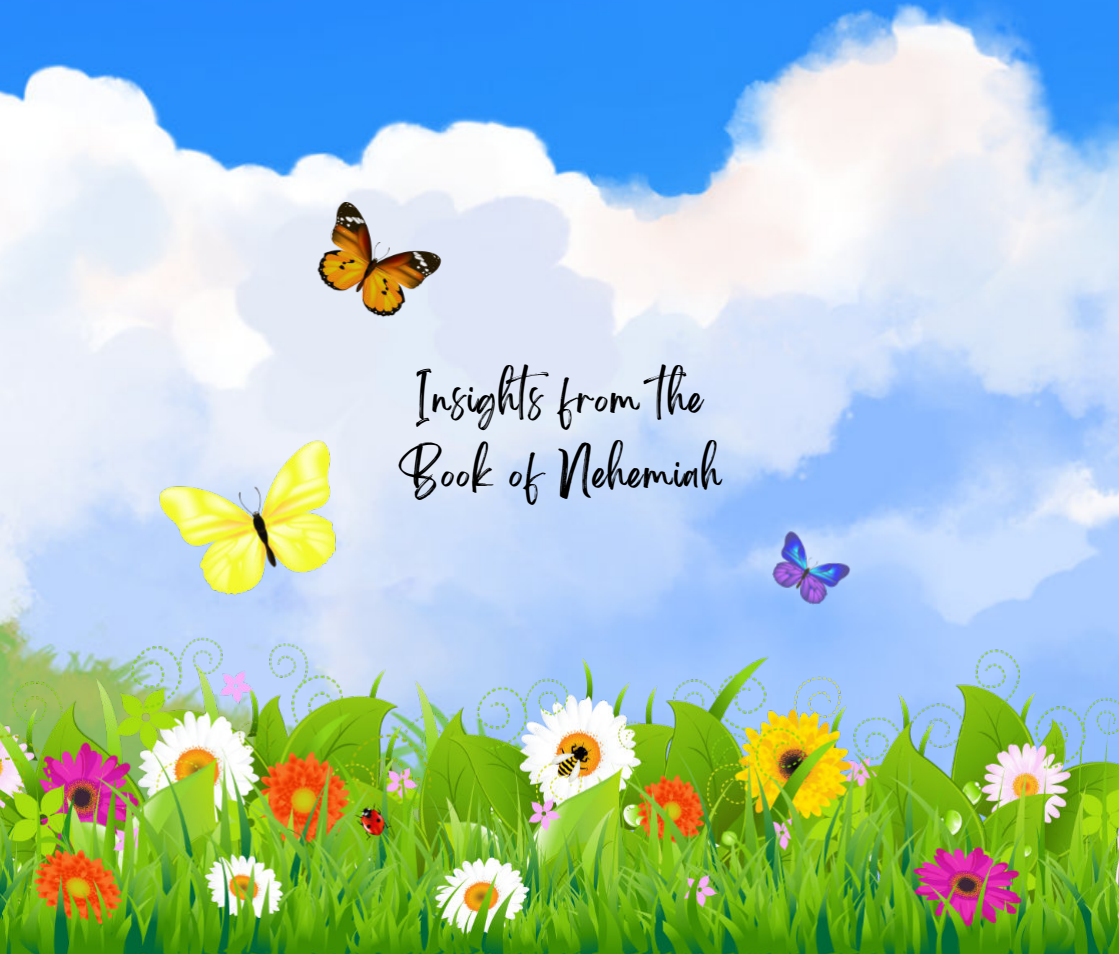


Modupe Kumapayi

A Book for
Dreamers
How Dreamers transmute into Achievers

Insights from the
Book of Nehemiah



A Book for Dreamers

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Dedication

TO all God's sons and daughters who, like
Nehemiah, are working out their faith to pursue
their dreams.

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Opening Note

AT three different times I've tried to write this book. This is my fourth and thankfully final attempt. When I first received the inspiration for this book, I had just finished reading the book of Nehemiah (for the umpteenth time). I was super excited and wrote down the idea for the book but because I was working on a few other projects back then, some of the original ideas I had got lost when I was finally ready to write this book.

At my first attempt something felt missing, and I deleted all I had written. On my second attempt something felt missing too, and I also deleted all I had written. On my third attempt – you guessed right – something felt missing again, this time though, I saved all I had written, hoping it might come in handy.

