

A close-up photograph of a couple's hands clasped together. The woman's hand is in the foreground, wearing a diamond engagement ring on her ring finger. The background is blurred, showing the faces of the couple.

# *Baessics*

SETTING THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS  
TO MARRY WELL

**ERNEST WAMBOYE**  
WITH WATURI WAMBOYE

## **BAESICS: SETTING THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS TO MARRY WELL**

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*Thanks to the Author of Life, without whom we would still  
be dead in our sins and transgressions.*

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who have given us the treasure of time and  
the teaching of truth.*

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## TESTIMONIES

Praise the Lord! I just want to let you know that the Lord has done great things for me today. I yielded to God today and He just did wonders. I'm overjoyed today the Lord took all the burdens I had. I cried the whole time as we worshipped and asked the Lord that He takes the lead. I'm so happy now. I had to let go of the relationship. And now I am thankful for I will Let God have His way. I am delivered! I want to thank God for you and your wife Turi. May your ministry continue to change people like it did to me. And be so blessed so much. Thank you! Thank you. Thank you.

-I-

Hi...you are a real inspiration, I have been reading your blog... I sacrificed my relationship of 4 years to live pure. I had to quit to live right... sin graduates. I started with sex to abortion to porn to masturbation and before it could graduate again Christ saved me. I am changed I feel free and I thank God for people like you who are not ashamed to speak about sex. Nobody told me the depth of sex...I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Keep the good work you are doing Ernest and Waturi. I will join in teaching the youth about all the mistakes I made, I will use my scars as a testimony. We are set to wed on February 11th next year if God wills... I hope you won't mind if I use some of your writings.

-T.J-

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I've been a masturbator, a bisexual and not long ago indulged in fornication. And every time I plead with God in sorrowful tears repenting but it seems that after only two to three months I am back. Bisexuality almost became constant until the day I was chased out of school and since I was in my last year that's when I vowed not to go down that road again.

-M-

I can't help but thank Papa enough for you and your wife and the work you are doing. I was engaged from December 2014. Oh I loved this man after being together for almost five years. During this five years we broke up at least twice. We were friends but there was one thing, just this one thing- he wanted more than one woman to himself. I don't know how I survived after the engagement. I knew he would change, at least I thought so. But I was so wrong. We even went through Ndoa. Our families were happy and they loved us but I was scared because this other woman was still there in his life. I consented to having sex with him because I thought if I didn't then that would be even a reason for him to go out and get it with other women. All this was deception from the enemy I tell you! Long story short, we broke up a few months to our wedding and the next week he was already seeing someone in my neighbourhood. I had to bear with the pain of seeing him drop her almost every day. They moved in together after barely three months of dating. Has it been easy? No, definitely no. Has it been amazing? Yes! Because I have allowed Christ to work on me. I have surrendered myself to the Master and oh isn't the Holy spirit awesome! I don't blame myself for the things I had no control over. I forgive him and myself too. How I wish I had this information earlier! God found me in my brokenness and He is moulding me into a masterpiece. Now I



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know what the Lord saved me from and I thank Him daily for that. It's been three months since they moved in together and my phone cannot rest. He still wants me to be in his life as he "tactfully" handles her because apparently he confessed that he made a mistake. Oh well, the instructions from the Lord are clear- don't look back, my child, don't look back. Thanks for the work you are doing. I am a pro in copy pasting and sharing with my girlfriends. I don't want them to go through what I went through. Thanks Ernest and Waturi! Barikiweni sana, sana, sana!

-S-

What a rhema word! It has made me shed my tears in repentance pertaining movies and programs that have unworthy scenes. May God preserve my heart as I have decided never to entertain the same.

-D-

I am honestly finding it hard to move on! I have honestly made past mistakes, serious mistakes that I even strayed away from church because the guilt of being with a married man made me not to even go to church. But at some point I accepted that it's wrong- so wrong! I actually need to stop! How will I manage to heal yet I see him every day?

-O-

Thank you so much for writing this book. Truth be told, I am one of those who is struggling with lust and masturbation. It's embarrassing and I always feel ashamed every time I say it's over but I find myself back at it again. I believe that this guide will help me and I will finally get over this.

