that schooling, talk less of teaching were out of the question for me. I remember being engaged to teach some children in Kumba (S. Cameroons) to prepare for end of year exams. I learned later that they did very well in their exams. This was my first endeavor to perform teaching duties.

When you have a dream, write it out, take your time, and patiently wait for its fulfilment (Habakkuk 2:2-3). There are probably going to be some false starts and detours or times when the dream appears impossible. Hold on to your dream and see God work it out in His due time.

1. *Spiritual transformation is real! Change is always possible! Without it, my life would have ended up very differently. Let no one fool you, the gospel is still the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes (Roman 1:16).*

On the night of November 14, 1981, my life was on a very different trajectory until I met face-to-face with Christ. After reading Dr. Zac Fomum’s track “God loves you,” I had a radical encounter with Christ. My life took a complete turn around and I have never been the same since then. I had such deep conviction of sin that for many days all I could see was the awfulness of the life I had lived up to that point. I went through deep repentance of sin and turning my back to evil practices and habits. One habit that fell off that night for me was smoking cigarettes – a habit I had picked up from my early teens while still in the village. I was beginning to dabble into immoral sexual actions. I was on a very dark journey and God put a complete stop to it by this experience. I carried out a few restitution activities immediately. I could have done more but I was far from some of the people I had offended/sinned against in my youth (These were before the days of easy communication – email, text or cellphones. I turned over everything into God’s hands and He did a marvelous transformation in my life.

If you have not yet decided to turn your back on sin and follow Christ 100%, now is the time to start the journey. You will never regret it. The life of sin is dark and always ends in death, but life with Christ is full of light and ends in eternal life. (Romans 6:23).

1. *The Republicans say things I like, and the Democrats also say some things that I like. Though I am politically conservative, I am not Republican; though I care deeply for the poor, I am not Democrat. I see too much hypocrisy on both sides. The Republicans end up agreeing to protect the rich over the poor and the Democrats end up calling clear evil -good, and good -evil. I believe the country runs better in the middle. That’s why I am politically Independent.*

I grew up under the dictatorial regimes of Amadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya in the Cameroons, shortly under the brutal regime of Hissen Habre in Chad, before undergoing the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha in Nigeria. Oppressive governance turns my belly. I have seen too much of it during my lifetime. Coming to America has opened my eyes to see that there is a better way to conduct governance over a people. When the government becomes overbearing, it reminds me of the days when you could disappear and never be found for saying the wrong thing and in the wrong place. When I see the government trying to force me to think a certain way and talk in a certain way, I resent it with my whole being because I do not want to go back into that mindset. I see both Republicans and Democrats trying to force people to think and speak in a certain way to back their respective talking points. Many times, I do not agree with these talking points, but I am forced to accept what is unacceptable. I love my autonomy. That is why I am politically independent.

1. *You can watch a good TV show and iron clothes at the same time. So, think about multitasking instead of spending time on the screens and doing nothing.*

I used to spend 4 hours watching a football game – with multiple advertisements included. Many times, I felt exhausted and guilty for spending that whole time without any productivity. When the team I cheered for lost, it made my pain even more excruciating. Additionally, my wife was not happy that I was spending so much time on the screen doing nothing. When I started multitasking, it made a whole lot of sense for me and even when my team lost, I still looked back at the time and felt good because I accomplished something important in that time. I think you should think of something that you can do while watching a game. This helps you to tune out during the multiple commercial breaks.

1. *Things usually work out, so no reason to be super anxious.*

Once I was stranded in Maiduguri on my way to Owerri from Chad. My money was completely gone. I did not know what I was going to do to proceed but I felt that the Lord had asked me to take off for school in Nigeria. After staying in Maiduguri for two days, I seemed to hear the voice of God the 3rd day asking me to go talk to the transporters going to the Southeast to take me and payment will be made at Owerri. I chose Emera Motors bus. I had not thought of that plan before that morning. The plan worked and I got to Owerri to a very warm welcome. Brother Maxey (who would later become my father in-law) received me with a lot of joy. He gave me the money I needed to go pay for the transportation from Maiduguri and collect my few belongings they had kept. The only thing I had with me was my letter of admission into Wesley International Bible College (WIBC).

