

BERTHA MUKODZANI

HOW TO PICK YOURSELF UP

**the art of building resilience
and dealing with adversity**



How to Pick Yourself Up: The Art of Building Resilience and Dealing with Adversity

Bertha Mukodzani

I want to dedicate this book to those who may feel like giving up at this point in their lives. My short advice would be, don't! But if you need more convincing, the following chapters will demonstrate why and how you can cultivate resilience and never give up on yourself, despite what this life throws at your doorstep. Better yet, I intend to show you how to turn a hopeless situation around and thrive, in your way, regardless of who you are, where you live and how old you are.

Text copyright © Bertha Mukodzani 2021– All right reserved

Disclaimer

I, Bertha Mukodzani, is the original author of **How to Pick Yourself Up: The Art of Building Resilience and Dealing with Adversity**. The book draws from experience. In many ways, I have experienced these things over the years; some I have learnt by observing other people and how they've handled their situations. In some parts, this work expands the articles/blogs I have written over the years.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form not recognised and approved by the author. Under no circumstances will any blame or legal responsibility be held against the author for any personal harm, loss and damages due to the information contained in this book.

By reading this book, the reader agrees that they are responsible for the choices they make. Under no circumstances is the author responsible or liable for any damage, losses, direct or indirect, which are incurred as a result of the information contained within this document, including but not limited to - errors, omission, or inaccuracies.

Legal Notice

This book is copyright protected. This book is for personal use. You cannot amend, distribute, sell, use, quote or paraphrase any part of it, or the content within this book, without the author's consent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

Turn your lemons into lemonade

CHAPTER TWO

How to Become a Powerhouse of Resilience

CHAPTER THREE

How to Beat Disease

CHAPTER FOUR

How to Master the Art of Forgiving

CHAPTER FIVE

How to Regain Confidence Through Practising Self-Love

CHAPTER SIX

How to Embrace Your Vulnerable Side

CONCLUSION

RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

It is a generally accepted assertion that our experiences are our most significant resource to draw knowledge, appreciation, wisdom and understanding. Thus, I am forever learning from my interactions with the world around me; the things I do, see, feel, touch, smell and hear.

Unfortunately, I have come to realise that there are times when I must break down doors, jump through hoops, and crawl over rough surfaces to get to a place of peace, success and beauty. I've had words spoken to me - words that have given me great joy and happiness. But, in the same token, some utterances have left me crippled with sadness, hurt, disappointment, discouragement and despair. And there have been times when I have been terrified and unsure of myself. In some ways, I've had to question my motives for engaging in certain things and dig into my feelings and thoughts; at times, my head has twirled for answers and solutions. The good news, however, is that all these experiences have not been in vain. Though some may see what I'm about to state as mere coincidence, I am convinced that, at times, we encounter some situations, good or bad, for a reason. For me, that reason is simply a deeper understanding and appreciation of who we are at our very core - what makes us humans. I also believe that through our experiences, we discover ourselves, delving into an untapped realm of our Ubuntu. Because, let's face it, some encounters do compel us to rise to the occasion, whether we want to or not, thus catapulting us into another dimension – a more mature version of ourselves. That dimension, I call simply growth.

My quest for growth, self-improvement and understanding has taught me to reflect and apply my knowledge to motivate others. Therefore, I sincerely hope that this reading, which is a compilation of all my reflections, provides pleasure and encouragement to the reader. Also, as you read through this book, I hope to ignite the desire to reflect upon your own life experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

How to Turn Your lemons into lemonade

There was a time when I used to frown upon statements such as these. I called them empty platitudes thrown around to provide a quick fix to a problem, avoid talking about the things that matter or explain away a discombobulating situation. However, over the years, I have come to understand and appreciate the true meaning of these words. To illustrate, here is a story:

There was a woman who had devoted all her life to God. She shunned all things deemed evil by her society's standards - she prayed every day, ate right, helped others and was a valued member of her community. Those who knew her could not fault her character. She was what one would call an upstanding citizen. A shining example to all the women around her - devoted wife and mother to her two children. For this woman, her life couldn't be better. Then one day, she came home after spending the day selling her goods at the market and got the news that her husband, with whom she had spoken that morning as he went to work, had been involved in a fatal accident. They told her that all efforts to revive him had been in vain.

As one would expect, the woman wailed upon hearing the devastating news. For months, she grieved her husband, at times, refusing to eat. Over time, her grief began affecting her children, who missed their mother's warm hugs and cheerfulness. She still wore black clothes, even after the traditional mourning period had passed. But the children understood the reason for their mother's sombreness. Death had robbed her of the man she loved—her provider and pillar of strength. However, when this widow's grief showed no signs of relenting, one of her children found it hard to cope without her loving mother and sought comfort elsewhere. Unfortunately, her new associations steered her to off the wagon, dropped out of school and started dealing drugs. Soon, the young girl got pregnant as she had started sleeping around with every boy who would have her. Consequently, the girl's behaviour compounded the widow's grief. And as if that was not enough, the woman fell ill one day and went to the doctor who ran some tests which revealed she had breast cancer.