-M-

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My humble testimony: just before I started attending the series on Love, Sex and Relationships, I had reached my end concerning matters on sexual purity. I was tired of the wait and I just was about to go back to my ex even with the knowledge that he is not born-again. I was about to settle. I had believed that God had His best for me but I was just plain tired of the wait but God intervened by sending this forum my way because what the enemy had planned for evil God used for my good. I am glad to pursue purity with like-minded people as the word of God says in 2 Timothy 2:22. And I will continue to pursue purity especially now that I have made a public commitment to God. Thank you for obeying God in this area. It's true what they say- our obedience is linked to other people as well...*na kweli ni Jesus! (it really is Jesus!)*  
-G-

God used you to speak to my stubborn addictions, I got married thinking masturbation would stop but for a while it did not but through your articles and constant resistance I am free from the thing. I would do it immediately my wife left for work. It was such a strong force. I decided to tell you this so as to encourage you to keep up with the good work. Continue writing on this sir you do not know the number of lives you have transformed. May God reveal more to you and may you be quick to share it. Once again, asante for allowing God to use you.  
-M-

## INTRODUCTION

BAE /bei/ noun (informal).

1. *A term of endearment referring to one's lover.*
2. *A person's boyfriend or girlfriend (often as a form of address).*

E.g. "I'm going to see my bae."

BASICS /bey-siks/ noun.

1. *Fundamental facts.*
2. *Principles from which other truths can be derived.*

E.g. "Let's get down to basics."

BAESICS /bei-siks/ noun. (slang)

1. *Fundamental principles to make relationships with the opposite sex thrive.*

There is something special about a man and a woman in love. It is so profoundly beautiful such that even wise King Solomon admitted that of the four most wonderful things he could think of, he could not understand the romance between a man and a woman (Proverbs 30:18-19). Men and women were made for each other. Our differences complement each other. Our strengths and weaknesses complement each other. Even our physical bodies fit into each other so perfectly for sexual union.

In fact few topics arouse the interest of many such as that of a

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man and a woman in love. It's the crux of Romeo and Juliet, Beauty and the Beast, Shrek and Fiona and virtually every famous romantic love story we have ever heard of. One man, one woman and one love. Such stories befuddle us when they don't have happy endings. However, heartbreaks and pain seem to be the characteristic of many relationships between men and women.

Turi and I have our inboxes filled every month with hurting men and women who are crying for their relationships with the opposite sex to work. What we teach them, we will teach you in this book. If you are single, this book will teach you how to thrive in your singlehood and prepare yourself for a thriving future relationship with the opposite sex. If you are dating or courting, this book will challenge you to tweak your life in order to get the best that God offers for your relationship with your partner.

Our content is biblical and themed with lots of scriptures because we believe in the supremacy of the Bible as God's word and we believe in its inerrancy and inspiration by the Holy Spirit. We have seen very clearly in our own relationship and in those of our heroes and mentors, that when the scriptures are obeyed, men and women experience a deep kind of intimacy and affection that makes the world marvel. They want it as well. They crave to have what you have. What they do not realise is that all we need for life and godliness God has given us and has also revealed in His word for our benefit.

We also believe that the human being was not made to live for things. When you die, all the money, cars, estates and whatever tangible and intangible inanimate assets that you have accrued will not escort you to the after-life, even if they were piled into your casket. You will leave them all on Earth. In your eulogy, how you related with people will be the bulk of your memoirs- more than the toys you had.

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When your mother gave birth to you, your first reaction was not a silent ponder over how you would make it through the tough economy of your republic. Nay! Your first reaction was a cry for air and a need for human hands to hold you and make you feel loved. Why? Because you were made for relationships! In their death beds, dying people never request to see their bank account balances just one more time so that they may rest in peace. Rather, they ask to see their estranged spouses, children, parents, siblings and friends one last time. In irrational birth, you cried for relationships. In inevitable death, you will crave for relationships. Have the guts to admit that in between you were made for relationships.

Consider this the start of your relationship with our written thoughts in this book. Even in the prime of your life, no matter how much money you make, no matter how sexually attractive you become, no matter how fast you rise in your career, no matter how important your job becomes and no matter how educated you become, you will never really experience a complete fulfillment in your soul if you have all those things but your relationships are failing. We weren't made to live for things; we were made for relationships. We don't need things to enjoy life; we need life to enjoy things, and life is found in relationships. We were made to live with one other, work with one another and love one another.

We also believe that the core of our fulfillment in life comes from having good relationships on two fronts: firstly with our Creator and secondly with our fellow human beings. Jesus affirmed this in Mark 12:28-34. It reads:

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he*

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*asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*

*“The most important one, “answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

*“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

The lawyer’s response puts a fantastic seal on Jesus’ words when he says, “To love him (God) with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” In the eyes of God, the most important venture in life is to have a thriving relationship with Him and a thriving relationship with people.

There is a reason why loving God is at the foreground. It is because a cordial relationship with God our Creator sets us up for fruitful relationships with fellow human beings. The scriptures even affirm

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that a love for God is manifested in loving people. 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:20-21 says:

*“If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (ESV)*

It is our hope that after reading this book, you will have the wisdom and necessary knowledge to propel your life in that direction. It is also our prayer that you will practise what you learn. In the words of Jesus Christ in John 13:17, “Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them.”