1. *The fear of God is still the beginning of wisdom (proverbs 1:7)*

Having the fear of God in my life has been the main difference in the way my life has turned out. Many times, in my life, the only thing that has kept me from going down a dark road has been the fear of the Lord. I have found that I am as weak as anyone and can commit pretty much any sin. Only the fear of God keeps me in line. I will define the fear of God as in-depth belief that the He is right there with me everywhere I am and that He guides me in all situations. For that reason, I will not do in private something I will not do in public because God’s eyes can see any and everything everywhere I am.

1. *If you have Jesus, victory is certain. (I learned this lesson when I was really feeling defeated and hopeless).*

When I was a teenager and into my early 20s, I used to feel down because of all the challenges that had happened to me in life. One day I was going to the prayer house (in Kumba) and was in one of those down days. When I got there and checked into my room feeling bad about myself and my plight, I looked up and on the wall was a poster with the words “if you have Jesus, victory is sure.” After that, it seemed that God used that poster to speak to me and that the message was meant for me. I started to reminisce on the various ways in which God had been good to me. To this day, when I get into those down days, I still rely on the fact that I do have Jesus and victory is certain.

1. *Serve others rather than be served, regardless of your position.*

When I was in college, our school president (who happens to be my father in-law), used to come to the students’ hostels and help flush the toilets. You need to understand that this was in a five-story building where there was no running water, so flushing the toilets was always a challenge. When the toilets were not flushed the bad smell often reached the offices. He could have delegated this task to someone else lower in the organization, but he decided to do it himself. What it showed me was that doing such dirty jobs as a leader meant that a true leader should be ready to do the things they require of others. In other words, learn to serve everyone – even those at the very bottom.

1. *Tithe faithfully and consistently! Bring the Lord’s blessings into your finances.*

I have always cared about my extended family and what happened to them. As such, trying to solve everyone’s problems appears to be something I have chosen to do. In many instances, I have reasoned that since I am helping other people, I could do that instead of paying all my tithes to my church. But about 15 years ago, God challenged me to pay my tithes fully and see Him work in my family. My wife and I talked about it, and we started to pay our tithes and he has taken care of my extended family in ways that I could never have imagined. He has opened doors for others. I continue to hand them over into His hands because they are His people before they are mine. I will do the things that I can do without failing on paying my tithes.

1. *Do not pass judgement on anyone (especially teachers) based solely on what others say. Interact with that person and make up your own mind independently.*

When I was in graduate school, I was warned about a professor to not get close to him. I went through my program avoiding him. However, just before graduating, I had an encounter with this professor that completely changed my views about him. When I got close to him, it was like night and day regarding what I had been told about him. He and I struck up a friendship but by this time it was too late to learn a lot from him. Since then, I do not take other people’s judgement of someone at face value. I must prove it for myself.

1. *Do not make major decisions when you are angry, you might be making a big mistake. Allow yourself time to calm down and think through your decision carefully.*

After praying and having peace that my relationship with Rachel could lead to our marriage, we went through some difficult challenges. At some point there was a decision made in the US for Rachel to stop all correspondence with me. I could have decided to either move on quickly or fight those who were putting obstacles in our way. I decided to do none of these. There was too much confusion that any decision to take any action would have been the wrong one in hindsight. I let things where they were and in God’s time, he opened the right doors for us to reconnect again. The more serious the decision, the more time you might need to sort things out as well as seek God’s will.

1. *Invest in your marriage when you are young and when you are old, it will take care of you. No price is too big to pay to prepare for and to have a good marriage.*

Parts of the first phrase came from a book we read as we prepared for our marriage. Even though we did not plan it that way, we ended up spending a lot of time preparing for our marriage (7 years). Because of the opposition that we had and many people telling us that we would not succeed, we decided to work hard to build a very strong foundation for our marriage. As I look back today, the cynics really helped us to work on the foundation of our marriage. For instance, we wrote a lot to each other and everything we could lay our hands on to read to help us was consumed. We got advice from several people in the process of waiting all those years.

1. *Food is still the best way to people’s hearts. I have learned when I lead teams that when people are getting agitated, I usually make sure everyone is fed and comfortable. Things usually return to normal after people have eaten or feel cared for. Feed your husband well.*

I try to do my best to care for the people that I take overseas or to Africa. When I find that there is a lot of agitation, I usually try to make sure people feel cared for. I remember being Nigeria and people were agitating. Then I realized that people had not eaten in a while. I asked one of the local helpers to arrange some food for everyone and the agitation died down quickly.

