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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this book to Adenrele, my best friend, to Oluwatetisimi & Babajimi, the fruits of my choice; and to HillCity, the people who make my world go round.

*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward.*

**HEBREWS. 11: 24 NKJV**

**A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION**

I was born and raised in the ancient city of Ibadan. But if you ask my 7-year-old self, he would say that we lived on the wrong side of town. It was rather too crowded and noisy for my liking; somewhere deep inside, I felt like we deserved better. So, I walked up to my father one day and asked “Daddy, why do we live here?” Please bear in mind that this question was coming from the restless and talkative little version of me. In those days, I wore people out with endless questions and irrelevant stories.

I am now as old as my father was on that faithful day, and honestly, I would do the same thing he did. His intention was not to answer my question but to bring closure to this uncomfortable conversation I was about to start. He simply said: “I like it here. When you grow up you can live wherever you choose to live”. Case closed.

Mission accomplished. He succeeded in keeping me quiet, but unknown to him, he had also kicked off a deeper conversation within my young mind, but this time around, it was a conversation no adult could control. His words played back repeatedly in my juvenile mind and triggered my boundless imagination: “When you grow up you can live wherever you choose to live”. Unconsciously, my dad had given me the greatest gift he ever gave me in his lifetime - he introduced me to the power of choice. And on that unforgettable day, I made a choice: “When I grow up, I will live in a serene environment; amongst the rich and noble”.

From that moment, I started feeling very good about myself, just thinking about my choice gladdened my heart and brightened my countenance. That was well over twenty years ago. It’s a little past 4:00 AM and it’s really quiet now. I sit in my study, revising my very first book. Just as it was 12 years ago when the first edition of this book was released, so it is now.

Apart from the sound of a car engine that would soon break the silence when my neighbour sets out for work, it’s going to be this quiet for the rest of the day. Yes. I got what I chose. Since I moved out of my parent’s home, I have lived in very quiet and secure neighbourhoods. But more importantly, I have continued to live conscious of the power of choice.

I have made some very good decisions and I must admit, some bad ones too. I have seen many victories, and I have had my share of blunders. I have done some things that I am proud of, and some others I wish I never did. Nevertheless, I am a very happy man today, because I discovered very early, the greatest power known to man - The Power of Choice! My strategy for success and unending happiness is very simple: I try my utmost best to make very good decisions all the time. This moves my life in the right direction and rewards me with fulfilment and confidence.

But being human, I make mistakes from time to time. What I then do is to make sure I follow the wrong decision with a very good one. This reduces my loss and restores my joy. The power of choice does not make me immune to life’s challenges or human errors, what it does is put me in the driver’s seat of my life. I cannot control the challenges life will throw my way, but I can choose my response.

I can choose how beautiful I want the rest of my life to be. I can choose my friends, my career, and how to spend my time and money. I can even determine some of the things that will happen after I exit this side of life, by simply writing a will. I have the power. I have written this book to let you know that you too can be as happy as you want to be and get all that you want out of life, by exercising your power of choice.

Reading this book right now is proof that you have a choice as to what happens in your life. This book is a collection of some of the principles I have discovered about the power of choice – simple principles that anybody can put to use. Read them carefully, apply them to your life, and watch things turn around for the better. But don't keep this discovery to yourself, share it with others, especially those in a difficult season of life. Let them know they have a choice.

I am counting on you.

**YOU’VE GOT THE POWER**

You have the God-given ability to determine what happens in your life. I must admit upfront that it took me a while to grasp this principle. Being the youngest of four siblings, I had no control over my life for a very long time. What I did was what the adults around me said to do. To start with, I didn’t get to choose my nationality, my parents, my skin colour, and most importantly, my height.

Left to me, I would have chosen to be an American; born to very rich parents (being a second-generation Buffet or Musk won’t be a bad idea); and I definitely would have designed myself to be at least six feet tall as an adult. So, I was born disgruntled. The nurses and especially my parents had no idea why I cried the moment I was born (just kidding). And from that moment, people kept making decisions for me without asking my opinion. Initially, I couldn’t blame them; I mean as a baby, I was absolutely dependent on others.

But even when I became mature enough to maintain intelligent conversations, nobody consulted me; they just went ahead to decide for me anyway. I am almost certain you can identify with me. Even as an adult, people in positions of authority assume they know what’s good for you, and so they decide anyway without consulting with you. The government does it all the time. Husbands do it; wives do it; parents do it; bosses do it; everybody does it.

And where has this landed us? We are fast becoming a society of victims. Everybody is blaming somebody for their lot in life – “My parents didn’t send me to the right school”. “I was raised by my grandmother”. “My husband is insensitive to me”. “My wife is not as beautiful as she was when we just got married” “The economy is bad”. “The government is corrupt and incompetent”. “My boss is wicked”. “My village people are on my case”. Some people’s blame list could pass for a mini book.