### **Before we begin: The semantics of courting and dating**

The terms dating and courting have been used interchangeably throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century such that the meanings seem uncertain at times when you mention them in public. You will find some people in the church who vilify the term dating as something ungodly. I have listened to the arguments over and over and I often find that we waste a lot of time arguing over things instead of defining them. When things are properly defined, we often realise we are in the same boat and stop fighting one another.

The crux of our belief concerning pre-marital relationships is this: a relationship between a man and a woman should not be a trial ground but rather a commitment heading to marriage. We believe that the idea of getting into a relationship for fun or “just to see where it

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goes” is a waste of time and the reason for so many emotional heart-breaks among many young adults.

What the world calls dating is often trial and error relationships with no commitment. In fact, the original use of the word dating came about in the early 1900s in America. There was a cultural shift from men pursuing women in the context of their families to pursuing them in the context of exclusive meetings in restaurants and entertainment joints. The modern version of dating has evolved in some social circles to often refer to a hook-up culture; no commitment to the marriage institution- just having fun. However, in many other contexts it retains a bit of the 1900s American model whilst combining the intentional pursuit of marriage.

For our context, we will use the terms dating and courting to demonstrate chronological difference in the relationships between men and women. We will not use it to one-up each other theologically. Dating will refer to the period before an official request to marry the girl from the man’s end. We will refer courting to the period after that but before marriage. We will still use the term dating in this book because it is the culturally understood term for the kinds of relationships we are teaching. We hope the semantics will not result in unnecessary war of words that only ruin those who listen. 2 Timothy 2:14 “Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.” (NIV).

The use of the term dating in this book does not nullify the biblical viewpoint of man-woman relationships; it only helps us demarcate the timelines of the people in the relationship. The man-woman relationships we refer to are exclusive (meaning that the persons in them are faithful and committed to relating to each other as a couple to



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each other alone). In light of that, we beseech you, our fellow fundamental brethren, let's not make a mountain out of a mole hill.



# ONE

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

*"You have a 100% success rate at marriage if you do it God's way."*

-Jimmy Evans (Marriage Today)-

The woman watched as the man on the ground lay sound asleep. She wanted to touch him but she feared arousing him from his slumber. She did not want to scare him. She watched his bare chest rise and fall steadily as he inhaled and exhaled in his sleep. She took in his full form lying on the ground peacefully and imagined herself lying next to him. She imagined curling next to his equally naked form and resting in his arms until he awoke and found her next to him. Would he approve of her?

She ran her tender hands through her dark hair that dropped like a black waterfall onto her shoulders. She gathered it all in one tail and tied it in a knot behind the nape of her neck. Perhaps he may like her hair looking shorter like his, she imagined. She sauntered around his sleeping body, studying him and remarking to herself what a magnificent creature he was.

The sun came up in the hills in the distance. The shadows fled as light poured into the forest garden. She suddenly forgot all about the man and craned her neck at the winsome rise of the sun in the bright

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orange morning sky. She saw a flock of winged creatures fly in her direction, several feet in the air. The rays of golden sunlight pursued the flying critters all the way into a nearby cave above the waterfall. Her almond skin tan radiated brightly in the sunlight. She basked in its warmth and took in the mesmerising sight of the sunrise.

She was almost lost in its enchantment until she heard him cough. She gasped and whirled. Had he awakened? Should she wait behind one of the trees then reveal herself? She knew she was conspicuous in the greenery in the forest garden. He would not miss to spot her. She resumed her position behind him and began to look for a place to wait. She thought it out again and opted to stay put.

She hoped he would be pleased at her vulnerable sight. She hoped he would like what he saw. The wait unnerved her. Her cheeks grew hot and her breathing pace increased. What was this feeling in her body? The man didn't move, though. She took a few steps closer to him and her body's reactions multiplied in intensity. She stopped. He was making her breathless already. She rubbed her bare arms when a chill swept past her. She imagined it was the wind out in the open, though she heavily doubted it.

The temperature was perfect. The chill was caused by her tension. She looked at the man and she knew that she was breathless with desire for him. She longed to hear him speak. Was his voice like hers? His build was definitely different. He was sturdy and hard; she was soft and curved. She admired his build but she liked her own. She looked up and waited for a sign. Maybe Elohim would give her direction. Nothing came. Why did she have to meet him like this? What should he say when he sees her? Why wasn't he waking up? Would it not be terribly awkward if she startled him?

Adam awoke quietly. He had dreamed of heaven. The images

in his mind were hazy and he couldn't exactly describe how heaven was. His eyes peeled open and came in contact with a clear sky, flooded with fresh sun rays. He arose slowly from the grassy lawn where he had fallen asleep and immediately felt the change in his body. His right hand swept up to the left side of his torso. He felt the skin closing in. He jerked his palm away and shot his face to the opening on his side. A healing scar was taking nature's course. Some blood was on the grass. He feared he might have slept on a sharp stick or stone. His left hand searched the ground around his sleeping spot. There was nothing. What had caused him to bleed?