1. *Never turn and run away from a dog trying to bite you - that puts you in a vulnerable position. Face it and strike it with your toes under its mouth -that is its vulnerable spot. It will usually run away after the strike. This strike causes pain without injuring the dog.*

I learned this lesson many years ago in the village. One of my relatives had a dog that was mean and would attack people randomly until one day a young man in the village broke him. When the dog tried to charge at him, he instead charged against it, and when he made contact, that was the last time the dog charged at him. In my young mind, I did not believe that anyone could subdue that dog like that. From that day, any time the dog saw the young man coming, it will put its tail between its legs and run for cover. It was amazing to see the predator become prey in a very short time. He was the one who explained to us about the technique. I never got to use it all these years until about 9 years ago when we lived in Ashland, Kentucky. Our neighbor had two dogs that were always barking whenever I came home. Since they were in chains, there was no reason to be bothered. One day when returning from work they both broke their chains and charged at me. The smaller charged first and I used the technique on it, and it ran away and the second and bigger dog came charging and I did the same thing, and it also ran away. Otherwise, both could have really hurt me that day. Since I am talking about dogs, another dog story that I have is when we visited a neighbor in Cincinnati and my son son, Ingam was barely 7 or 8. When we opened the door and stepped in without realizing that our friend was not in the room, the three or four dogs charged at us. Since I was with my boys, I did not even have time to think of my technique when my 7–8-year-old stepped between the family and the dogs and calmed them down. To my knowledge he had never owned a dog. I guess my technique is not the only one. What I have learned is that sometimes when dogs bark, they are not necessarily trying to hurt you. So, try softening your voice and calming it down and if it is still charging and intending to hurt you, use the technique.

1. *Teachers usually want different things from students. So, find out what each teacher wants and give it to them. Don’t expect teachers to be the same and don’t ask one teacher to do things like your favorite teacher. It will not go well for you.*

Just as students have different personalities and learning styles, teachers have personalities and teaching styles. I learned this lesson from my friend Fyne Nsofor. He said when you try to compare teachers, you just make the situation bad. I learned this lesson during my undergraduate studies, and I have used it throughout my academic career. If I can figure out from the beginning what is important to the professor, I will try focus on that for the class. Some teachers like to focus on application of the material while others like to focus on the theory. Those who focus on application will allow you room to be more independent, whereas those who are focus on theory would want you to maybe regurgitate what you have been taught. Know your teacher and give them what they want even if that is not your style. I remember taking a class on preventive counseling from Dr. Bob Conyne at the University of Cincinnati. He was such a smart professor and liked to treat everyone as though they are as smart as him. So, the class had very little structure. We were using his textbook for class discussion. You could take discussions in any direction you wanted. Needless to say that lots of people were lost and complained bitterly. Since this was a graduate level class, he was treating us like knowledge creators. Many of us only appreciated it after the class was over or when we were doing our dissertations.

1. *Texting and driving are so common that everyone does it -though it is VERY DANGEROUS! If you must do it, use hands-free voice text!*

One time I was driving and texting and suddenly, the car in front of me stopped. It took the grace of God for me not to hit them. I have probably texted while driving since then. But that incident convinced me to be completely careful when texting and driving. A split second of inattention can be the difference between staying safe or having a serious accident – life and death. I was lucky that day. Many others are not so lucky.

1. *Start each day with “This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it” regardless of what is going on.*

After I found the postcard on the wall reminding me that if I had Jesus, victory was sure, my whole outlooked changed. In church one day, someone shared with the group about the importance of practicing Psalms 118:24 every day. I started in my early 20s and still try to practice this Psalm daily – especially when circumstances required me to be downcast. As I look back now, the incident I was describing above about feeling down a lot as a teenager may have probably been undiagnosed depression. I cannot claim that just believing and practicing Psalms 118:24 will solve the problem of depression for everyone or even for most people. Some people need to be able to talk to someone else about what is going on. You may need to talk to a therapist and in some cases, you may need to talk to a psychiatrist to be prescribed antidepressants. We deal with depressed moods differently from a biological standpoint. So, taking medication is not a sign of faithlessness in the same way that taking medicine for diabetes, ear infections or cancer are not signs of faithlessness.