But here’s the first lesson I believe we all have to learn about life – **Successful People Don’t Play the Blame Game; They Take Responsibility**. This was the first lesson God taught Adam; but like so many of us, he didn’t master it in class, he had to learn it the hard way. Chapter 2 of The Book of Genesis records that God placed Adam in the garden He had planted, and gave him the responsibility to care for it. Secondly, God brought all the animals to Adam, to see what he would call them; and whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. In all these, God was revealing to Adam his power of choice.

God put him in charge of the garden without telling him exactly how to keep it. God asked him to name the animals without giving him suggestions. And after he was done, God did not alter any of his decisions. In essence, God was saying to Adam, “You are fully in charge. Whatever you choose is final”.

But Adam missed the point. So, when God asked him why he ate the forbidden fruit, he blamed Eve and blamed God for his predicament. Adam lost his place in the garden, not just because he sinned, but because he refused to take responsibility for his actions. I keep wondering what would have happened if he had just fallen on his face and told God he was sorry. Knowing the merciful nature of God, maybe things wouldn’t have turned out so bad for them.

And just as it was in the Garden of Eden, so it is today; all the hardship and misery in our world are consequences of someone’s irresponsibility. Please understand that our lives can be divided into two seasons. In the first season, you are dependent - unable to make your own decisions; bound by whatever others decide. The second season begins when you start making your own decisions. Your success in life begins when you decide to kick off your second season; and by the quality of choices you make.

These seasons have absolutely nothing to do with your age. Some twenty-year-olds are already in their second seasons, while some forty-year-olds are still in their first seasons. Some people live and die in their first season – they never take responsibility for their lives. They blame the coach, blame the referee, blame other players, blame the weather and even blame the spectators till the game is over. The earlier you start taking responsibility, the better your chances at a life of fulfilment and significance.

When you consciously kick off your second season, you may even come to appreciate some of the choices others made for you in the past. Today I sincerely thank God for my Nationality, my parents, my siblings, my skin colour; and my height (did I just say my height? Okay, now that I am married, I guess it’s not a big deal). And when I consider my talents and the possibilities ahead of me, why would I be a second-generation “anybody” when I can be a first-generation “me”? If you have not kicked off your second season, you are missing a lot. Start now! Stop blaming your parents, the government, or any other person for that matter, and start taking responsibility for your life. Am I in any way trivializing the impact of the wrong decisions, and the mistakes of others in our lives, especially when we were younger? Not at all.

But let’s face the fact – fixing the blame does not fix the problem. We can however reverse the consequences of our negative past by taking responsibility for our lives. Responsible people are never at a loss; they learn valuable lessons from their past and at the same time, determine their future, just by assuming full responsibility for their lives. You can choose your future. Yes, you can! You can choose how happy you want to be; what you want to do with your life; what kind of home you want to build; whether to work for a salary or to run your own business.

You can even choose when you retire, how you retire, and what to do after you retire. No matter what happened in the past, the future is up to you. You may not be able to choose your country of origin, but you can choose your country of residence. You didn’t get to choose your parents and siblings, but you can sure choose your spouse. Please don’t allow your first season to colour your second season; or worse still, to be the only season of your life.

The story of Johnnetta McSwain is a perfect example of what happens when you embrace your power of choice by taking responsibility for your future, despite a traumatic past. John C. Maxwell shares her story in his insightful and instructive book on personal development - The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth:

For more than thirty years, she was someone who saw little value or potential in herself. But to be honest, there were many legitimate reasons for her poor perception of herself. She was born to a single mother who didn’t want her and told her so

She and her sister, Sonya, who was a year older, along with a cousin, spent the first five or six years of their lives being raised by their grandmother in Birmingham, Alabama. But the house was also shared by three uncles, who abused all three of the children psychologically, physically, and sexually. Johnnetta was scarred both physically and emotionally. “By the time I was five years old,” says Johnnetta, “I had already started to believe that I was not only inferior, but I was also a child abandoned by her own mamma. As a child, I had no place, no voice, and no worth at all.

When Johnnetta and Sonya’s mother learned about the abuse, she moved the three girls to a new home. But the abuse continued; this time from the men her mother brought home. Sonya ultimately responded by living on the streets and turning to crack cocaine. Johnnetta avoided drugs, but she spent much of her time on the streets and dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. She had her first child out of wedlock at age nineteen, then a second child in her mid-twenties.

For the most part, she lived in government-supported housing and on government assistance and relied on her boyfriends for additional support. To keep herself in designer clothes, she resorted to shoplifting. Sonya’s perspective poignantly sums up the state they were in: “Everybody in my family been in jail, on drugs, didn’t finish high school, so what I got to live for? What I got to amount to? Nothing! What I got to accomplish? Nothing. Johnnetta’s 30th birthday caused her to look in the mirror. She didn’t like what she saw.

She writes, "That day I woke up and realized I had absolutely nothing to celebrate—no money, no full-time job, no home, no husband, and no clue, not even the will to do better.… At last, I knew it was time to make some changes". She wasn’t happy with her life, and she realized that if she continued in the same direction she was going, her two sons would also be headed for trouble. As far as she knew, not a single male member of her family had ever finished high school. Many died young or ended up in jail.