Then he felt her presence. Even without seeing her, he knew someone was within the vicinity. He was used to Elohim's surprises. Without turning, he spoke aloud.

"So have you come again to indulge me on how vast the universe is or are you still expanding it?"

The woman heard him speak and had no idea what he was talking about. She parted her lips to speak but nothing came out. What would she say? Was this part of the introduction?

"So it's the silent treatment, huh?" Adam asked. Elohim didn't respond.

Adam turned slowly to face the Creator. Contrary to his expectation, Elohim wasn't the one standing behind him. He jerked backward, a little surprised, when he saw the woman. Adam rubbed his eyes. There before him in full sight was the most alluring sight in all of Eden. Surely Venus had landed on Earth. Adam's eyes scouted the work of beauty standing mere feet away from him. This creature was very familiar and enchanting. Why he couldn't shift his gaze from her, only heaven knew. She was he, only a bit different. She was unlike anything he had seen yet like everything and more than he had desired

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to ever behold. He knew who she was the moment he took in her breathtaking sight- she was his.

Adam erupted in a fit of infectious laughter. His eyes lit with excitement! He laughed with so much exuberance, he feared she may deem him mad like the monkeys.

“Yes! Yes!” he cried out.

The woman’s heart skipped at his deep baritone. His reaction elicited a lot of interest in her. They were alike yet so different. She watched him leap in the air and cry out again.

“Yes, yes!”

A smile colonised her lips and she too erupted in laughter!

“Oh Lord, She is beautiful! She is beautiful!” Adam cried out. He looked up at the sky and cried again, “She is beautiful, Elohim!”

Elohim. That word was known to the woman. At least she understood that part of his talk. The woman stood immobilised, a smile pasted on her face, her shoulders shaking slightly with light laughter. She blushed when he studied her. His eyes hardly blinked. She was taken aback by the man’s stare towards her but grew soft when he calmed down.

“My name...is Adam. What’s yours?”

It was strange. She thought about it. She did not know. She was about to speak when suddenly she was up in the air. He grabbed her in his arms and swung her around. The woman giggled in delight. The man was very strong. She rested shelled in his embrace as he sank to his knees holding her and muttering words to Elohim. She heard him whisper in a deep heartfelt voice.

“Thank you! She is beautiful!” Then in calmness he said, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Eesha.” He felt the scar on his side with his right hand. “For she was

taken out of man.”

“Your name shall be Eesha,” Adam said. “Eesha means out of man.”

At the mention of that name, the woman blushed. Her blood coursed through her body in passion. She loved that he liked what he saw. She looked deep into his eyes and saw that he felt the same as she. She saw passion, desire and she saw a future.

Elohim descended from the sky in a bright light that flooded the forest garden. Adam presented the woman before the great white light that stood before them. The woman stood by Adam, speechless at all that was happening.

“With your permission,” Adam said to the light.

“Go forth!” a voice emerged from the light.

Adam went down on both knees, grabbed the woman’s palms, looked up into her sparkling eyes and said, “Eesha, will you be my spouse?”

Eesha giggled, looked at the light that she recognized as Elohim, looked back at the giddy man and said, “yes!”

And there in the morning of the garden, the man and his woman were united by Elohim. The first proposal. The first wedding. The first marriage. They were both naked and they felt no shame.

### **Start with God**

That is how we imagine Adam and Eve had their first encounter. It was the world’s first romantic relationship and it didn’t need several co-producers, assistant directors, make-up artists and stunt men to execute it. It was a successful love story because it had one person at the centre of it all- God.

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If we want to get the basics to marrying well right, we must start with the beginning of everything- the Creator God. Genesis 1:1 begins by saying, “In the beginning God...” If these first four words of Genesis are true (and they are), then it would only make sense to admit that all of God’s creation works well under His instruction and authority. And it is not an assumption. Throughout the Bible, God emphasises this.

When He is out of the picture in money matters, enslaving debt, greed, covetousness and avarice strike. When He is out of the picture in relationship matters, envy, adultery, hurt and all kinds of relational dysfunction strike. If you want to marry well, you must have a God-centred life. Or if you like, a theocentric life. Anyone seeking to know how relationships with the opposite sex ought to thrive should start here. Most people reading that imagine that I’m saying you ought to go to church and be religious. Far be it! I need you to go to the start of human history and see what I mean. The first four words of scripture are “In the beginning God.” These words are more than an opening sentence of the Bible. They reveal the main character. They reveal who the story is about. They demonstrate who has the spotlight. And if you fail to see that, all you need to do is read all the canonised 66 books of scripture. God’s word is about Him. Life is about Him. He is in the spotlight of the entire production.