1. *Develop self-confidence but do not put yourself in compromising situations because anybody can fall into sin - especially sexual sin.*

When I left the church in 1985 when I had lots of theological unanswered questions, I realized how weak I could be. I started to deal with desires that I didn’t before. I was tempted mightily to go down a sexual immoral path more than I had ever had in my life. As I look back now, the only reason I did not take that route was not my will power; it was simply God’s grace in my life. This was the time in my life that I knew that God was planning to do something special with my life. He showed up in some very dark places that I put myself in to deliver me. After the second and third times, it was clear to me that God was talking to me to reconsider my theological arguments and to just simply trust Him with my whole life. This triggered a series of events that saw me come back to church from a complete process of deconstruction of my faith.

1. *Know and own your strengths and weaknesses. This keeps you authentic. Use your strengths maximally; seek and accept help with your weaknesses.*

There was a time in my life when I was not particularly willing to own my strengths and weaknesses. Maybe it is because of my age and the fact that I do counseling for a living that I have changed. I have learned through my work as a counselor that the temptation to pretend to be someone else instead of yourself is very high. In my adult life, I have found that I am more authentic, at peace, and productive when I embrace my strengths and weaknesses. I am no longer ashamed of the things I am not good at because there is probably someone out there who can do a good job of those things I cannot do well. On the other hand, I want to do well on the things I am good at and passionate about.

1. *God is always at work; find where He is working and join Him (lesson from Henry Blackaby).*

Since I surrendered my life to Christ and have traveled around quite a bit, it seems that there was always an opportunity in each location I have been for service to God and his people. After my conversion in 1982, I moved across the country to Kumba from Bertoua. When I got there, I joined the Full Gospel Assembly that was growing and vibrant. I had a lot to contribute to that body of believers and also grew a lot in my faith. After I left and found myself in Ndjamena, Chad, I joined a vibrant Eglise Biblique de la Vie Profonde or Deeper Life Church. We carried out great outreach ministry in that city and planted several churches. Then I moved to Nigeria where I stayed for the next 10 years from 1989 -1999. In Nigeria, I got involved with several ministerial works including children’s church, youth ministry, mission journeys to Chad, Niger and Cote D’Ivoire. I also pastored a Church in Ihiala, Anambra State. Upon coming to America, God let us to the Pillar Community church in Cincinnati where I served as assistant pastor for nearly 10 years. In the meantime, I also served as the chaplain for the Cameroon family of Cincinnati (CFC). I also joined the College Hill Presbyterian Church as a counseling intern and eventually the interim director of care – it was through CHPC that I began to organize mission teams to Africa in 2004. I have continued to organize these mission teams since then. After Cincinnati, we moved to Ashland, Kentucky where I continued to organize mission teams to Africa. It is there that we joined the Nazarene church and I served closely with the pastor and preached from time to time. It was through the Nazarene connection that I got the current job at MidAmerica Nazarene University since 2013. Here my mission trips have been fully supported and I have been able to expand into East Africa – we went to Kenya in 2019. In each of the places named, it seemed that the Lord had some opportunity prepared for me to just fit in, I just needed to find it and fit right in.

In Kansas City I have also connected with the African Christian Fellowship where I serve as the missions’ coordinator. It has been fascinating to connect with other African Christian professionals from all over the continent.

1. *Always leave a tip after staying at a hotel with a nice note to the cleaner. I usually will place it in an open Gideon’s Bible to psalms 23. Leave a Gospel tract if you have one.*

When I lived in Kentucky from 2009-2013 as a professor with Lindsey Wilson College, most of my work was done in four community colleges in Kentucky and West Virginia. As a result, I spent a lot of time in hotels on those weekends. I got to build relationships with many of the people working in these hotels and heard their stories. Some became members of my ever-expanding extended family. Leaving a tip was always encouraging to them and guaranteed that I had even better service. Even without the potential for better service, it was fulfilling to give to the those at the very bottom of the chain who clean the rooms. I have continued to do it even if I spent only one night at a hotel.

