

I AM

Who is I Am? I Am Who Is!

By

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Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible versions of New Living Translation [NLT], King James Version [KJV], Amplified Bible [AMP] and New International Version [NIV]

These are true stories. However, some names and places have been changed based on the author's discretion.

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CHAPTER # 1

Men and Matters of the Heart Seeing I Am as The God of All Comfort [Elohei khoi-Nechamah]

The following vignettes provide male experiences that were shared about their marital relationships that had gone awry.

BUFORD

“Oooh shhhhh! Ooooh shhhh! I’m outta here!”

“Oh myyyyy! Nooooo! Oh I’m soorry! Oh I’m soorry baby!” she cried.

“So what happened next?” I asked Buford.

“I couldn’t do a thing except back Richie out so he couldn’t see his auntie’s nakedness. We had just come in from a day of fishing. You know, Richie would visit with us each summer like clockwork. So going fishing was routine, but this time was different.”

“What was different?” I asked trying to understand the events as Buford reflected about that Saturday morning.

“Now that’s a dumb question!” he barked. “What do you think was different? Me and my nephew go fishing and come home and my life is over! A niggah with his draws half down, climbing out my bedroom window and you asking me what’s different? I felt like

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puking and exploding at the same time. My life was over, over! I died! I loved her and look at what she did to me!”

Then all I heard was that flat tone. Yes. He hung up the phone on me.

I pulled the phone away from my ear and looked at it for a few seconds and then disconnected the line and thought about what had just happened. A college-educated, gainfully-employed, church-raised, Pop Warner volunteer referee, who would soon be retiring and living a life of driving his RV cross-country. By my account, his best life was just beginning. After all, he knows Haggai 2:9 and sang Israel Houghton’s 2005 “Your Latter Will Be Greater” song at least 2,179 times by now.

But while Buford may have heard of the Book of Haggai and Israel’s wildly successful gospel song, there was a disconnect from him knowing and living out the Word of God in-the-now. But he had just revealed he was in a very fragile state.

So over the course of several months of sporadic 15- to 30-minute phone conversations, an unsolicited Buford would bare his heart, share an array of details, and recant that day the other man did his exit-stage-left out of Buford and his ex-wife’s window. The vividness of the story was never blurred. I only knew of one nephew Richie that Buford had, and he was now in his mid-30s. Richie and my friend Naomi had been dating. Naomi had introduced Buford to me. However, I was trying to do the math. So

one day I asked, “So how old was Richie on “the day” this all happened Buford?”

“Oh, he was just a little boy,” Buford responded. “I think seven or eight. Naw, he might have been more like four or five. He was just a little tike at the time. Smart as a whip you know. After all, I raised him every summer. Yes. That’s my nephew. Actually more like a son to me. He would come from Nashville by the Greyhound and stay with me in Quincy every summer until it was time for him to go to college.

“Is that right?” I asked.

“Oh yeah. Look at him now. He’s a big shot over there at Cape Canaveral. He got prime training. My sister did right by letting me raise him during the summers. That’s what African American boys need; great male role models,” Buford touted.

Although we were speaking by phone I just imagined that Buford was strutting around like a peacock with his chest poked out saying, “That’s my boy! That’s my boy!”

And I agreed. Positive mentoring in not only word, but action is an essential ingredient for the rearing of boys and girls. However, since learning is an ongoing process, I believe mentoring does not have an age limit. We never arrive. We’re always on a journey. Having mentors, iron-sharpens-iron advisors, and accountability

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partners is simply wise. And Biblically, we are to bare one another's burdens and be our brother's [and sister's] keeper.

"So Buford, may I ask you a question?"

"Baby, you can ask me N-E-THANG you want," he added a chuckle type of chortle at the end of that statement. I think he was still on a personal high thinking about all the greatness he had poured into Richie.

"You know I don't believe in talking to married men...and that includes married men that are legally separated." Throughout our "phone" relationship Buford would periodically mention he was looking for "juz tha righ gal!" to make his wife. But she couldn't be a CHEE-TAH! She had to be a clean, devoted woman because he wasn't going to have his name smeared all over the city and be embarrassed and humiliated by a cheating wife.

"Baby girl, let me tell you something, I ain't no kinda married. I got my divorce papers and I will sho-nuf show you them. I ain't got nothing' to hide."

Although we were on the phone, I still envisioned him strutting...now perhaps like an aristocrat in a smoking jacket with a cigar. Likely with his chest puffed out and his tailbone ejected out and up, and of course his feet at a 90-degree angle at the heels.