She didn’t want that for her boys. For Johnnetta, the process started with her working to get her GED. She took a twelve-week course to prepare and then took the test. She needed a score of 45 to pass. She received a 44.5. But she was determined to make something of herself, so she scheduled a retake at her first opportunity. When she passed, she was excited to be chosen to speak at the graduation ceremony. No one from her family bothered to attend. Johnnetta knew that if she was going to change, she needed to leave Birmingham and get a fresh start.

And she wanted to do something no one in her family had ever done—go to college. She decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia, and was motivated by a profound thought: “I get a chance to be anyone I want to be.” “It took her almost three years to pull it off, but she made the move. Soon afterwards, she enrolled in Kennesaw State University, deciding to take more than a full load every semester. She was thirty-three years old when she started school.

She was street smart, but not very book smart—at least not at first. That intimidated her in the beginning. But for the first time in her life, she was determined to better herself. And soon she realized she could do it. “I realized I didn’t have to be smart,” Johnnetta explains

“I just had to be determined, motivated, and focused. This came with a high price tag for me. I had to exchange my thinking. I had to think like a smart person.” Not only did she study hard and stay focused, but she also sought out the smartest person in each of her classes and asked to study with her.

Soon she was studying and thinking like the best students in the school. She also maintained the vision she had for her future. At the beginning of every semester, she went to the bookstore on campus and tried on a cap and gown, “looking at herself in the mirror and imagining what it would be like to graduate. One day when a classmate was talking to her, she had a realization. The classmate was saying, “I don’t love myself I’m a nobody.” Johnnetta responded, “You sure can love you if I love me.” And that’s when it hit her, maybe for the first time. “I realized I loved myself.” She had changed.

She was turning into the person she wanted to be, that she was created to be. Johnnetta completed the work for a bachelor’s degree in three years. Then she enrolled in graduate school, where she earned a master’s degree in social work. As of October 2012, she was working toward earning her doctorate.

Some people struggle to believe they have the power of choice; they find it difficult to believe that God created each one of us with the right to determine what happens in our lives.

After all, He has a plan for every one of us. So how do we reconcile The Will of God with The Power of Choice? Let me show you the big picture: God created the whole world and created each one of us with a definite plan in mind. But God also gave each person He created, the power to choose what happens in their lives. In this unique relationship, God reveals His intentions to man; but man has the right to choose it or not. Please understand that it is not that God is powerless against man, or that God cannot make us do whatever He wants; but God, in His love chose to share His power with us.

His will is for man to be the final authority on earth, just as He is the final authority in Heaven. God’s will is to rule the earth by influence; not by force.

*“The heaven of heavens is for GOD, but he put us in charge of the earth.”*

**Psalms 115:16 (MSG)**

*“Then I ask, "Why do you care about us humans? Why are you concerned for us weaklings?" You made us a little lower than you yourself, and you have crowned us with glory and honour. You let us rule everything your hands have made. And you put all of it under our power…”*

**Psalms 8:4-6 (CEV)**

It is the ***will*** of God for you to have a ***will*** of your own. Your power of choice is a gift from God. What you do with it is your way of saying “thank you”. A pertinent question to which we shall pay some considerable attention later in this discourse is “What happens when a man’s choice is contrary to the will of God?” But for now, the fact before us is that you indeed have the right and ability to choose what happens in your life. Someone might say “How can I choose what I want when the odds are stacked against me?” Haven’t you heard it said that “life makes a way for a man who knows where he is going”? When the force within you is stronger than the forces against you, your victory is inevitable! You may be disadvantaged right now, but you won’t be forever.

Somewhere along the line, your opportunity will come. The question is: will it meet you prepared? No matter where you are now, arm yourself with a compelling dream of your future; choose what you want your life to look like, and start preparing for it. Your dream is your prophecy! God will come to your aid; and in the process of time, your expectation will become your experience.

**WHAT YOU CHOOSE IS WHAT YOU GET**

To every choice there are consequences. Isaac Newton was right when he said “To every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction”. Some call this principle The Law of Cause and Effect; The Bible calls it The Law of Sowing and Reaping.

*“You cannot fool God, so don't make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant.”* **Galatians 6:7 (CEV)**

To every choice there are consequences. Where you are today is the outcome of all the choices you have been making in your life. A choice is not an end in itself. Every choice sets in motion a series of events, some of which you cannot reverse. Have you heard about Esau? That was one guy who made a terrible choice he couldn’t reverse:

*“Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act and wanted God's blessing- but by then it was too late, tears or no tears”*

**Hebrews 12:16-17 (MSG)**

We must be careful not to confuse forgiveness with consequences. God will forgive our sins, but may not interfere with the fallout of our wrong decisions. What you choose will determine where you end. In Jeremiah 18, God says if He decides to prosper a nation, but that nation resorts to sin, He will change His mind about them. When He decides to pull down a nation, but the nation repents, God says He will repent of the evil He has planned for them. In other words, our choices determine the move of God in our lives.