For days, the woman curled into a ball and cried herself to sleep. She even contemplated taking an overdose of some pain-killing medication the doctor had given her to end her life, except her beliefs forbade her. Despite sparing her own life, the woman wrestled with God

during her prayers. She implored the Lord to reveal why He had allowed horrible things to happen to her. After all, she had devoted her life to serving Him and others. What had she done wrong? She agonised. Despite her beseeching, the ailing widow got no answers from God – at least not right away.

Grudgingly, the woman continued attending church, serving her community the same way she did before adversity struck. As she continued to grieve for her departed husband and wayward daughter, the widow underwent weeks of gruelling chemotherapy. Weeks later, the doctor called her into the office and told her the good news she had continued to ask God for – she was in the clear. Upon hearing the excellent results, the woman leapt from her chair, hugged the doctor and cried tears of joy and relief. But, she knew she still had one more problem to overcome. Finally, after more weeks of praying for her child, who had now left home following a miscarriage, God answered her prayer. Now repented of her sins, her little girl returned home, announcing she wanted to go back to school.

One day as the mother sat in her kitchen, an inspiration came to her. She would use her experiences to inspire others, and she knew just how she would do it. So she put pen to paper and produced a book detailing all her experiences. The book became one of the best-selling books in her town. The book inspired men, women, and children, especially those who had walked in the same shoes as she had and those going through similar situations. Then, to show her gratitude for the blessings she had received, the woman used the money to open a Youth Support Centre for children facing similar challenges as her children.

Furthermore, the woman travelled across the country, holding talks, raising awareness about breast cancer, and encouraging women to get regular check-ups. She gave hope to widows like herself and was always available whenever they needed to talk. When asked how she saw her life, the woman said she couldn't be more satisfied with her life, for everything she did gave her a great deal of satisfaction and a sense of purpose. The thought of writing a book and opening a Youth Centre never occurred to her before her husband passed, for she was always happy and content with the way her life was. It was as if, she told her audience, God had unimaginable plans for her. Plans He would reveal in the most devastating ways.

According to her understanding, God had allowed her suffering for a reason bigger than her wants and needs. She was glad that she had been able to respond to her calling through her pain and suffering. And that she had turned things around. Instead of continuing to wallow in self-pity, she played the cards that life had dealt her.

The story teaches us that life is unpredictable. It can throw us a curveball, and we may not feel that it is fair. Rightly so. But here is another unsavoury truth to take in - the moment we are born, our environment subjects us to some harsh realities of life. This kind of stimuli, if persistent, conditions us almost to expect adverse outcomes and to maintain a defeatist attitude. As a result, it becomes virtually impossible to think positively.

This story teaches us that sometimes we discover ourselves through adversity; some challenges catapult us to becoming the best version of ourselves and reaching our full potential. And yes, it hurts at the time. And just like the woman in the story, we may wonder why misfortunes are haunting us at every turn. We fail to understand why. But if not you, then who? That misfortune could have happened to anyone. The difference becomes what you do to shift the tide, i.e., how you use that pain to get stronger and develop your resilience. As we've learnt through the widow's story, one way to build resilience and get stronger and become better is to turn our lemons into lemonade. You can use your pain to your advantage. Your test can become a testimony to others. Through conquering your trials and tribulations with courage and determination, you become an inspiration to others—someone the world can emulate and admire. I will illustrate further the points I've raised in this chapter in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

How to Become a Powerhouse of Resilience

The woman depicted in chapter one is not me, but I understand her story all too well. Over the years, I've had to build my resilience muscle. This became necessary, a means of survival after having gone through grief – losing a husband at a young age, losing my parents, and just being a woman and a black woman living in a world that constantly undermines and throws prejudices at you. COVID-19 has thrown us into an ongoing predicament, resulting in fear and uncertainty for the future. So, in my job as a nurse, I've had to don my PPE and get on with it. I've witnessed unimaginable suffering on the wards, making it necessary to constantly tap into my resilience reservoir to remain solid and efficient for my patients. Finally, the pandemic has also pointed to us some unsavoury truths about racism, inequality

and injustices of this world. So, as a package, I've had to become resilient in various ways to navigate the challenges life throws at me.

Therefore, in the concluding part of this chapter, I will give you the blueprint of how you can become resilient and thrive despite what life throws at your doorstep.