"Buford, transparency is a wonderful attribute. So how long have you been divorced?" I inquired.

“Huuuummmm. Ahhhhhh. Well, let me seeeee,” Buford appeared to be uncertain, but I didn’t want to break his chain of thought so I remained silent.

Then he started to do his mental math in a mumble, and I could tell he was working a basic arithmetic formula without a calculator. ‘90 minus 3 plus 14, carry the 2...’ Yeah, Buford was working the math like a statistician.

“Twenty-nine years!” he finally blurted out.

“Yup! It’s been almost three decades.” Buford’s volume and tone slowed and quieted.

I remained silent. And in a quiet voice, he went on to say, “I bought her a 2-karat diamond marquis. Paid cash for it. She made more than I did at that Cape job, but I saved every penny of my mad-money to buy her that ring -- just to say, ‘I love you’ at an unexpected time.”

I could envision now that Buford’s chin was at his chest and I could feel that his eyes were beginning to well with tears.

“Hello, Buford?” I called to make sure he was still on the line.

Then he inhaled and exhaled heavily, “Yeah, I’m still here,” but he was thinking and I was awaiting his next comment.

“You know,” his paced picked up and he now sounded reflective.

“In college she and I both had our wild side. Yeah baby! I was fine!

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Yeah I said it! Young, cut, built, solid muscle back then. Strong as a lumberjack. I spent on average two hours a day lifting weights. No fat, no flab back then. My BMI was in-check!”

I now envisioned Buford looking at himself in the mirror first head-on, and flexing his muscles like the Arnold Schwarzenegger - - actually Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia -- of the 1970’s. Striking those body builder poses for the paparazzi. But then I imagined him looking at his side profile view. He likely cupped one of his hands under his gut that is now “done-lapped” over his belt buckle and he is now jiggling it; then trying to inhale and compress inward the soft tissue of his stomach muscles, which have now lost most of their elasticity.

“Yeah! I sowed my wild oats!” I snapped back into listening to Buford as he reminisced about his college-strutting days.

“But let me tell you something,” he continued. “I sowed my wild oats, and she did too. The ladies loved Buford, and then men loved themselves some Sherry. She was fine with her 5-inch 2-foot short-stack-self. Girl had a Coke bottle bangin’ shape too. But she was also smart as a whip! And it was like she didn’t even have to study; just a pure scientific mind. Just sheer brilliance!”

I could tell he was smiling because his voice was lifting and sounded lighter now.

“Straight outta college she landed a nearly six-figure job at the Cape. And back then that was like making a million dollars. She was rich!”

“And she said yes! Yes, she wanted to marry me and be my wife! Me, Buford! She committed to marrying me!” He continued, but the pace was now slowing again and I could tell he was no longer smiling.

“Yeah, she’s married now to some church guy. She’s singing in a choir now out in California. Trying to act all holy. But I know the truth! She took all my money, the best years of my life. Had people thinking I couldn’t satisfy her. I gotta go.”

And again, abruptly there was that flat phone tone. Buford had once again reflected on his brilliant, very attractive ex-wife. The college memories would lift his spirit, but the tragic memory of her being caught-in-the-act was brutally vivid and deflating. Although the incident resulted in a divorce of nearly 30 years prior, the emotional hurt was as real in his present day as when the incident actually took place.

There’s not a shadow of a doubt covering my belief that marriage should be until death parts the spouses. The deep pangs of betrayal, like the unrelenting throbbing of emotional sciatic nerve pain, cannot be soothed by even an entire bottle of Bayer Aspirin. However, I do not believe there are any situations in which the

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Lord desires his sons and daughters to sit, sulk, and stay in for decades without hope of relief. We know Jesus came to heal the broken-hearted and lift the heavy burdens, for his sons and daughters to live an abundant life here on earth. Could it be possible that we place other things...perhaps even people...before God? I make no excuse for people who intentionally or even unintentionally inflict vile, repugnant, rancid treatment on others. The Great I Am will vindicate. However, we have each suffered some degree of emotional hurt, pain, disappointment, despair, or trauma. Yet, do we believe the Word of God and its power to see and go beyond the muck and mire of any gross current situation to get energized enough to muster ourselves up and move forward?

With this second unannounced flat-line phone hang up, I phoned Naomi and asked why she “really” thought he and I would be a good match; beyond the obvious that we’re both single, about the same age and church-goers.

Her reply, “Run! Girl, ruuuuuunnnn!”

“But you introduced us,” I reminded her.