Moses and the first generation of post-slavery Jews were all supposed to settle in the Promised Land. When God enlisted Moses, His intention was not for Moses to merely lead the Israelites for a while. God said, “Take them out… and bring them in”. But in the course of their journey, when God instructed Moses to Speak to the rock, Moses struck the rock and thereafter, lost his opportunity to lead Israel into the Promised Land. God had said to David “I will establish your throne forever”; but the choices of Solomon, his successor, undermined that promise.

We humans are powerful on earth because God made us sovereign. However, no man can alter the plan of God; he can only remove himself from being a part of it – from playing the role God chose him to play in the plan. When God called Joseph, it was not just about Joseph. God had earlier made a promise of deliverance to Abraham - that after about four hundred years of forced labour in Egypt, his descendants would be delivered. Therefore, when God began to reveal dreams to Joseph, it was not so much about him, but about God’s promise to Abraham.

If Joseph had refused, God would simply have turned to someone else. That person may not be as strong, or as qualified for the assignment, but God will use him anyway; for with God, all things are possible. When a man makes a choice contrary to God’s plan and purpose, God will simply replace him. God promised Abraham that He would deliver his descendants from Egypt, and bring them back to their land. But the very people who left Egypt were not the same ones who entered the Promised Land; but God’s purpose was fulfilled - the descendants of Abraham left Egypt, and possessed the Promised Land - but by choice, some did not make it.

They could have made it, but they didn’t. Not because they didn’t want to, but because that was the consequence of their choices. Here’s my point: it is possible to make a choice without desiring its consequences. For example, the average teenager who messes around with hard drugs never wants to be an addict or a derelict; he just wants to have fun. Addiction, however, is one of the consequences of drug abuse.

It is therefore wise when making decisions to look beyond immediate pleasure, to consequences. But it is also pertinent to note that even when you are suffering the consequences of a wrong decision, hope is not lost. You can receive healing and recover lost ground by making a series of good decisions. Don’t let your mistakes define you. You are only a “junkie” if you keep abusing drugs.

If you can start, then you can stop. Never be deceived into thinking that you can’t help yourself. But even if you can’t, God can! All you have to do is ask. Consider the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15: 11-32: He took his share of his father’s estate, took off to a distant land, and squandered his newfound wealth on riotous living. When his party was over, so was every other thing: money, friends, and opportunities.

And his timing was bad – he ran out of money at the beginning of a recession! So, things went from bad to worse – the life of the party became the lowlife in a pigsty. But the Bible records that one day, he came to his senses; this was his “defining moment”. He concluded that a slave in his father’s house had a better life. He must have said to himself, “I may have lost everything but I still have hope”. From that moment, he began to make choices that turned his life around.

He planned to return to his father as a slave, but he ended up returning as a son. I believe there is a prodigal son in each one of us, but only a few make it back home. Would you be one of them? This can be your defining moment – the point in your story where everything turns around. Forgive yourself, and forgive any other person who may have done you wrong; let go of the past, and begin a new life by upgrading the quality of your decisions.

**THE RIGHT CHOICE**

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were privileged to have Jesus as their family friend; as he often visited their home when his schedule permitted it. On this faithful day (Luke 10:38-42), he had come into their home with his disciples; it was only proper to entertain them. There was a lot to do, so Martha got down to work. Mary on the other hand sat down to listen to Jesus – the same situation, but two different choices. Martha eventually came to Jesus complaining “Lord, doesn't it bother you that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!" But Jesus thought differently; he said "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her."

The first lesson here is that it does not matter what other people think or choose when God approves of your choice. Secondly, in any given situation there is always a right choice; every other choice, depending on the gravity of the situation, may lead to unfortunate consequences. Thirdly, facts are not enough to make the right decisions. In this case, the facts support Martha’s decision; yet her choice was wrong.

It’s a good thing to entertain guests; but on that particular day, the better choice was to listen to the teaching of Jesus. Helping strangers is a good practice; in fact, the Bible encourages it (Hebrews 13:2). Yet, there are times when entertaining a stranger is a security risk. How do you know what to choose? How do you choose between two equally eligible bachelors? How do you know the better of two fantastic opportunities? It is relatively easier to choose between good and evil; the difficult task is choosing between good and right. Let me suggest to you some considerations that will help you make the right choice in any given situation:

**USE THE MANUAL**

Have you ever installed or operated a piece of equipment without reading the manual? Men do it all the time, and many have had their fingers burnt severally.

The same thing happens when you make decisions incongruent with The Word of God. The Bible is God’s manual for life, and that’s why it has maintained its relevance for thousands of years. Every detail of human existence is governed by the scriptures. Here’s what I discovered: even if you never see a vision, hear a voice, or receive a spectacular visitation from God; **you can never follow The Bible and go wrong.** For example, In Exodus 23:25-33, God through Moses, instructed the Israelites not to make covenants with or enter into any alliance with the people they would find in the land He would give them.