Tip Number One

Be realistic about your situation

When dealing with adversity, it is prudent to look at your situation in a realistic way. Sweeping things under the carpet will only prolong your suffering and delay the recovery process. Adversity can be any situation you deem challenging, unbearable, terrible or trying. It could be the loss of a loved one, loss of a job. So, imagine any scenario that is difficult to handle. One that rattles the status quo and forces you to mourn or seek a solution. If you find yourself in that situation, acceptance is the first step to facing it realistically.

Tip Number Two

Grieve Properly

Sometimes acceptance entails that we allow ourselves a healthy period of mourning. Resilient people have learnt how to grieve appropriately, allowing themselves to feel every emotion. They take time to cry, to feel sad about their challenging situation, for there is nothing wrong in allowing yourself to feel what you feel.

Grieving also entails writing your feelings down. Writing is a cathartic experience when your heart is heavy. Instead of bottling it all in, pour your heart out on a piece of paper. Writing things down often uncovers hidden and deep-seated truths about ourselves. But, of course, emotions, dark or light, surface during this unveiling, and that is OK. Because the healing and recovery processes start the moment we **yield to our feelings. After we have cried and felt every emotion, our souls become less burdened, the fog finally lifts, and the initiation of resilience begins.**

Tip Number Three

Yield to a higher power

As mentioned in the previous chapter, human beings generally tend to turn to a higher power for strength and courage when dealing with adversity. Resilient people have explored what

gives them faith, hope and courage to overcome adverse circumstances. For me, my resilience comes from the Lord and His word. As I bury myself in the scripture, I find the strength and courage I need to withstand the pressures of this world. Therefore, whatever you consider being a higher power, something outside of you to see you through those trials and tribulations, you must immerse yourself in that because without faith and hope, you cannot begin to pick yourself up and build resilience along the way.

Tip Number Four

Capitalise on your setbacks.

Someone once said, ‘Every situation, when properly perceived, becomes an opportunity.’ Out of our hardships, we can discover ourselves and our purpose. Use your negative experiences to build others. For example, you can start a support group, write a motivational blog, or birth a book. That way, you will get a sense of purpose and find the strength to move forward.

After the passing of my husband, leaving me in college with a toddler to care for, I struggled to make ends meet. Just like the woman in the story, I grieved and suffered for a long while. For years, thoughts haunted me. My society back then made me believe no man would ever want me because no man in their right mind wants to care for another man’s child. Married women shunned me, for I was perceived a threat—a desperate woman out to snatch their husbands. Single women did not want to be around me either, as I represented something they never wanted to be. My in-laws wanted nothing to do with me or my child, and my parents did the best they could to take care of us. Bear in mind, back then, I was young, naïve, lacking in confidence, resources, and a limited view of my truth and how the world works. Knowing what I know now, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that grief does not have to spell the end of your life. You can pick yourself up and live again. That, I did. I forgave, reflected and taught myself how to survive. I learnt that there is always something to be gained from every situation that I encounter.

After wrestling with my grief and blaming God for allowing misfortune to come my way, I finally regained composure. Life was still unfair, but I also realised I could turn my story into an inspiration. Like the woman in the story, I gained the inspiration to write my story. Through writing, I found clarity and healing. To this day, I find pleasure in educating, motivating and inspiring others through my writings and YouTube channel, thanks to every teardrop.

Tip Number Four

Maintain an attitude of gratitude.

I will admit it; I was one of those people who always looked at the glass as half empty rather than half full. My friends and family often reminded me I have a job and that God has blessed me with well-behaved and healthy kids, a roof over my head, not to mention the fact that I was alive. When they said these things to me, I would roll my eyes and complain and sulk at my situation. The slightest suggestion that what I was facing wasn't that bad irritated me. I accused them of sugar-coating things and of trying to put sunshine where there was, in fact, rain. It wasn't until I learnt to walk in gratitude that my perspective shifted, and I began to feel more positive about things. Then, I began to experience joy and peace that surpasses all understanding.

Adopting an attitude of gratitude has been a journey for me—a journey of constant growth, new meaning and understanding. Being grateful implies that I embrace my life in the state that it is. It means being able to see times of trials as opportunities for growth and a new awakening. It means embracing all that I am and falling completely in love with me, regardless of what I have or think that I lack. It is not having to ask, 'why me?', 'what did I do to deserve this? And so on. That task, I realise, is not easy but certainly doable!

We all have the one thing that our hearts truly desire. In our minds, we feel that if we were to acquire/possess, our world gets restored. And when we box ourselves in this state of mind, everything else going around me disappears into a thick fog. We lie awake at night, tossing and turning, wondering how it would feel to have that for which our heart yearns. We plan and scheme all day and night long and wallow in self-pity when things seem impossible or hard. Then, before we know it, life passes by because our desires trap us. We miss lovely and rare moments with our children and fail to see the sunshine beyond our curtains and closed doors because we've been fixating on what we have no control over. Nothing anybody says or does to try and make us see the other side of life will matter because we want what we want, and we haven't got it. All this is because we don't walk in gratitude.