For many people, the spotlights of their lives have themselves at the centre. As opposed to a theocentric life, a humanistic one is adopted. A humanistic life is all about self; one’s goals, one’s ambitions, one’s place in the universe and one’s own happiness. Perhaps even picking this book was a means to get yourself more in the spotlight. Genesis 1:1 implicitly asks us to surrender the spotlight to the one who deserves it. We are not the chief protagonists; God is. And if the God



of the Bible does not have this place in our lives, then every effort to enjoy any of His gifts, including that of a romantic relationship with the opposite sex will be futile. It will be the classic cart before the horse.

When you recall the encounter we just read of Adam and Eve, you may be tempted to take it at face value as merely the love story of Adam and Eve. God is challenging us to see this love story as the result of a life where he has the right place in our lives. That kind of romance develops when each party in the relationship lives life theocentrically. A blazing romantic union is a fringe benefit of a relationship where God has taken the position of Sovereign Lord.

Unfortunately, for a majority of people in our world, romance has taken centre stage. It has become the main act and God has been reduced to a filler performance during the break. He has been denied the centrality He deserves and has been relegated to the role of an advisor and consultant when the romance is dwindling. Some people only run to God when their act is falling apart. And they hope He will take the role of a stunt man and fix their mess when they pray. And if He doesn't, they may challenge Him with pseudo-threats such as, "If you are truly a good God..." and "If you really care for me..."

But you see, Beloved, such statements ultimately find their root in the belief that we are life's main act. They are humanistic in nature and not theocentric. If you think so, you may believe that God exists to fund your life campaign with His blessings. And if you live like that most of your good deeds will ultimately be directed to yourself- bribes to God to use His superpowers to keep you at the centre and in control. But the God of the Bible is telling us that He is not an assistant; He is God. He is the main act and we are His creation. And His gift of relationships with the opposite sex will only be realised to

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the maximum when we accept that He is God and we are not.

We will get a glimpse of Eden in our relationships when we pursue the giver of Eden and not Eden itself. To want a great relationship with the opposite sex while wanting nothing with the Creator is not uncommon in our generation. Looking to creation to give you only what the Creator can give you is the first error in our pursuit of romantic relationships. If you want to get the basics to marrying well, you must realise that God is not a means to our happiness; rather, our happiness is a result of God being in charge of our lives.

C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, famously states: God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing (1952:31). So do you want marriage more than God? You should want God more than marriage. Do you want anything more than God? You must want God more than anything.

But the Bible teaches us that none of us innately wants God more than anything. Romans 3:10-12 "...There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." This is a serious claim the Bible makes. All our goodness is being nullified by the one from the beginning- the only good one- the only God. Nullified on what grounds? On the grounds of sin- our sin. Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What is sin? The original term for sin stems from an analogy of an archer missing the target of a bullseye. The bowstring twangs. The arrow is fired. But it misses the target. The target is God's standard of righteousness. And every human being has missed and is always missing the target. All have sinned. All fall short. All miss the mark. Even the Pope, Mother Teresa and Billy Graham

combined offer no close shot to God's standard. But sin not only becomes a misfired shot. It becomes a way of living. We are slanted to sin. We are predisposed to miss the target. Psalm 51:5 "For I was born a sinner--yes, from the moment my mother conceived me." (NLT). We are all born with this defect. And with this defect comes no desire to please God but rather to please self.

We have no desire to be theocentric; all within us screams humanism. The primary motive of sin is to keep us focused on self and place God at the sidelines, if not get rid of him altogether. Timothy Keller once said, "We are so instinctively and profoundly self-centered that we don't think we are." A man cheating on his wife is not merely him breaking the vows he made on his wedding day; he is placing himself selfishly at the centre stage of life and kicking God out. His desires matter at that moment and nobody is stopping him. A woman bent to sleep with someone's husband is placing herself at the centre of the universe. Her wants become king at the moment and no Bible will tell her otherwise. And this is just the extreme stuff. The lying, the fornication, the bitterness, the gossip and all the stuff that ruin relationships on a daily basis are simply because God's position of being in charge of how life should run is being challenged by a selfish human being.

And because God's gift of freedom to express the will is available to every human being, the hurt can escalate to global catastrophes such as terrorism, rape and murder. God is not to blame. Every human being that abhors God's standard is. The terrorist and the cheating spouse have far more in common than they think: they all detest a theocentric way of living. The fornicator and the rapist have far much in common that they believe; the former detests a theocentric view of waiting for sex until marriage while the latter detests a theocentric

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view of consensual sex. Their actions may bear different consequences but their rebellion to God is similar and it is sin.