Then I prayed. And, finally, one afternoon before my birthday in 2024, while laying on my couch thinking about a dream I had the night before where I had been asked to re-write a report, my mind drifted back to this book. I knew I had to re-write it again, but wanted to do it right this time. Somehow, I decided to wait a while more to get fresh inspiration. During this wait, I accidentally opened an old journal I had read many times, and there it was, my long forgotten jottings on Nehemiah, hinting at the original ideas I had received for this book! On the spot I knew there could be no procrastination anymore. I had to start immediately! So it started, and I was so stirred in my spirit, the work was accomplished in no time in the zest of grace!

The journey from dreaming to doing – by this I mean finishing – isn't always seamless; but the challenges hardly matters when you're finally done. Anyone who has started or finished anything meaningful will tell you this. There's something about the joys of finishing that makes all the hassles worth it, and makes you want to achieve something great all over again. But not everyone knows about that feeling. The feeling they understand so well is having a skill/gift/talent and a desire to do something. Sadly, that's where it ends for many people. Truth is, settling for that feeling alone is you attempting to short-change yourself.

Thinking back to the days when I read the book of Nehemiah, I remember saying to myself, "Here is a man who can teach us a thing or two about being a doer and enjoying the joys of finishing, including everything in-between. Instead of the book of Nehemiah, it should be called the book for dreamers!" And for good reason too. Why? It's because it has lessons that when applied can help one move from the dreaming phase to the doing phase! I knew I had to share all that I had learnt with you. And I hope I did just that here in the simplest way ever!

If by the time you're done reading this book there's a shift in your mindset because you've received enough light to continue on your journey, then I just might have done justice to the assignment God gave me after-all. I really pray this is the case.

Rooting for you always,
Yours in Christ,
Modupeola-oluwa Kumapayi

Vital text

*For the eagerly awaiting
creation waits for the
revealing of the sons and
daughters of God!*

Romans 8:19, NASB

Part 1

*In the
Beginning*



1

Something of Interest

RATHER than leading with stories about Nehemiah's childhood, teenage years and even some other interesting stories about his adult life, his autobiography opens with a simple name drop for his father; then he goes straight to address what we won't be wrong to refer as the second most important thing Nehemiah will do in his life. The first was that he knew God; the second, as we shall soon see, was that he stepped into his divine destiny, even though I'm not quite sure he had full realization of it at that time; perhaps he did much later.

Nehemiah's date with destiny came in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while he was in Susa (also spelt Shushan) the capitol. That day Nehemiah seemed to just be meeting with men whom he was familiar with. But his meeting with Hanani, a close relative from Judah and the others, proved to be his first step into destiny. For you reading this, my hope is reading this account would result in a significant move into your own destiny too.

At the meeting, Nehemiah inquires about the welfare of others, including the state of Jerusalem (Please note

that certain events had happened prior to this time, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, and the people being taken into exile in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar; but through Zerubbabel and Ezra under Cyrus's rule, some of the exiles had returned and the Temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt. Also, there had been attempts at rebuilding the walls. But an accusatory report to the king had resulted in an order for the Jews to stop the work, see **Ezra 4:7-23**).

Let's read a portion of Scripture that tells us about Nehemiah's meeting.

“And I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and disgrace, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.” Now when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (**Nehemiah 1:2^b-4, NASB**)

Though a date had been set with destiny, I dare say Nehemiah's genuine need-to-know about the welfare of others and the state of Jerusalem played a key role in revealing what it was God would have him do to him. I say his interest was genuine because, look at the effect the negative report he heard had on him. He sat down, not because he was tired of standing but because he was overwhelmed with sadness. This is the same reason he wept and mourned for days, the same reason he took the report to God, not only by praying, but accompanied it with fasting.

I earlier mentioned that his meeting with Hanani and the others would help us learn more about Nehemiah. Well, it's true. In case you missed it, now you know that Nehemiah was someone who loved God's people; this is why even though he was far from home, and like we shall soon learn, in a privileged and safe position as the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah had genuine interests in what was happening to others and the state of Jerusalem.

Another thing revealed about Nehemiah was reliance on God. Upon hearing the news of the deplorable state of Jerusalem and the remnant of the people there, he did not only feel genuinely distraught, he took the matter to God in prayer. It meant Nehemiah was a man of ardent prayer also.

Do you love people? Proof of this is in the genuine interests you take in the welfare of others, especially those who might not be able to do anything for you in return. Are you a person who relies on God? From what we can see, loving people and relying on God were, and if I might add, will be prerequisites for those who want to play a positive role in what God is doing in the world.

Want to know why it's so important to love people? It's because God won't call any of us to any self-serving mission. Acceptable service to God will always involve serving others; and if we don't love others, the mission will prove impossible! The driving force for starting, going through the in-betweens, and getting to the finish line always has to be love. We can't and shouldn't run on anything else. And need I say, we need to rely on God. He is the One who has the plan, and allows us to play a small yet significant role in it; only He knows how to provide us with all that would be required to begin and

finish His mission. Thinking we can get by doing God's work without God is foolishness.