We lack gratitude for the here and now, making it hard to pause and appreciate the good around us. As a result, we find ourselves spiralling out of control, and in the end, we self-destruct. But if we look long and hard, we will find that there is always something good

going on in our lives. The only reason the good in our lives will seem minuscule is because of a lack of gratitude. But if you look at it, the fact that you're able to read these words is a blessing. It means you're alive, can read and have access to technology—something which other people can only imagine.

The fact that you've woken up this morning alive and well, can afford to put food on your table is reason enough to be grateful. So many people in the world long for food and walk stretches of miles, scrounging for something to put in their bellies to keep them alive. Some of these people lack clothes and a roof over their heads, someone to love them. We forget all this when we focus on that one thing that we lack.

Understandably, we will want to achieve more than what we already have to gain satisfaction from life as human beings. I feel that it is quite alright to want to do better for ourselves, but it is always healthy to adopt gratitude while we are at it. Because that attitude of gratitude is the very thing that opens more doors for us and allows us to acquire all our heart's desires. Gratitude will feed into those other areas of our lives that may be taking a beating due to persistent negativity. When your mind is always telling you that something is not right and that you shouldn't be this, it means you can't be pleased. Remain unhappy long enough, and you slip into a state of depression, which is the last thing you want!

Lacking an attitude of gratitude will cause us to push ourselves to the limit as we compete against others instead of competing against ourselves. I don't need to remind you about the undue stress and fatigue that this causes, and before we know it, we have burned out and lost ourselves during the process. Moreover, in the absence of gratitude, there is a danger of alienating those around us. How can we embrace our loved ones and see the good in them and appreciate them, let alone love them, when we don't feel the same love and appreciation towards ourselves?

Having an attitude of gratitude doesn't imply turning a blind eye to the areas of our lives that need fixing. It simply means we've learnt to embrace the hostile areas while being willing to do what is within our control or power to improve the situation. And when we fail, we do not don't beat ourselves up about it but are thankful for the opportunity to try.

Maintaining gratitude is a tall order, for the human mind tends to move towards what occupies it, i.e., pain, suffering, and hardship. While being grateful is hard to do, we can dwell more on the positives in our lives when we are facing trials. This takes great mental strength and discipline. Marvellous things happen, and things shift in our favour when we focus on gratitude, thanking God for what we have, here and now, rather than what we lack. Gratitude is possible, despite our pain. We attract more when we focus on our children's smiles, the food on the table, the extra clothes hanging in our closets, and the roof above our heads. Take a walk and be in communion with nature. Stand still. Stare at the trees, the birds gliding in the sky, feel the breeze and the sand tickling the bottom of your feet. Instead of dwelling on what you cannot change or solve, focus on the things within your control.

Tip Number 5

Give people and life a chance. So you have been disappointed and hurt by those you love and closest to you. It happens to the best of us. God never promised a life free of trials. If there is anything history has taught us, it is that humans are made to conquer adversity. Through the centuries, we have seen people bounce back and living to fight another day. Through their stories, we have learnt that resilience is inside every one of us. We need to dig deep and bring it to the surface by taking advantage of the hand we're dealt. Through building resilience, we gain more understanding, the forgiveness of ourselves and others. We learn to care for ourselves on a deeper level, listen to our hearts and souls, doing what they tell us, and we also learn to give what we have, the tangible and intangible.

6) ***Last but not least, find your source of strength.*** For me, it is prayer—words from the Bible. For me, the 'good' book is the ultimate law of attraction. It's the ultimate book of motivation and hope. Over the years, I've come to realise that it is not my job to wrestle with the Devil and with things I cannot understand but God's.

So, my message in this chapter is simple. Despite the setback, we can find the headspace by taking the necessary steps to heal, to create better circumstances for ourselves and others. No situation in life is permanent. Things change, and sometimes for the better. So whenever the trials of this world burden us, we must allow ourselves to hear the message behind our suffering and feel the resilience course through our veins.

CHAPTER THREE

How to Beat Disease

In the first chapter, we learnt about the widow who found purpose through adversity. Unfortunately, one of the adverse events she'd encountered was dealing with an illness. So, in this chapter, I will delve into the principles of beating disease. Then, I will give you a prescription, if you like, that will help you towards healing.

Disclaimer: what I'm about to say in this chapter is not in any way a miracle cure for any disease. Neither do I claim that it will work for your situation. Instead, I will give you the fundamentals of health that will provide you with the best possible chance of survival long term, even a 'cure' or reversal of disease in some instances. I am using my knowledge as a healthcare professional and bearing the testimony of those who have battled illness and overcame or currently live a much fuller life despite it. Furthermore, I am going back to the basics, drawing from my faith and facts about the body and nutrition in dishing out the fairest formula to give you the best fighting chance.