Sin inside of us does not want God to take His rightful position in our lives. And it is for that reason that in our fallen sinful state, we generally disdain His standards on sex, money, relationships and virtually anything that He has to talk about in His word- the Bible. The human being in their sin has no pure desire to wait for sex until marriage, to pray for his enemies, to think of others better than them and to keep all the Ten Commandments. And if we think we do, God is clear to let us know that those good deeds are filthy rags to him (Isaiah 64:6). Even our most righteous deeds are infected with sin's selfishness. We often give to the poor when there's an audience to see us- it's not about them but about us. The outside may be a white-washed tomb but the inside is a rotting carcass.

So you may have possibly picked this book and said, "Just give me the tips on having a great romantic relationship without any of the mumbo jumbo about God." We believe that is a dangerous thing to ask. It is synonymous to asking the pilot to get you airborne and then have him take a parachute and leave the rest of the plane to you. If you are not a trained pilot, you will crash that plane. You need the pilot in the plane if you want to enjoy the flight and if you want to arrive alive. You need him not just in the plane, but in the right place in the plane- the cockpit.

But even if you believe in God and stand for a theocentric way of living, you still need this. Even believers often kick God out of the picture. There is a word for that; the Bible calls it idolatry. From our experience in mentoring believers, God is still on the plane alright, but He has been given a passenger seat. You need the right person in the cockpit and that person cannot be you. That can only be the Creator.

## **Idols and The Heart**

I just mentioned that the insubordination of rejecting a theocentric life is called idolatry. It applies to your relationships. If you insist on having a relationship with the opposite sex without having God at the centre of your life, you will fall into the crushing disappointment of idolatry. Idolatry is the substitution of God for anything else. An idol is a God-substitute. It is the thing that you look up to; the thing that is the source of your life's significance, security and sense of being loved and accepted. It is the thing that is your refuge in times of trouble, anxiety, worry and doubt. It is what gives your life meaning. It what you run to when your world is falling apart. Idols may be money, power, human approval, sex, one's good looks, one's moral standing or even a person.

And when we don't have a theocentric way of living, our hearts become easily magnetic to idols. The trouble with idols is that they take the role of God and vow to fulfil what He can but they fall drastically short in delivering their promises. Idols in themselves are often good things. The bad thing lies in what we ask of them. We often ask idols to substitute God and give us only what He can give. Well, what is it? What is this that only God can offer? What is the thing that gives us a theocentric life? The answer is the Gospel. The Gospel is the only way to live a theocentric life. From the Gospel, we learn that God gives us what our hearts deeply long for. And what our hearts deeply long for is unfailing love, assured security and purposeful significance. And from these three things we can understand what the Gospel is, what our hearts long for and how God offers it.

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### Unfailing Love

When a boyfriend forgets his girlfriend's birthday and a fight breaks out, a few things may be said by either party which are unloving. They may even end the relationship on that note. The boyfriend failed the girlfriend. When the girlfriend disrespects her boyfriend in public, a verbal fight might ensue. Things may get ugly and embarrassing. The girlfriend failed the boyfriend. Often in a relationship, we know we are loved based on the response we receive from our partner. If you were asked, "How do you know you are loved by your partner?" you will most likely respond by stating how they react to your goodness towards them. The love we receive from them is often based on our current behaviour and actions. It is conditional. And when this current behaviour and actions fail, the couple often states, "We have fallen out of love."

God's love is different. God offers unfailing love. What does that mean? Well, for starters it means that His love is without conditions attached. His love for you does not change based on your behaviour, the lack of it or our circumstances. Human affection tends to do that. Unfailing means that it is unconditional. It is not altered by good days and bad days. It is constant. Secondly, it means that it is flawless. It is not seamed with underhand demands. And God demonstrated this love for you perfectly in the Gospel through the person of Jesus Christ. This flawless and unconditional love was demonstrated in the mission of Christ on earth. His goal was to pay for the sins we committed. To do that He had to offer Himself without expecting any favour from us because we are incapable of offering anything of significant value to a holy God. Knowing we could offer nothing, He came anyway. This is unconditional love. To be accepted by God, He

had to live without sinning. And this He did. This is flawless love.

The Bible teaches us that His death was a substitutionary punishment. Take it as if this life is an exam. None of us can pass the exam of life because we all fall short of God's glory. Christ Jesus, our Lord decided to sit the same exam of life that we failed and He passed 100%. But here is the game changer. He took His paper and erased His name and wrote yours instead. He took your failed exam and erased your name and wrote His. His perfect score of 100% is now credited to you and Jesus Christ is debited from your failures. You receive eternal life for an exam you never participated in if you accept Christ.