1. *Don’t argue with a waitress at a restaurant. They could put nasty stuff into your food.*

I have learned that when I treat the attendant at the restaurant with respect, I get good service. There is no reason to be disrespectful to them. Their job can be stressful as they serve the public. I once saw a report on TV where an attendant was putting fries in his nose before putting on a plate to serve a customer that offended him. I have heard of people putting nastier items in food to serve people who have offended them.

1. *Be proud to be an African and to be an American at the same time. Appreciate and develop both cultures and teach your children to do the same from very early on.*

In my cultural identity development, I have understood that I need to embrace all my background and be proud of it. It is not a mistake where I was born, and all the things that happened to me in life. Instead of allowing any of the circumstances of my life to weigh me down, I will use all of them for God’s glory. God doesn’t make mistakes, so I can embrace all the identities that God has given me, and I will be proud of all of them. When I first came to America, I tended to de-emphasize my Africanness in favor of my Americanness. I wanted to learn how to be American which was not bad, but I did that in place of my Africanness. For instance, I did not teach my boys to speak Meta - which is a language I spoke growing up. I didn’t even try. If I had to do it again, I would fully embrace my African identity while I am learning how to be American.

1. *In church splits, neutrality is hard.*

When I was a young adult, our church split, and it was ugly. It was hard to see people who were together and working together become very antagonistic towards each other. I still remember trying to play the neutrality game and belong to everybody. When I went to fellowship with the group that had left, they asked me to leave if I had not decided to be with them. This happened to me twice with another group in another city. The second was painful because I was in a new city and needed fellowship and it took quite a while to find them. I felt like a child whose parents were going through a divorce and putting the child in an impossible position to choose sides.

1. *It doesn’t matter what side you choose in a church split, maintain love and respect for people on the other side.*

One of the reasons I continued to grow in my faith during the church split was that I tried to keep good relationships with the people who had left, since I obviously did not join them. When I went through another church split, I did not try to force myself onto the group that left. I continued to maintain deep respect for them, and we were able to still do some ministry together after the split.

1. *Compare yourself with history, not your generation. Every generation has some twisted views (lesson from CS Lewis)*

When I was growing up in Africa, big pants/trousers (called “apaga”) and high-sole shoes (‘salamanda’) for guys were the fashion. Men used to wear high heels hundreds of years ago. Very long and baggy shirts were also the fashion then. I look back at those things now and they look stupid and ignorant. It doesn’t matter what is trending now, it has probably been here before, and it will disappear again. Beware of cultural or fashion trends, especially trends that majority tend to follow. If you look hard at history, it has probably been here.

1. *Seek advice from many but take ownership for your decisions.*

Over the years I have been given advice by so many people. When I was a teenager, I was very impressionable to the extent that one of the older boys gave me advice about how to seduce girls. I thought since he was older, his idea was good. Needless to say that I soon learned that his advice was devilish. I tried to act on his advice, but it proved to be such bad counsel in retrospect. What I learned from that experience is that you need to examine every advice or counsel given to you before acting on it, regardless of who is giving the advice. At the end of the day, you are responsible for your own actions, regardless of who inspired those actions.

1. *Don’t keep a record of wrongs, rather keep a record of the good that others have done to you. Reciprocate when you have the opportunity to do good to them, their posterity or simply pay it forward.*

I have been inspired by how David’s friendship with Jonathan extended to Mephibosheth (Jonathan’s son). When David was running away from Saul, he did not have the time to repay Jonathan for saving his life. I have found that when I try to pay someone back immediately, the payback usually does not meet their need like what theirs did for me. So, I have decided to wait for the right opportunity to do good to those who have done good to me. At other times, if I cannot payback directly to the person or indirectly to their offspring, I just pay it forward.

1. *Islam is a religion not based on the truth that sets you free from the power of sin. It also has no assurance of eternal salvation.*

As a teen, I seriously considered conversion to Islam because I admired my neighbor who was Muslim. The inconsistencies that I saw in my friend made me to ask him questions. Despite his kindness and generosity, he lived a very immoral life. When I confronted him about this double life, his answer to me was that his sins happened at night. At that point I remembered that in Sunday School I had learned that God sees everything everywhere all the time. In looking back, I think my friend was honest. He just didn’t know that there was a savior who could break the power of sin in our lives, so we do not have to hide and live a double life. One year after this encounter with my friend, I heard the gospel and turned my life over to Christ – this is the best decision of my life to date.