With illness, prevention is always better than cure. If you know how diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and COPD, among other diseases, evades and manifests in your body before crippling you, you will do well to try and prevent them. We often see some diseases coming a mile away as they creep up on us - over time, our parameters, measurements and general well-being change. Some disorders, however, like a thief in the night, like to pounce.

Our lifestyle choices, genetic disposition, or climate often put us in a precarious position, and before we know it, we have succumbed to one disease or another. Any disease taking hold of our bodies, minds, and at times, souls can be the most confounding experience a human being could ever face. The illness removes us from our usual element and places us in a vulnerable position—a position where we are required to rely on other people's care, compassion and expertise.

So, I'm here to say that you do not have to feel utterly powerless when facing an illness. Below is my simple method, which I've compiled with the hope and understanding that it will give you the best fighting chance. At the very least, it will help you cope and alleviate

your condition. As the best outcome, the points I'm about to give you will improve your overall health, reverse some conditions and even prolong your life considerably.

1) ***Know your enemy and what you're dealing with***

I will draw from the Bible and Sun Tzu's book, *The Art of War* to understand this principle.

In the book of Ephesians 6, chapter 10-18, Christians are told to, "Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." The idea behind this message is that believers must always be prepared to fight the Devil. In this instance, the Devil does not come in the form of an ugly monster with horns and sharpened teeth but can be the battles we face daily. Battles such as our children rebelling against us, temptation, discouragement, among other trials and tribulations we face. Therefore, if Christians live a life of prayer, where they anticipate these trials, they are better prepared, spiritually, to withstand anything that comes their way. Thus their faith and power of the Holy Spirit with which they are in constant communion shields and guides them. And even if they were to lose the battle, they would do so with a sense of victory and hope for a better life in the next world.

In his book, *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu says, "If you know your enemy and yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

If we take these two quotations, one thing is apparent: one must always be prepared. In other words, if you go into battle, you stand a better chance of winning if you know your enemy's tactics, location, fighting strategies, as well as their weaknesses.

We can apply the same principles when fighting disease. When we are diagnosed with an illness, it is common and natural to feel terrified and not wish to know more than we need to about the disease. Patients are sometimes given a choice as to how much information they want to learn about their illness. While others opt out of knowing every little detail about their predicament, perhaps because knowing a little too much can be too crippling and prevent one from living, some take a more courageous option, taking the time to study their

condition. As a result, they absorb all there is to know about their enemy, which is the disease.

Therefore, the lesson to draw from the two passages above is: For instance, if you've cancer, find out how it attacks your body and the thing that feeds it. To do so is to empower yourself. Someone once told me that 'knowledge is not power' but only 'potential power'. Meaning, knowing how the disease manifests itself into your body or mind will only take you so far. You will need to take it a step further if you are going into this battle. This brings me to my next point;

2) Develop a positive mindset

This appeals to one's psychological disposition, i.e., attitude, thoughts, feelings, confidence, courage, and determination. Despite what you face, I've realised that it is wise to stay positive. While I'm not encouraging you to ignore your predicament and be unrealistic, there is a lot to say about having a positive mindset. Believing that you will and can get better and trust that you have enough courage and determination to fight the disease goes a long way. I've heard testimonies of long-term survivors after receiving the doctor's devastating news of a short prognosis. While doctors rarely get it wrong, I also believe that a higher power is operating in the spiritual realm, determining how our lives turn out and that we tap into that incredible power when we engage in positive thinking.

Negative emotions are like poison coursing through our veins. Anger, resentment, jealousy, envy, to name but a few, destroy our souls and health from inside out. For instance, when you hold on to a grudge, the body reacts each time we see that person. The heart races, our blood pressure rises as the body prepares to fight, for it perceives a threat. This stress level puts a strain on the brain, gut, and heart, which inevitably leads to further deterioration in our condition. However, acts such as forgiving, love, compassion, empathy and kindness are the balm of the spirit and keep disease at bay. Therefore, it is prudent to rid ourselves of negative thoughts and energy.

3) Surround yourself with positive people

Just like the inward environment, our physical environment plays a crucial role in our healing. In the same way, we must lean towards a positive mindset and immerse ourselves in favourable acts, and we must steer clear of negative associations. Their presence in our battle will breed negativity and scepticism and invite a gloomy outlook that will only worsen our suffering and feed the disease. If a friend or family member does not believe you can beat the odds, that is their problem, not yours. Your job is to fight.

While battling an illness, do not forget to live. Your life is not over yet. If the condition allows you, laugh, play, dance and go for walks. Take the time to stand and stare at the birds, the trees and feel the fresh air. But in communion with nature, immersing yourself in God's creations and wonders. There will be days when you do not feel like doing anything, and that's OK. Let your loved ones, those who are with you in this fight, care and look after you.