“Yeah, but Richie and his momma are quacky! Let me spell it for yah! Q-W-A-A-A-A-A-A-K-K-K-K-K-K-K! They got issues! No, not issues...ISH-SHAAAAAS! It likely runs in the family. Ruuunnnnn!” she yelled.

“So you go from “Y’all would be a great match, to ‘call the paddy wagon’ and the men in the white jackets. What’s that about, Naomi?”

“Please forgive me,” she requested. “I should have called you sooner. I moved too fast with Richie. That dude was talking marriage from the day he moved in. But he is just twisted. Richie is a hyper-sensitive man that wants to be babied. He’s a big kid. And his momma tried stepping in on a private situation between Richie and me and I had to put her in her place. She made me go ABW [that’s angry black woman] on her aaaccccccee! And plus, she’s a beer DRANK-AH!”

Talk about having a difficult time putting the pieces to the puzzle together. All I could say was, “Okay, Naomi. You still working the overnight shift at the hospital?”

“Yeah. I’m beat. I’m pulling a double.”

“Well get yourself a 15-minute power nap. I’ll chat with you later,” I advised.

“Thanks. I’m in the bathroom stall at work right now. Gonna sit right cheer for about 25 or 30 minutes. You know how it is girl. I got intestinal blockage ISH-SHAS.”

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“Okay Naomi,” I began closing out our call. “Handle your business. Chat with you later.”

Any type of mutually beneficial relationship requires communication, commitment, cooperation and compromise. Buford was stuck and continued to reveal how entangled and entrenched he was in bitterness concerning his ex-wife. I learned his only council was with his best friend, “Big Boy” who was a married church deacon that openly had a girlfriend. Big Boy and Buford went way back. They pledged and were on line for the same fraternity at Southern University.

During the next few phone calls, Buford continued to share how he and Big Boy were so close that he felt his life was complete with their friendship. He added that Big Boy was a do-or-die type friend that would stick closer than any wife. I had to concur. I do believe there are friends that stick closer than one’s brothers, sisters, and any natural family members. During one phone conversation I shared with Buford that women always seem to have some sort of prayer circle, prayer call, prayer program, or prayer conference going on. I told him about the 8:00 a.m. Saturday morning prayer call friends and I have had for more than 10 years and asked if he would be interested in joining. I added that he didn’t need to pray unless he wanted or felt led. I emphasized that he could be a silent observer and just experience how the various prayer requests were stated and how prayers were prayed.

“Naw, I’ll pass,” was his immediate and abrupt reply.

Then I asked Buford whether he and Big Boy ever prayed.

“Like what?” he asked.

“Well, I know women will pray at the drop of a hat. But do you and your closest friend pray about anything? About your desires, about life, health, family, relationships, disappointments, hurts...anything?”

“You really be all deep, don’t **chew!**” he was laughing sarcastically.

“No Miss Jill. Big Boy and I do not hold hands and pray. Except maybe when we go out for dinner and he blesses the food. Girl, you something else. Actually, remember this: the only person I need to pray to or with is God. God knows my heart, so He’s taking care of me just fine.”

“I agree, Buford! You’re absolutely right. God knows each of us down to the very fibers of our hearts. But God’s Word says we should pray at all times; pray for one another, pray without ceasing, and touch and agree in prayer with others,” I added. “Isn’t it great, however, when your dearest friends are praying with you on matters that you’re going through? And isn’t it even better to know that their prayers are aligned with the very Word of God for your life?” I asked him.

“Yeah. I know Big Boy’s got me covered. He’s my running buddy. And he preaches too. He’s good. I’m good. We’re good. We don’t

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need to talk out loud and be touching each other to pray,” Buford confidently explained.

“Next thing you’ll probably be asking me if I get smeared down with olive oil and whether I speak in tongues. You’re funny. Too funny at that!” he laughed and continued laughing. Then asked, “You don’t be getting into all that nonsense, now do you?”

I was silent.

“Oh my lawd. You one of them?”

My silence continued.

“You really do go overboard, don’t you?” he questioned.

“Buford, if it’s in the Word of God, it’s good enough for me,” I said calmly, yet confidently.

There are times, many times, when pressing and forcing a matter won’t work and might actually backfire. Knowing Buford’s emotional delicacy on the matter of his former wife, and trying to bridge it with prayer, simply would not work -- at this time.

So I advised Buford I’d keep him lifted in prayer for his total healing, restoration, and eventually finding his new wife.

“Okay. Whatever you say Miss Jill,” yet Buford continued to laugh.