When Joshua took over the reins of leadership, God said to him:

*“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.”* **Joshua 1:7-8 (NLT)**

In essence, God was saying “If you follow the manual, you’ll never go wrong”. By chapter 9 of the book of Joshua, the Gibeonites proposed a peace treaty with Israel, claiming that they lived far away. The leaders of Israel signed the treaty without recourse to God’s written instructions; only to find out that they had been conned.

When we ignore the manual, there are always consequences. Like I said earlier, facts are not enough to make the right decisions; but there is protection in the manual. Regardless of how logical a line of thought is, if the Bible does not approve of it, you should reject it. A man once went to R.W Shambach and said an angel appeared to him and instructed him to divorce his wife and marry another lady in their church; because the person he was married to was not supposed to be his wife. He asked the man of God for his opinion. Shambach said, “The Bible says…” and the man cut him off, saying, “I know what the Bible says. What do you say?” Shambach’s irate response was, “You expect me to have an opinion other than what the Bible says!?”

A clear indication of ingrained pride is for a man to hold an opinion contrary to God’s word. But I’ve heard people say “Let’s leave the Bible out of this, and be realistic…” And I wonder, can we possibly be more realistic than God – the creator and definition of reality? That job, relationship, business practice, or lifestyle is wrong, that demands of you, things contrary to the Word of God; and it will attract unpleasant consequences. It may be acceptable to people, but if it is contrary to the Word, it will surely lead to a dead end.

**PURPOSE IS EVERYTHING**

Jotham’s Parable is one of my favourite illustrations when I talk about purpose. It is recorded in the book of Judges 9: 8-15 (NLT):

*“Once upon a time, the trees decided to elect a king. First, they said to the olive tree, 'Be our king!' But the olive tree refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing the olive oil that blesses both God and people, just to wave back and forth over the trees?' "Then they said to the fig tree, 'You be our king!' But the fig tree also refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing my sweet fruit just to wave back and forth over the trees?' "Then they said to the grapevine, 'You be our king!' But the grapevine also refused, saying, 'Should I quit producing the wine that cheers both God and people, just to wave back and forth over the trees?' "Then all the trees finally turned to the thornbush and said, 'Come, you be our king!' And the thornbush replied to the trees, 'If you truly want to make me your king, come and take shelter in my shade. If not, let fire come out from me and devour the cedars of Lebanon'"*

Without any attempt at a theological exegesis, one lesson I draw from this insightful allegory is that **it is not difficult to know WHAT to choose if you know WHY you came.** Every choice you make is always at the expense of an alternative; so, before you make that decision, consider God’s purpose for your life. Some choices may not necessarily attract negative consequences, but amount to a sheer waste of your time. Don’t be like Jonah who wasted his time and money travelling in the wrong direction. Why date a person incompatible with your divine assignment? Why take a job that robs you of quality time with your family? There are issues you won’t even need to pray about when you are clear about your purpose.

During my National Youth Service Programme (a mandatory program for all Nigerian graduates), I was approached by some good-intentioned colleagues, to run for some political office. In their opinion, my analytical, communication, and leadership skills were well suited for the position. But without a moment’s thought, I politely refused their offer. I said to them “You can see the gifts, but I know their purpose”. I later accepted the responsibility for teaching a weekly Bible Study; an assignment more suited to my purpose.

Did you hear about the guy who went to his friend to borrow some money? On getting to his friend’s house, he met the family having dinner. Upon his friend’s invitation, he settled down to enjoy a good meal. Some minutes later, another friend came in and asked to speak with the host immediately. They conversed outside the house and the second visitor left. After the meal, the first visitor proceeded to ask his friend to loan him some money. The latter exclaimed, “Hey yah, I just gave all I had to that other fellow”. If this man had prioritized his purpose for the visit, he wouldn’t have missed out. Every time you disregard purpose in the making of your decisions, you risk the loss of a better opportunity.

**YOUR TIMING MATTERS**

In life, what you do is as important as when you do it. It is not enough to make the right decisions; you must make the right decisions at the right time.

*“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”* **Ecclesiastes 3: 1 (NKJV)**

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25: 1-13), you will notice that they all did the same thing: They all went in search of extra oil; they all had lamps burning, while they awaited the arrival of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was delayed in coming and they all fell asleep. The major difference however was in the time they chose to buy oil.

Some bought before they went to the banquet; the others postponed their purchase till they heard that the bridegroom was near. Replace the word “virgin” in this parable with the word “dreamer”, and the message will become clearer. The foolish virgins are foolish dreamers. They are quick to share a woeful story about how life has been unfair to them. At least, it was not their fault that the bridegroom came later than scheduled.

People feel sorry for foolish virgins, but nobody wants to marry one. One outstanding quality of successful people is foresight – they plan and make their investments at the proper time. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Although he was short, he had vision. Knowing that Jesus would pass by a particular road momentarily, he positioned himself on a tree.