And what does Christ get? Thirty-nine lashes of the whip. A split open back bleeding like a tap. A crown of thorns piercing His veins. Scorn and abuse. He hangs naked in front of His mother and followers. He is pierced on the side and mocked to come down and save Himself. Yet His hanging on that cross is saving us. The wages of sin is death, Beloved and Jesus took the tab. You are accepted into God's Kingdom, not because of anything you have done, but simply by believing on Him who did it all for you. It will take humility to admit you cannot sit the exam and see how much He loved you.

Christ's flawless and unconditional love is the water that our sinful hearts long for. His love says that we are affectionately embraced and our sin is taken away even when we have failed completely. And his flawless record is now imputed on us and we are perceived by God as if we never sinned. The abortion is forgiven. The lies are forgiven. The adultery and fornication are forgiven. The words we could not take back are forgiven. All is forgiven for those that ask. 1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Jesus Christ never failed you. He then took the punishment of

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flogging and crucifixion you should have taken. He never failed you. He lives a flawless life on your behalf. He never failed you. He then laid His life down and rose from the grave. He never failed you. Christ will return for those that are His. And if you belong to Him, He promises He will never fail you. His love is unfailing.

The only source of unfailing love comes from the cross of Christ- the Gospel. We see God pour out unconditional affection towards us by sacrificing His only Son. And if we can grasp the Gospel, we can realise that it is futile to expect this kind of love that our souls crave for from any other source. Any other source that claims to offer this is an idol. Any other thing that competes with God for your heart in this regard is an idol. I once saw a funny meme on Facebook that said, “Ladies, this man Jesus died for you; your boyfriend cannot even faint for you.” Behind the humour is a deep message that unfailing love is found in the one who died for us to rescue us from mortal death. This is the deep set longing for your soul, Beloved, and your boyfriend or girlfriend cannot give it to you.

### Assured Security

God offers assured security. The second deep longing for the human soul is to be secure. On a base level, we prefer secure neighbourhoods, we lock our doors and we insure our cars. Why? We want everything to remain intact when storms come. Our deep longing for security is revealed in times of trouble. And whatever we run to is our source of security. The most common thing humans run to for security is money. Look at what Job says:

*“If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You*



## *First Things First*

*are my security, ' if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained ...then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high. " Job 31:24-25,28*

Job counts his hope in finances as security to be unfaithfulness to God. He implies subtly that God should take that role of security in his life. The futility of Job's money as security is seen when it is incapable of saving him from the calamity he faced. A one-hundred dollar bill could neither stop the Titanic from sinking nor preserve the life of any man on board. For you who hopes to marry well, you must know that money is not the only idol of security that is wooing your heart.

Your security may also be in a person. When we find ourselves defaulting to a human's view above the scriptures, we have left a theocentric life and placed our security in man. When we run to men and women to help escape the worries, troubles, doubts and anxieties of this world, we have placed our security in man. Yet man is so feeble. Human relationships face the uncertainty of people failing us. Even solid marriages face the uncertainty of death. Then what happens when your security lies in a coffin and is being lowered six feet under?

The Gospel says that the most secure place you can be is in having your sins forgiven and eternally saved from the punishment of your sins. The Gospel says that the biggest security for your soul is in having a relationship with Him. And God in His compassion for you guarantees a safety zone.

*"The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish*

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*us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.” Psalm 103:8-14 (NLT)*

Look at that! He understands your weakness and stands by you. He doesn't reject you, cast you aside and give up on you. And He assures us that if we rest in His love through the Gospel of Jesus, we will not be separate from Him.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39

Our safety is so solid and everlasting that God promises security that surpasses the certainty of death. Any other source of security for your soul is an idol and with it is a crushing disappointment when it fails to deliver.

## Significance

God offers significance. The third and final deep longing for your soul is to have a life worth living. With the certainty of God's love and se-

## *First Things First*

curity for your life, the natural response for those that submit to Him is to live for Him. When God's love and security for your life is unsure, the natural response is to try look for something else to live for. For some it could be a career, children or even a marriage. But these things only become idols because they cannot quench the deep desire for our soul. Only the Gospel can. The Gospel says that as soon as you submit to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, He gives you prime status at that moment.

He begins by calling you His friend. John 15:15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." The Creator of the heavens is not calling you a servant but a friend.

He continues by calling you His child. John 1:12 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God." On account of your sin you were an enemy of God. Through His Gospel, the enmity is dissolved. Your status is no longer inimical to him. You are restored to a position of sonship. You are family. The murderers of His son have been invited to be His children.

He then bestows power and authority to you. Romans 8:17 says "Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." God then states that through his Gospel you have ruling power similar to Christ. This shall be manifested in the Millennial Kingdom when all evil will be destroyed, but we must realise that the author of Romans does not use future tense. He says "you are." Not "you will be." The God of the Gospel is giving you a power that no earthly source can guarantee.