4) *Implement*

“There is sickness everywhere, and most of it might be prevented by attention to the laws of health.” The Ministry of Healing.

Indeed, the above interpretation should not suggest that the primary health principles are invalid since the disease has already manifested in the body. If anything, the primary health principles are now more relevant than ever. In this battle, one will still need to observe their daily health habits diligently. Maintaining good health means a balanced diet, adequate rest, exercise, fresh air, sunshine and drinking water. We cannot expect to beat any disease without these principles. They're the pillars of our existence.

5) *Have faith*

Faced with trials and tribulations, some, if not most, turn to a higher power, that which is outside of ourselves, for strength, courage and determination. Through our spirituality and beliefs, we find faith, hope and meaning in adversity. So, whatever you consider a higher power, now is the time to turn towards it. Christians who understand Ephesians 6 would have already recognised that the time has come to draw out their swords and shield, for it is time for battle. Prayer, meditation, and practising gratitude are ways through which human beings draw meaning and the strength they need to maintain a spirit of abundance and prevail. Therefore, beloved, do whatever it takes to garner all the faith and hope you need.

In conclusion, beloved, do what the doctor tells you. Take your medication on time, follow the prescription and immediately report any side effects. Then, when you feel discouraged, appeal to the five aspects mentioned in this chapter and face the enemy. And if, in the end, you lose the battle, at least you would have fought a good fight.

CHAPTER FOUR

How to Master the Art of Forgiving

Have you ever felt so angry, hurt and disappointed that you lie awake at night, tossing and turning? Blood courses through your veins as you mull over what they said or did. Your heart races, your face transforms into folds of fury at the mere mention of their name or when you hear their voice or see them coming down the corridor. You may even make a loud, contemptuous snort or look away at the sight of them.

And, when they are finally out of sight, you exhale a sigh of relief, thinking – *that showed them*. That knot in your stomach unwind, and your body rests, for you have proved a point and revealed to the person just how much you despise them. For a while, you feel pumped and experience release.

Alas, the feeling does not last. It never does.

The spring in your step vanishes, and the satisfaction of hitting back disperses, transforming into a lump in your throat. The anger and hurt come rushing back, and your body goes into a frenzy as it slips back into another whirlwind of emotion. The actions of your so-called *nemesis* begin to torment you once again. The words they uttered during your row start ringing incessantly in your head. Their actions or lack thereof gnaw away at your soul and chirp away at your confidence. Suddenly, you start second-guessing yourself. You feel unworthy, violated and wronged. And when you realise that nothing you do makes any difference, your body becomes paralysed, robbing you of your joy, creativity and everything good in your life - because your object of torment has now become your sole focus. It has occupied your mind and soul.

You are hurting, and you resent them for what they did or said to you. Anyone who's ever been hurt and disappointed understands that.

But, the bad news is that more often than not, the person who wrongs us forgets the moment their back is turned. In the Shona culture, we have a saying that goes something like this: The cutter soon forgets the tree they cut, never the tree. In other words, the people who hurt us often go on to lead their lives and, on their terms, while we are left reeling, broken and debilitated.

Emotions are necessary. For example, anger and hurt can alert us to that which we do not like. By experiencing them, we get to reflect, and in some instances, they can become the motivation we need to make changes in our lives. But anger, hurt and disappointment, if not well-managed, lead to bitterness, resentment and hate.

Science informs us that anger as an intense emotion triggers that fight and flight response. The body recognises something wrong and releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to help it cope. During this period, the blood pressure rises, the heart rate soars, and the gut becomes compromised as the brain shunts blood away from it and towards the muscles as it positions itself for a physical attack. If this happens long enough, your body gives way to disease - headaches, digestion problems, stress, depression, heart attack, stroke, and so on.

So to liberate ourselves from this soul-destroying mission when someone wrongs us, we must forgive. Challenging to achieve if the person who wronged us is not remorseful or apologetic. To quote the words of Nelson Mandela, 'Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.'

You do not have to shake a person's hand, give them a peck on the cheek or let them know you have forgiven them. Instead, exhale and let it all go because forgiveness is never about the other person, but it is about you and you alone.

And, there are steps you can take to get to that place of true forgiveness and setting yourself free. These are as follows:

1) **Realise that you cannot control someone's actions, thoughts and behaviour.** But you control only yours. You control your reactions and grasping that enables us to detach ourselves from toxic situations quickly. Other's people's character flaws are not your problem. Your responses to those flaws are your superpower. If it comes, their apology should be a bonus, for, in your spirit and mind, you would have already forgiven them.

2) **Embrace your feelings and allow yourself to feel what you feel.** You are human, after all. Part of embracing your feelings is learning to forgive yourself. When you learn to forgive yourself, you will find it easy to forgive others because you understand that no one is perfect. You have empathy and compassion for their flaws, for you are also a flawed human being.