While others were still struggling to see Jesus ***where he was***, Zacchaeus was busy climbing a tree ***where he was going to be***. By the time Jesus came along, there he was perched on a tree. Of course, he accomplished his mission – he saw Jesus. But much more than that, he got the rare privilege of hosting Jesus in his home. And that’s what happens when you plan, you are likely to achieve much more than you envisaged

Consider with me this important principle of success: ***Urgent matters are seldom important, and important matters are seldom urgent.*** In other words, the choices that will influence and impact your life the most will hardly pressure you. You will never be pressured to save or invest money, spend time with your family, exercise regularly, or read at least, one new book every month. These however are some of the most important decisions you are going to make. Conversely, destructive decisions bring some degree of pressure with them.

When someone makes you an offer, and asks you to decide immediately, think twice. Is it not absurd to decide after two months of romance, to spend the rest of your life with a total stranger? Someone has rightly said that “if you don’t have the time to do things right, you will have the time to do them over”. In my opinion, it is better to say “NO” than to say “SORRY”. But when you are sincerely unsure of what to choose, please ask for some time to wrap your mind around the issue. ***WHAT*** *you do is as important as* ***WHEN*** *you do it.*

John C. Maxwell in his book The Winning Attitude explains that

The wrong decision at the wrong time is equal to disaster;

The wrong decision at the right time is a mistake;

The right decision at the wrong time is unacceptable;

The right decision at the right time is what leads to success.

When you have a clear understanding of where you are coming from and a vivid picture of where you are headed, it is easy for you to know where you are and what you have to do next.

**LET THE HOLY SPIRIT LEAD YOU**

Here’s the tricky one. There are those times when the right decision is not just staring you in the face. For example, how does a lady determine the better of two God-fearing, good-looking; and equally eligible young men? Or whether to leave a good-paying job in familiar territory, for a better-paying job in uncharted waters. At other times, emotional pressure, or a medical emergency may rob you of the presence of mind to make an intelligent decision. The tendency is for you to panic and do the first thing that comes to your mind. But the probability that you’ll make the right decision in such a situation is very slim. What you should do instead is to relax, consciously commit the situation into God’s hands, and ask Him to tell you what to do.

*“Give your burdens to the LORD, and He will take care of you. He will not permit the Godly to slip and fall.”* **Psalm 55:22 (NLT)**

*“Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.”*

**1Peter 5:7 (NLT)**

*“Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* **Philippians 4: 6-7 (NLT)**

According to Paul, the first thing you will experience is peace – a deep-seated feeling that everything’s going to be alright. That tells you that God does not just care about what happens to you, He cares about your feelings too. It’s no wonder the Holy Spirit is called “The Comforter” He will comfort you in the situation, and then tell you exactly what to do. At other times, He may not give you specific instructions; rather He will just comfort you and then orchestrate events in your favour. In my career as a church leader, I have experienced a great deal of the leading of the Holy Spirit, out of dead ends.

Let me share one of them with you: it was a Saturday, and I had decided to go to the church office for some extra work. Everything was fine till I heard a knock on my door; it was the music director.

After explaining how uncomfortable he felt about his decision, he told me that he had to leave the church immediately. Of course, I was devastated; but I told him not to worry, and that everything was going to be alright. He left my office and joined the choir rehearsal in the auditorium. I felt the peace of God in my heart and I knew that everything was going to work out fine.

A few minutes later, I caught an idea. I called an old friend and told him about my dilemma. Interestingly, he had just quit his job in a bigger church, by the leading of the Holy Spirit. And it so happened that he was around our church when I called him (someone will call that a coincidence). So, in a matter of minutes, he was in my office for an interview. When the choir rehearsal ended, I approached the choir to inform them of the imminent departure of their current leader, and to introduce to them his successor.

Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, a dilemma became a stroke of genius. When you consider the fact that God sees the end from the beginning, you will realize that He’s never surprised by whatever happens to you. He sees it coming and He knows exactly what you have to do; not only to survive but to surmount your challenges. So, when you don’t know what to do, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you. Speaking of Him, Jesus said:

*“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future.”*

**John 16: 13 (NLT)**

**CAN YOU HANDLE IT?**

James the brother of Jesus, in his letter to the Jews in the diaspora, asserted that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17 NIV) Peter also corroborated this assertion when he wrote that God’s divine power has given us everything we need for a Godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3 NIV) What these two foundational leaders of the Christian faith teach us is that God is the source of everything good in our lives. Therefore, we must acknowledge God as our source, but more importantly, we must learn His ways. When we understand how God operates, we will expedite the fulfilment of our desires.

In my attempt to understand how God operates, through studying the scriptures, I discovered that God hardly gives finished products; He gives raw materials. He shows people what to do, He gives them what to use and then He surrounds them with an enabling environment. Whatever God wants to give a man, He gives him in the form of a seed. To create a world of about 8 billion people, God created 2 humans, surrounded them with raw materials, and then planted in their hearts a desire to multiply and fill the earth with other humans. That is what The Bible means in Genesis 1: 28 where it says that God blessed them. In other words, when God blesses you, He gives you everything you need to produce everything you want.