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Why would the God of the Gospel call you a friend, His child and grant you all this undeserved power? Apart from the overarching reason of His passionate love, it is also because He has work for you to do. He requires your life to reflect His character. He requires you to live for Him and bring many who do not understand the Gospel into His sheepfold. When we live for anything else more than we do for the God of Gospel, we devalue our purpose. When a man tells a woman that he lives for her, it sounds romantic, but it is cheap. When living for the God of the Gospel, all other areas in your life fall into place (including a romantic relationship with the opposite sex).

### **The Gospel and Your Identity**

David said this about false gods or idols: “Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.” Psalm 16:4 (NIV). David is right- when the place of God is taken by a person, we suffer more and more. Idols promise you unfailing love, assured security and purposeful significance and require you to sacrifice to them in order to get them. Yet they don’t deliver at all. David must have found out about that the hard way and was inspired to write this verse in Psalm 16. He stopped sacrificing to false gods that don’t satisfy. Jesus is the only true God who does not require your sacrifice to fulfil you.

On the contrary He sacrifices Himself on the cross to demonstrate that you are loved, secure and significant if you believe in Him. Bruce Marshall stated “The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God.” (1945:108). When anything else (even a person) takes the place of God, it is a reflection on your identity.

Whatever makes you know you are loved, secure and significant feeds your identity. God requires that your identity is in Him before you come into a relationship with the opposite sex. Imagine you were called for dinner by the president- just you. The president wanted to meet you only! Imagine him sending a chopper to pick you with six body guards. But after the dinner, you would be back to your old self. No plane. No bodyguards. No State House. Earthly love, security and significance do not last. But God's does.

### **Idols and Relationships**

So before we look at the basics to marrying well, we must ensure that the foundation we are building on is rock solid. We must start with God. One of our favourite marriage speakers are Jimmy and Karen Evans. Pastor Jimmy frequently says, "You have a 100% success rate at marriage if you do it God's way." Are you doing it God's way? Is He LORD? Have you uprooted the idols of your heart? Have you started with God? You must deal with the idols in your heart as far as relationships are concerned in order to marry well. Here are a few questions that can help us confirm idolatry.

*Have my current/past relationships interfered with my personal devotion to God?* Have relationships with the opposite sex interfered with my proximity to the God of the Gospel. Have these relationships been spiritually draining yet have me still cling to them powerfully? For a believer, have your current/past relationships hindered Christian fellowship? Have they cut you off from fellowship of the word with other believers?

*Does the absence of the relationship cause anger or inconsolable frustration?* Does the idea of not being married/not being with

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this person debilitate us and leave us joyless? Does the idea of this relationship ending give me deep set anxiety, worry and even depression?

*Without this relationship, is my life without real lasting meaning?* Do I get my sense of importance and reputation from having a relationship with the opposite sex? If your relationship was to end, would you conclude that you are ruined? Does the idea of being single sound like a curse?

*Do I depend on this relationship for my spiritual growth?* Do I depend on this relationship as the core support of my life? Do I depend on this relationship to meet my financial needs? Do I depend on this relationship for emotional stability?

The alternative to idolizing marriage is idolising independence, which I have not belaboured. However, Keller states: While traditional societies tend to make an idol out of marriage (because they make an idol out of the family and tribe), contemporary societies tend to make an idol out of independence (because they make an idol out of individual choice and happiness) (2011:231). The most common result for those who idolise marriage is to compromise on convictions. The most common result for those who idolise independence is to become impossible to please as far as selecting a mate and settling down is concerned. The God of the gospel must take centre stage in our hearts in order for us not to fall victim to any of these false gods. If we truly want to marry well we must start with God.

## TWO

### YOU NEED A MASTER

*"You are under qualified for the job of master and commander of your own life."*

-Timothy Keller-

A friend of ours broke up with his girlfriend. A few weeks later, he was telling us of this new girl he had met in church and wanted to start dating. When we suggested that he takes things slow and evaluate his previous relationship, the man told said that he just couldn't imagine himself single. Besides, he said what if the girl was taken by someone else while he was in his singlehood. Would he ever get another girl like her? This fear was causing him to jump into a new relationship with a girl he hardly knew barely three weeks after the previous break up. The relationship that had ended had lasted for over two years. He neither took time to evaluate the relationship nor mourn the loss.

Do you see the problem here? The man perceives singlehood as a problem. In his own words he admitted, "I can't stay single." Unfortunately, many young adults view singlehood in a similar fashion. Yet the single years are actually a fantastic time to prepare for a relationship. Once our identity and foundation is anchored in the Gospel and once we realise that the only way to be truly fulfilled is to live a theocentric life, then we are ready to take the right step in the direction