1. *There are lots of devout, sincere, honest, and pious Muslims. Some are more sincere in their business transactions than many Christians.*

Looking at my friend from years back, I can attest to the fact that he was honest in his business dealings. I have had other Muslim friends since that time who have proven to be quite honest in their business dealings.

1. *Don’t let someone else destroy your faith by their hypocrisy -even one who has taught you truth before or Church leaders. Follow them only as long as they follow Christ (lesson from 1 Corinthians 11:1)*

After I was born again, the friend who had given me the gospel tract that led to my conversion had some problems in his own walk with Christ. When I met him almost two years down the road, he tried to lead me away from Biblical Christianity. By that time, I had learned a lot of scripture and I could spot the heresy he was trying to push on me. It seems that what he dabbled into was more like witchcraft in hindsight. What I learned from that experience is that you need to know scripture for yourself and not let anyone, regardless of their position, derail you from the path of truth.

1. *If you are persecuted for doing the right thing, don’t fight back trying to defend yourself. Let God vindicate you in due time.*

There was a time in my life when I felt accused from several quarters. I heard a lot of things said about me that were false. During that period, I seemed to be viewed as a villain in every way possible. As I look back, I am not sure how I went through that time. The one thing that is obvious is that the period came and went. In retrospect I would do even less of trying to defend myself for God to take all the glory. If you are accused of doing wrong, and you have done wrong, it is important to apologize – that is the mature thing to do.

1. *God is my real father.*

Growing up with a confusing or nonexistent relationship with a father figure was tough. I had an otherwise happy childhood because my grandmother made sure of it. However, I still remember nights when I cried myself to sleep because of the vexing question of my origins. My teens and early 20s was the time that this became a preoccupation. By this time, I had become born again but I still had to address this question. One of the mature sisters in the church listened to me carefully and then said, “God is your father and that should be enough.” It seemed that I finally received the answer that satisfied my deepest need. I was a child of God and when I have Him, earthly father or not, I was taken care of, I was loved, I was special, I was not forgotten. Soon after that, I discovered Psalms 73:23-28 which has become a passage to anchor my heart and life.

“Yet I always stay close to you, and you hold me by the hand. You guide me with your instruction and at the end you will receive me with honor. What else do I have in heaven but you? Since I have you, what else could I want on earth? My mind and my body may grow weak, but God is my strength; He is all I ever need. Those who abandon you will certainly perish; you will destroy those who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, how wonderful to be near God, to find protection with the Sovereign Lord and to proclaim all that He has done!” Psalm‬

1. *To marry a great woman or man, you must be a great man or woman (lesson from Robert and Rose Afor)*

My good brother Robert Afor, who has since gone to be with Jesus, made this comment when he was looking for a wife in the church. I remember staying up late and talking with him about the huge decision he was making. He had had a marriage that didn’t end well, and so, he was determined to make it right the second time. When he found Rose, it seems that he had hit the jackpot. In explaining his thought patterns, he simply said that he had resolved to be great to get a great woman. Their nickname in my book remains “The Greats!” His outlook had a huge influence on me because I decided to work on myself to be as good a husband as I could be. In other words, I had to be great if I wanted a great woman for a wife. I believe Rachel is a great woman; I am still working on being a great man.

1. *Christ must increase and I must decrease. Learn to lean on God and NOT on human wisdom.*