Another Biblical record underscores this fundamental principle that God is more into raw materials than finished products.

*“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; 8 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey; 9 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.”*

**Deuteronomy 8:7-9 NIV:**

The promised land was described as a land flowing with milk and honey - a land of abundance; but what Moses describes here in Deuteronomy 8:7-9, is a land of raw materials, or better still, a land with a huge potential for abundance.

We see this same pattern repeated in God’s redemption project. To save the whole world, God sent His son (the seed). The Son trained only a handful of men and then delegated them the task of reaching the whole world with the gospel. That's how God operates.

When I considered God’s pattern of blessing mankind, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, it dawned on me that God's intention has always been to get things done on earth through humans. When He enlisted Moses to lead the Jews out of Egypt, look at his choice of words:

*Then the LORD told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. 9 Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them 10 Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.”*

***EXODUS 3:7-10 NLT***

I find it rather interesting for God to say “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt… I have heard their cries of distress… I am aware of their suffering… I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land” But then He follows these with “Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt” God didn’t need a man to hear their cries for help, He didn’t need a man to see their distress; because these are things that can be done in heaven. But when He got ready to rescue them and to lead them out of Egypt - something that has to be done on earth, He called on a man, to get it done. WHY? That’s how He gets things done on earth - through men (and women).

This critical principle implies that whatever God intends to do for you, He will do through you and others. This is what it means for God to bless you: He will plant a desire in your heart, and then surround you with all the resources you need to produce it. Let me put this in the context of all that we have been discussing all along. God did not only give you the power of choice; He also placed on you the responsibility for producing your choice.

I strongly believe in the following statement so much that I repeat it in practically all my training sessions: **Success begins with responsibility**. You are not ready for success until you start taking responsibility for what happens in your life. Embracing your power of choice without embracing the responsibility for your choice is what it means to be “entitled”. Entitlement is a sign of immaturity and it is also a prelude to frustration. When you are certain about what you want, but leave the responsibility for producing it to others, you set yourself up for disappointment.

You cannot blame people for dropping you if carrying you is optional. But when you take the responsibility for giving them what they need, they will reciprocate the gesture. The best relationships are symbiotic. Embracing the power of choice, therefore, is taking baby steps, real maturity is taking responsibility for producing your desires.

If I want a successful career, I have to build it. If I desire a thriving marriage, after praying about it, I have to roll up my sleeves and build it. In the same vein, a successful business will not just fall from heaven, it must be built. Whatever I choose, I must be ready to build. God’s part is to send me the resources, my part is to build.

Now let's consider what Proverbs 24:3-5 in the classic edition of The Amplified Bible says:

*“Through [skillful and godly] wisdom a house [a life, a home, a family] is built, And by understanding it is established [on a sound and good foundation], 4 And by knowledge its rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. 5 A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge strengthens his power.”*

What I learned from this passage is that it takes knowledge, Godly wisdom, and skill to build anything on earth. Therefore, to produce my dream, I must build the capacity for it - I must acquire timely knowledge, develop the right skills, and immerse myself in Godly wisdom. I remember a life-changing conversation I had with my pastor so many years ago; during the conversation, I described my dream in flowery detail; I told him how I wanted to become just like one of my role models - to speak to large audiences, run a massive organization and make a huge impact with my life. My pastor being a very kind but extremely wise man, listened to me attentively and validated my dreams, but then he asked me a question that changed my perspective forever

He said, “Do you have the capacity for it?” My takeaway from that conversation is that it's not enough to dream, it’s not enough to know exactly what I want; I must develop the capacity for it. In the words of Dr. Myles Munroe, “Pursuit is the proof of desire”. If you want it, build the capacity for it. At this point, I feel like the proper title for this book should be “WHAT YOU CHOOSE IS WHAT YOU GET DONE”; but I figure reading the book title alone will discourage some people from even touching the book

Many would rather receive than build. But I learned years ago from Les Brown that “you don't get in life what you want, you get in life what you negotiate for”. Jim Rohn said it this way, “Success is not something you pursue. Success is something you attract by the person you become” In other words, you don't get what you want in life, you get what you build capacity for. Even if it comes your way by chance, if you can’t handle it, you won’t keep it

This is what happens to people who stumble on wealth, a great relationship, or a great opportunity. They squander the wealth, lose the relationship, or waste the opportunity. They didn’t SEE it coming, so they did not build the capacity for it.

To build capacity for your dream, I recommend that you do the following:

 **BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT IS IN YOUR HANDS**

Be grateful for what is in your hands because these are the tools you are going to build with (I call them your convertible resources). To be truly grateful, you have to be mindful of your convertible resources - I mean your natural abilities, your aptitude, your physical, mental & emotional health; your relationships, and Time.

No matter how difficult things may have been for you, if you have these resources, your possibilities are endless. Take a second look at them - natural abilities, aptitude, physical, mental & emotional health; relationships, and Time. These are your raw materials for building capacity and for building the life of your dreams. Be grateful for them. Gratitude will open your eyes to the true potential of your convertible resources.