3) **Think positive and breathe life into your soul** - this boosts your confidence and self-esteem, and you will need this to tackle the next stage, which is;

4) **Do not give value to hurtful words and actions.** If someone knows you go on a rampage whenever they push your buttons, there may decide to amuse themselves by playing with your emotions.

5) **Instead of reacting negatively, turn things around.** One way you can do this is by being kind. Kill them with kindness, as the saying goes. I have found that when you do not react how the other person anticipates, you catch them off-guard and throw them off course. Since in their minds, they would have prepared for your defensiveness, when you show the opposite attitude, they are more likely to feel stupid and embarrassed, even small.

6) **Communicate.** Endeavour to look at things from the other person's perspective. Perhaps they wronged you because they misunderstood a situation or something you did or said and, therefore, reacted out of anger. We should always consider the possibility that we could be wrong about a person and their intentions. Sometimes people hurt us unintentionally; therefore, having an open mind allows us to see things differently. If it is something as serious as cheating, ask if something could have enabled that behaviour. Were there early warning signs that you ignored. Sometimes, people cheat or wrong us due to their character flaws and not something we did or said. Through communication, we can determine the cause. Then, we can start working on our problem-solving and negotiating skills. By talking, we can find common ground and come to a place of understanding. That is not to say, take a

cheating partner back, but you can forgive them while deciding to move on with your life. Likewise, you can forgive a friend for all their wrongs and still remove them from your life.

7) Last but not least, **practice the act of forgiving often**. Forgiving, as challenging as it is to do, is a healthy thing to do. When we do it often, it becomes a part of who we are because we already know and understand that the act of forgiving another person is a gift unto ourselves and a crucial part of self-care. After all, the only person we have power over is ourselves. When we learn to let go of anger and resentment effortlessly, we take back the reins of our life. Other people's actions can no longer haunt us.

CHAPTER FIVE

How to Regain Confidence Through Practising Self-Love

Usually, when we talk about self-love, we think of things like pampering ourselves, watching what we eat, exercise, splurging on new clothes, a new hairdo and so on. Of course, all those things are acts of self-love and a crucial part of becoming the best versions of ourselves. But in this chapter, I am inviting you to consider self-love acts on a deeper level. Acts or ways of thinking that may not be obvious.

Suppose you're wondering about how you've been showing up in the world, i.e., your handling of daily situations. Perhaps, you've been reflecting on how you respond to people and circumstances. And if you are doing enough for yourself and others and considering if there is more you could be doing in your journey as a man or woman, then you have started to demonstrate self-love on a deeper level.

There is something about persistent suffering that leaves you feeling as if you do not deserve happiness. For years, I was one of those people who did not believe or know what they deserved. There is this phenomenon where, for instance, a person get the job they've always wanted, the relationship they prayed for and are healthy, happy and feeling as if the world is as it should be, and then discomfort starts creeping its way into their brain. They begin to feel uncomfortable, almost to the point of seeking trouble and waiting for something awful to happen. In their minds, they are convinced that the joy they have now cannot possibly last and that it is too good to be true. This kind of thinking can be crippling enough to deny all

evidence to the contrary in their lives. The good life they have ceases to make sense, for, in their minds, it is only fleeting. Then self-sabotage ensues. They engage in all kinds of actions to put themselves out of the misery of waiting by extinguishing their happiness sooner. They flee from all the good, seeking pain and suffering. I have realised that this happens to some of us because something has conditioned us to believe that we do not deserve happiness. Our experiences have caused us to think that joy and peace are not for us and that we must always be watching and admiring others from the side-lines and not participating. As sad as this sounds, this way of thinking is common.

Change your mindset

Understand and believe wholeheartedly that you, just like the next person, deserve to be happy. You deserve the good things that this life has to offer. Happiness is not just for other people, but you too can have it. But it is only within your reach if you believe we deserve it and want to have it. Self-love is about a change of mindset. Believe that you deserve the good things in this life.

Raise your standards

There was a time in my life where I was willing to accept anything and everything on offer because I didn't think I was good enough to deserve more. I didn't see myself as the kind of woman who deserved better than was already on offer. But as my mindset shifted and my confidence and self-esteem increased, I started setting better standards and expectations for myself. Not only did I expect these high standards from the people in my circles, I expected them from myself. If you want better, then be better. When you come to that space of understanding who you are and how valuable you are as a woman as a man and hold yourself to high esteem, you set better standards for yourself, and that's part of self-love. You no longer compromise and understand that it is OK to let those who cannot live up to your standards go. You will not tolerate disrespect. Neither do you shrink yourself to make other people comfortable.