Between the end of 1985 to November of 1987, I was a fugitive from God. I had what I would term today as a theological crisis of faith. During this period, it seemed that no one could help with my theological questions. One of the main questions was how to balance God’s sovereignty with human responsibility. Nearly four years earlier I had a radical born-again experience that changed the trajectory of my life. However, at that point, I was struggling to make sense of theological questions and the application in the lives of believers. I saw so much hypocrisy in the Church that I could not justify or reconcile philosophically why I should continue in church. I left the church but still believed in Jesus because my born-again experience was so profound that I could not deny. After staying away from active church attendance for so long, I was beginning to see that in my personal life, I was becoming more and more drawn to sexual sin. I resisted but felt this inward pull towards things that I had never struggled with before. It seemed I was about to embark on a journey that led to utter darkness. Two or three events that stand out in my mind were situations where God miraculously delivered me at the last minute after my will power had acquiesced. After the third incident, I started to look for my way back to fellowship with God and other believers, but my pride could not let me just come back on the things I had been arguing about. So, while out of town in another city, a friend (John Kelly) who had known me earlier stopped by to invite me to church. It was a prayer meeting and the leader asked us to read from John 3:30 “He must increase, and I must decrease.” After the leader finished reading and started commenting, I was lost in deep conviction. I tried to pray but could not. So, I left and went to look for a pastor friend of mine (Salomon Ndegha). He was surprised to see me because he had never succeeded to convince me through argumentation. This day, however, I was not arguing. I just wanted to get right with God and His people. Philosophically, if Jesus were to increase in my life, I needed to decrease. We had a long talk and he fell asleep. However, it seemed I had hours and hours of conversion with the Lord that consisted of all the questions that I had ever had. When I finally fell asleep, it was in the wee hours of the day. When I got up, I felt light, and it seemed I had not had that kind of sleep in a long time. I did not have any questions, it seemed that a heavy load had been taken off my back – like in Pilgrim’s Progress. I got up in the morning and told him I was going back home (Kumba) to apologize to everyone I had hurt with my arguments and reconcile with the church. He was surprised and concurred (a caveat here is that his brother had to find some money for me to use for transportation back home). Everyone was happy to receive me back and when I was asked to speak, I just apologized without any justification. When asked about my questions, I simply said I had none. They could see that I had had a visit from the Lord. Our human philosophical arguments fall apart when we come face-to-face with Jesus. Looking back, I can truly say that if I have simplicity of faith today, that is when it started. Less than a year after returning to church, I was on my way to Nigeria to go to seminary to study theology with the full blessing of my church family.

1. *God is not afraid of your doubts if you genuinely want to know Him. He will meet your heart’s desire.*

The incident I narrated above where I learned to let Christ increase while I decrease showed me in so many ways that God was watching over me even when I was obviously going astray. In a certain sense, my doubts were sincere even if I was completely misguided. I wanted to know God and be sure about Him. The route that I took was not necessarily the good one, but I wanted answers from God. It seems that the Lord provided rest for my soul instead of mere philosophical answers and that is what I really needed. This is the concept that is expounded in Hebrews 4:9-11.

“As it is, however, there still remains for God's people a rest like God's resting on the seventh day. For those who receive that rest which God promised will rest from their own work, just as God rested from his. Let us, then, do our best to receive that rest, so that no one of us will fail as they did because of their lack of faith.” Hebrews‬

1. *Journaling is a great way to process your thoughts and record down history.*

I have journaled off and on since I was in my 20s. I found that when I process my thoughts through journaling, I tend to make wise and well-thought-out decisions generally. I have found that when I journal, I tend to carry less of the weight of what is happening in the moment psychologically. During the long-distance courtship with my sweet Rachel, journaling was a great way for me to process my thoughts. When I am faced with challenges, I find that when I can journal, I tend to figure things out. I have gone back a few times to read what I wrote in my journals during some tough times, and it has been interesting to see how I thought in those circumstances. I have used journals for writing down what is going on internally but also to talk to God.

1. *It is great practice to read the Bible through in a year.*

I learned this many years ago before I had the Bible electronically on my phone. I read the Bible to get the whole story. As I see it, the entire Bible is one story, with so many nuances. When you read or listen to all of it, you get the full picture. Many times, I find that some sections that I read one year and get very little might become a gem the next year. From time to time, I will get stuck in a particular passage. When that happens, I take the opportunity to dig deeper. If I don’t get anything that pulls my heart’s strings, I just keep reading/listening.

1. *You can commit any sin, so continuously watch yourself.*

Being in church since my late teens has convinced me that any believer can commit any sin regardless of standing. From my own personal experience, I found that my heart was drawing me to things that were forbidden – only God’s grace kept me from going down the dark road of sexual promiscuity. I have also seen many “strong” people of faith fall prey to sin – especially sexual sin. So, I say do not get complacent because sin is always knocking at the door. Believe in and trust people, but also possess a healthy dose of distrust in the human condition for yourself and others. This will keep you honest and alert not to cross certain boundaries.

1. *Do what you have to do in order to do what you want to do (a lesson from the movie The Debaters). This is especially true sometimes with school and work.*

I have had to use this lesson many times when faced with challenges on the way to accomplishing huge goals. When I was younger, it was mostly school. Nowadays, it is more about telling myself that there is no crown without a cross. I find that even in my relationships, I need to give before I can take. This give-and-take attitude has greatly enhanced my relationships and reduced the number of enemies that I have.