That being said, I earlier wrote that Nehemiah's genuine need-to-know about the welfare of others and the state of Jerusalem played a key role in revealing to him what it was God would have him do. It's true, because unlike many people who hear God's audible voice revealing His will to them, and some being able to figure out God's will just by the kind of skill/gift or talent, including spiritual gifts they have, others only have a dream to be a part of what God is doing in the world. They pick up clues of what their role might be from their interests.

So what are your interests? Our interests have a way of pointing us to the work we must do. For me, I've always loved reading. When I gave my life to Christ, reading was still a favourite thing to do; and you guessed right, I read the Bible a lot, over and over and over. And as I read, I raise questions – questions that I later find answers to, often through the help of the Holy Spirit. Over time, I have come to think about others a lot.

Would others have questions too? Of course many would. I have worried about those who might lack clarity about God's word and will. We all deserve to understand the messages God is passing across to us through the Scriptures. And, without intending to play the role of the Holy Spirit, just with a sincere desire to help others understand and grow in their Christian walk, I took my concern and desire to God in prayer, and soon started out writing down the insights I receive daily in my Bible study and walk with God, in hope to share them with others.

I'm tempted to continue my little story with the word 'coincidentally', a word I strongly disagree exists in the life of a child of God. The unique relationship God shares with His children leaves nothing to chance or coincidences; everything is prearranged, ordered, well thought-out by God to do us good. It was much later I remember a series of prophecies that had gone forth about how God wanted me to serve Him and humanity, and the pens He had given me, just for the work. Never mind that I tend to easily forget those prophetic incidences, probably because I hadn't given my life to Christ when I heard them first. Not until after I had given my life to Christ and a desire was put in my heart, did I finally later remember. My steps were ordered, you see. I just didn't realize it until later.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying everyone who loves to read should become a writer, let alone a teacher/interpreter of God's word. What I'm saying is, if you prayerfully pay attention to the things that interests you, you will be on your way to discovering what God would have you do. And something this interest of yours will have in common with that of others whom God uses is that it will have its focus on others; it will be advantageous and beneficial to others; it will never be self-serving.



2

The Role of Intentionality

THE negative report Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem moved him to pray; but it wasn't only so he could find comfort in God for the sadness he felt that he prayed. If you take a closer look at the words of Nehemiah's prayers, they reveal something important to us. It's Nehemiah's strong desire to right some wrongs. The first is the spiritual wrongs of the nation; the second is the physical damage that had been done to the walls of Jerusalem. Let's read some verses of Scripture.

“I said, ‘Please, LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the

ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.' They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man. Now I was the cupbearer to the king"
(Nehemiah 1:5-11, NASB).

While the intercessory nature of this prayer proves my first point, the tail end of the prayer as recorded in the verses above, prove my second point. Do you see it, the proof for my second point? In case you missed it, I'd help make it plain. Nehemiah asked God to make him successful. Why would he ask that if there isn't an aim or purpose he sought to accomplish? He also asks God to grant him mercy before "this man" (he meant the king). And why? If not because the king had a role also to play in the plan he had in mind. Do you see it now?

The trend of Nehemiah's action is pretty straightforward. Interest-prayer-plan, or is it interest-plan-prayer? You'd agree with me that Nehemiah had a special quality about him; it's his intentionality. I can imagine Nehemiah saying, "Now that I've heard

everything that's wrong, I'm going to do my part in doing what I can to right these wrongs." And it didn't end in him just desiring to do something; because, he also goes ahead to actually do something. He didn't give in to excuses about how he was a slave-turned servant, nor did he leave things to chance, sitting idly and merely leaving things to chance. There was no room for such happenstance because his servant situation put him at a disadvantage, anyway.

When we discover our interests, I'm talking about the one that will help reveal what God would have us do, what usually accompanies it is the revelation concerning a need. Nehemiah for instance hears the negative report and suddenly sees a need; but he doesn't stop there, he also sees how his input could right the wrongs (i.e., help meet these needs). Then he immediately got busy. Soon we come to see him in action leading the team that will bring about a solution to one of these needs.

Have you discovered that interest? If yes, then surely you must also be able to see areas of need. But that's not all you must see. You must also see yourself as someone who can, at least to some extent, meet those needs. Do you see all of these? You must, because it is when you have the right view of the situation and of yourself that you can confidently take your concern and desire to God in prayer, and He can put a practical plan in your mind to help you get the work that you must do done.