Have courage

Self-love will have you develop the courage to go after what you want in life and believe that it is OK to want more to aspire to be something more significant. Courage is also giving yourself the permission to take chances and necessary risks, try something, and ask. Asking for what you want demonstrates that you love yourself enough to believe you deserve what you want and can have it. So, develop the courage to have faith and self-belief to follow your heart's desires because that is what self-love does.

Forgive yourself

Another aspect of demonstrating self-love is being able to forgive yourself for the mistakes that you make. Because, let's face it, no one is perfect. We misjudge situations and people; therefore, we should be able to forgive ourselves when that happens. If our friends and family members can forgive us, why can't we forgive ourselves? It is through our mistakes that we attain growth and wisdom. Our errors and experiences shape us, for better or worse. But when we practise true self-love, the mistakes can only be for the better.

Own your space

When it comes to self-love, I want to invite you into this kind of thinking where you believe, with your whole heart, that you deserve a space in this world. And that you are as important and deserving as the next person. You, too, should have the chance and opportunity to experience peace, your definition of happiness, respect and dignity. Do not accept circumstances and situations that demean you as a human being because nobody is better than the other. For example, someone might have more money than you do and be in a position of privilege, but that does not make you a lesser being. Self-love demonstrates this understanding and belief in how it treats itself, talks and responds to others and situations daily.

CHAPTER SIX

How to Embrace Your Vulnerable Side

I've come to realise that as human beings, we are the masters of pretence. We walk with wide grins on our faces, pretending that everything in our universe is OK or indeed perfect. We laugh out loud at lousy jokes, choose our words carefully, and wear nice clothes. And if you are a woman like me, you spend hours at the beauty parlour having your hair fixed and your nails polished.

We may do this because we care about one another's feelings and our looks, but sometimes it's because the thought of having a hair out of place or being 'that' terrifies us. So even though our worlds are falling apart and are far from perfect, we walk with our heads held high, looking people in the eye, convincing them that we have everything under control. But inside, we are like a volcano, waiting to erupt.

A little prod on the right spot is all it will take for us to explode, destroying everything in our path. It is when this happens that those around us turn in awe, wondering what the hell happened. They are puzzled why a woman, or a man of such stature and decorum could snap and lose it. Well, I reckon it's because human beings don't allow themselves to be vulnerable!

For me to understand human vulnerability is to draw from my own life experiences and perhaps the experience of others. Making one vulnerable takes immense courage and maybe the bravest thing one ever does. It is natural for us to want to be accepted for who we are, warts and all. And yet, sometimes, we hesitate to reveal our true authentic selves to other human beings. The reason, I've realised, is that rejection or the thought of being judged terrifies us. So, we would rather hide than lay ourselves bare to the people that matter the most in our lives.

But being vulnerable implies the opposite. In matters of the heart, it means loving someone with all your heart even though there is no guarantee that they will love you in return. It's not being afraid not to be perfect and revealing your authentic self, giving them a choice to fall in love with who you are and not who you think they want you to be. Instead, it's taking that leap of faith as you go after that which your heart desires.

Being vulnerable also means being able to look someone in the eye, confessing all your deepest fears. Furthermore, it is standing in front of someone, admitting your wrongs and asking them to forgive you. In life, we can't always tell how others will perceive us when we lay our hearts and souls bare, but it is trusting that they will appreciate us and our efforts and gestures regardless of the outcome.

Have you ever had to shed tears in front of someone? If you're anything like me, you probably have. Being vulnerable is being able to cry in front of your pastor, your friend, your wife or indeed your boss without having to worry if they will think any less of you. It's being able to turn to someone and admit that you are hurting, you need help, you can't cope, and that you've had enough. It lets them see you in your weakest state and allows you to feel what you feel without fear of being judged or ridiculed.

I reckon if we all exercised a healthy amount of vulnerability in our lives, the world would be a better place. If only we could allow ourselves to be who we are, feel what we feel, and say what we want to say, I believe there would be fewer suicides, crimes of passion, abortions, resentment, pride, anger, and frustration, among others things.

Conclusion

I genuinely believe that every event we encounter weaves itself into life to form a purposely designed tapestry. Without each thread, colour and piece, we cannot have the masterpiece, our self-actualised selves; however, you may want to define it. In other words, we would be remiss to beat ourselves up for everything that happens in our lives. Instead, embracing every challenge and learning to play the card we are dealt makes it that much simpler to just through life's hoops. If not for my experiences, I would not be the kind of woman I am today—determined with great inner strength—also the type of woman who dares to write this e-book on life's lessons. And there is no chance in hell that I would've become wiser, sharper and even more determined to be the best that I can be.

RESOURCES

Healing Foods by Neal Yard's Remedies, Covent Garden

The Art of War by Sun Tzu's book

The Bible

The Ministry of Healing: Health and Happiness

Thank you for reading this e-book.