Gratitude will motivate you and supply the energy you need to pursue your possibilities. Gratitude will brighten your countenance and surround you with an aura that makes people want to be a part of whatever you are building.

**TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BIGGER TASKS**

If you truly want to expand your capacity, you must take responsibility for bigger tasks. I learned this lesson many years ago, and I came up with a phrase to help me remember it and practice it in my life - ***If it is not stretching you, it is not helping anybody.***

When I am setting goals or evaluating my work, this principle is my standard of measurement. Whatever is not stretching me is not good enough for me and for the people that I serve. To keep growing, I must keep attempting tasks that place a demand on my thinking, and on my ability to get things done through others. I must embrace tasks that make me continue to learn new things and improve my skills.

**DESIGN A PERSONAL GROWTH ROUTINE (PGR)
& STICK TO IT.**

Remember what we learned from Proverbs 24: 3-5? To build the life of your dreams, you need skillful and Godly wisdom, you need Understanding, and you need knowledge. Your Personal Growth Routine is a series of activities that you observe with discipline, to expand your capacity - that is to acquire skill, understanding, and knowledge. Your PGR must provide you with a consistent flow of fresh and timely information. Your PGR must have a rhythm to it.

There’s no one-size-fits-all prescription for personal growth; do whatever works for you, but make sure it is stretching you and follow it consistently. Another thing your PGR must do for you is to provide you with an opportunity to practice what you are learning immediately. For example, to continue to develop as a leader, a major part of my PGR is to share what I am learning about leadership with others regularly. So, I write leadership articles, I hold virtual leadership seminars and I facilitate group training programs. The need to deliver excellent content to others has now placed on me the need to study much more than I used to do. The more I learn, the more I have to share. This process, over a long period, has helped me become a better leader. The more I share, the better I become.

**THE ULTIMATE DECISION**

As we conclude our exploration of the power of choice, permit me to share with you what I consider the most powerful principle in life. I call it the ultimate decision: the one decision that determines whether a man truly succeeds in life. The Classic edition of The Amplified Bible presents Romans 8:28 as follows:

*“We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labour] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.”*

The principle here is very simple but immensely profound. It says that when you choose to make God an integral part of your life, and when you choose to invest your time on earth in the pursuit of His purpose for you, God will make sure that “all things” work out in your favour. By “all things”, He means your choices and the choices of others that affect you. In other words, even when people seek to do you wrong, God will work it out in your favour. And even when you make a bad decision, God will work it out in your favour.

Please note that we are talking about ultimate outcomes here, and not just immediate results. For instance, if you are wrongfully terminated at work, it will hurt you; and you may have to deal with some financial challenges momentarily. But God will use the situation to work out His purpose for your life. He may inspire you with a business idea that paid employment will never have allowed you to consider. A couple of years later, you will find yourself making more money than you could ever imagine, with a lot of time on your hands to care for your family and to pursue some other interests. You will later be heard to say “It was a good thing that I was wrongfully terminated”.

This is what happens to those who are committed to God – all things work out in their favour. We have said in this book that what you choose is what you get, but the law of “The Ultimate Decision” says that when you choose God and His purpose, all things will ultimately work out in your favour. It’s like knowing the final score of a football match before watching it. You get to enjoy the game without anxiety. The same thing happens when you make the ultimate decision: you face every challenge with confidence, and you respond to every setback with hope; because you know that God is in control.

There are two deliberate steps you have to take in making the ultimate decision: the first is to make Jesus the lord of your life. The second is to discover God’s purpose for your existence and to commit yourself wholly to fulfilling it. I have met quite a lot of people who take the first step and stop there. They are Christians quite all right, but they are not actively pursuing God’s purpose for their lives. That’s like buying a ticket without getting on the plane

To see Romans 8: 28 played out in your life, you have to choose God’s purpose as the central theme of your life: you choose a career according to purpose, you select your friends according to purpose, you choose your spouse according to purpose; and to everything contrary to purpose, you say NO! The strength of Romans 8:28 is found in Luke 1:37: “…nothing is impossible with God”. To place your life in God’s hands is to make your life positively predictable. No matter how hard we try, we all make mistakes from time to time; the comfort I draw from the ultimate decision is that even when I make a mistake, God will work it out for my good. If you are looking for the key to a life of no worries, you need to look no further; it’s in the ultimate decision. If you are yet to make the ultimate decision, I invite you to join me and millions of others across the world, as we enjoy a worry-free life because we have made God the center of our lives

To take the first step by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour; say the following prayer from your heart: “Dear Lord, I thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus on my behalf. I accept him today as my Lord and Saviour. I invite you into my life today, and I ask that you input your nature into me and lead me into the fulfilling life you designed for me. In Jesus name, amen.” The next step is to ask God to reveal to you His purpose for your life

As you continue building your relationship with God, it will become clear to you what God will have you do. In the meantime, engage actively in a faith community or church around you and live according to God’s word.