1. *When you are stranded, don’t freak out! Pray and listen to what the Lord will direct you to do. He becomes real in such situations. Remember He is watching over you.*

The fact that I left home young meant that there were times when I felt I didn’t have anywhere to turn to. In other words, I was stranded or lost. I have seen God come through so many times in my life that when I am at a crossroads, I start to look for the new thing He is about to do. This is the lesson that is taught in Isaiah 43:2, 19.

“When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you.” Isaiah‬

“Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now! I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there.” Isaiah‬

1. *Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God (lesson from William Carey - English Baptist missionary to India interpreting Matthew 28:18-20).*

This great missionary quote from William Carey has challenged me many times when I am tempted to shy away from something because it is above my league. I have learned over the years that if I do not attempt things that are higher than me, I will never be able to see God’s hand in helping me accomplish them. Believing that God can do big things is easier than attempting big things and trusting God to help you accomplish them. A word of caution here is that this should not be confused with human ambitiousness. If what I am trying to accomplish is just for self-aggrandizement, then maybe it needs to go to the cross first. That means that you need to lay the ambition on the altar and let God either take it away or take it and give it back as His, not yours. Stories abound in the Bible about this (Abraham and Issaac, Joseph and his dreams, Gideon and Israelites etc).

1. *A dissertation is a big project that can be overwhelming. To overcome it, break it down into small manageable pieces. Do this with any project that overwhelms you.*

When I did a dissertation, it was easier when I broke it into small manageable pieces. What happened was that I could focus on the little piece at a time and not worry about the rest of the big project. The saying goes that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a step. When I set small realistic goals, I put myself in the position to succeed and it builds my self-efficacy. Once you complete a big project, your confidence will grow to do even more.

1. *No sacrifice is too great to make on behalf of your children. They are your gift/sacrifice to the world and to God.*

I have watched our boys grow up into young men. Investing in them will enable me to help them to be able to invest into other people and so on. I tried to demonstrate to them the importance of having your life anchored in Christ.

**Biographical Note**

Dr. Acha Goris is married to Rachel Goris (who is an MK, an RN and works in hospice), and they have two adult sons Ike and Ingam. He holds a bachelor’s degree from West Africa Theological Seminary (WATS) in Nigeria in theology, two master’s degrees from the Theological College of Northern Nigeria in missiology, and Cincinnati Christian University in counseling, as well as a doctorate in counselor education and supervision from the University of Cincinnati. Dr. Goris has been training counselors since 2009, first at Lindsey Wilson College in Columbia, Kentucky, and currently at MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe, Kansas since 2013. Before that he pastored, did upholstery, and taught at WATS before migrating to the US. He and Rachel are missionaries at heart and take every opportunity to be involved in missions.

Dr. Goris has done non-medical counseling with the United States Military and is currently on standby as a Military and Family Life Counselor. Dr. Goris is also passionate about serving the poor in the community and has spent the last 8 years involved in the Fishes and Loaves ministry that feeds the homeless in the Kansas City metro. This is a ministry that Dr. Goris leads with his wife Rachel. The ministry is currently being run in partnership with the African Christian Fellowship of Kansas City metro where he serves as missions’ coordinator.

Dr. Goris’ major contribution is networking by organizing learning/mission/multicultural counseling immersion trips for students from the US to Africa and beyond. With such trips, he has taken students to Nigeria, Haiti, Cameroons, Kenya and a trip is currently being planned for South Africa with the possibility of other countries. He enjoys connecting people across cultural barriers and pointing them to Christ. In addition to serving on the board of Bread for Life, he also served on the US board of Friends of West Africa Theological Seminary. Dr. Goris is the faculty supervisor for the Academic/Clinical honor society Chi Sigma Iota for the MNU chapter.

Dr. Goris’ counseling interests are to mentor counselors in-training, strengthen marriages of the African Diaspora and help to demystify/destigmatize mental health in Africa. Consequently, Dr. Goris is currently working on a project with Dr. Susan Gitau and others to create a concise manual for Counselor Education in Africa.

Dr. Goris enjoys sports, travel, history and working on cars.

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