You may ask whether I want us to be people of prayer or people who are intentional. I'd say both, Nehemiah's prayers were proof of his intentional nature. If you're praying and your prayers are focused on people's needs that God helps you see, and your desire/

plan is to make a positive impact, then you are being intentional. Have you ever sat to think about what could have been left unaccomplished by Nehemiah if he had only heard the report, wept and then moved on with his secular job? I have. What would have happened is that God's work will still be done, but Nehemiah wouldn't be part of it. He would have been replaced by someone else. This is the danger of indifference, or would I say, passivity. You and I can't afford to be victims of indifference nor passivity, either now or ever.

While I'm of the opinion that Nehemiah's plan came to its fullness while he prayed, some might choose to believe he had his plans before he prayed and perhaps prayed so he could receive God's approval and providence. Any of both scenarios can be the case, because there are instances where God drops an idea in our spirit and when we take it to prayer, we receive clarity on the matter alongside God's assurance of His favour and mercy to carry out the plan. There are also cases where the entire idea has already dropped in our spirit, yet we still ought to pray for God's approval and providence.

In my case it was the former rather than the latter. I wonder what your case is or will be. Regardless, let's bear in mind that we must carry God along in everything we do; by this I mean, we put Him first, not drag Him along after we've taken all the steps.

Did you notice that Nehemiah's secular profession wasn't mentioned until the tail end of the first chapter? Why do you think that is? While I'm of the opinion that his secular profession was mentioned to help us discern the meaning behind the final words of Nehemiah's

prayer and, also because the next chapter reveals more about the king's role in Nehemiah's plan which was also God's plan, I believe it also reveals God's intentionality. Though being a cupbearer wasn't Nehemiah's destiny role, God had put him there for a reason. Soon we will see how it all adds up, and it does. Maybe this is that sign you need to stop despising where you're at in life, even if you're made for more. Where you are does have a role to play in God's plan.

3



Opportunity and Preparation

AS the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah's job was to serve the king wine, but taste it first in case it is poisoned. While it was a trusted position, I don't particularly see it as an enviable one. I'm sure you know why I think like that. But thankfully the worst case scenario never did happen, and it remained that way until the time came for Nehemiah to make full use of this position God had intentionally allowed him to occupy.

Earlier, Nehemiah had asked God to make him successful in his plan and grant him mercy before the king. In the first eight verses of the second chapter, we see how God answered his prayers. It's a long read but I will share those verses of Scripture here, not to fill up the page but for the sake of clarity.

“And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I picked up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, “Why is

your face sad, though you are not ill? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid. And I said to the king, “May the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the site of my fathers’ tombs, is desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, I request that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.” Then the king said to me, with the queen sitting beside him, “How long will your journey be, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, so that they will allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which is by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house to which I will go.” And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me” (Nehemiah 2:1-8, NASB)

God’s first answer to Nehemiah’s prayer was in the form of an opportunity, which came **four months** after he had begun praying day and night. On that day, which must have seemed like every other random day, only it wasn’t, Nehemiah found an occasion that would serve his purpose. Please, let’s note that Nehemiah didn’t use any worldly wisdom to get that opportunity, it was a gift from God. It was God who caused the king to be mindful of Nehemiah’s countenance and talk about it.

Bible scholars say that Nehemiah letting his sadness be seen by the king could have put him in grave danger. So he wasn't using his grief to start a conversation with the king and further his own interest. It just so happened that it was his grief God used to get the king's attention.

Nehemiah who had prayed could discern this opportunity was a gift, and that it must be maximized. He does just that by informing the king of the reason for his sadness even though he was afraid. And when asked about what action he'd like to take, we get a chance to observe the level of preparedness Nehemiah had put in towards his plan. Yet, before answering the king, he still says a silent prayer (Remember the king had an unfavourable view of Jerusalem and his decree contributed to the sorry state Jerusalem was in). However at the end of the back and forth with the king, we see Nehemiah's wisdom, seeing that he acknowledged God's hand in everything that had just transpired between him and the king.

After reading all this, are you wondering how what you know/where you're at might be a stepping stone for the work you must do? My advice is, don't worry about those kind of things. Even Nehemiah wouldn't have known how his position as cupbearer would be used by God to get him to his soon to be role as rebuilder and leader (governor). Instead, here's what you should be doing: praying, waiting for an opportunity and staying prepared while you anticipate the opportunity.

I earlier mentioned that Nehemiah didn't use worldly wisdom to get that opportunity. It's important we too do not adopt the habit of borrowing the wisdom of the world; it has a tendency to lead one into sin. With God,

the end doesn't justify the means; the means is just as important as the end, perhaps even more important. So let's be careful to wait for God to present us with the right opportunities or reveal the right opportunities to us. But, enough about opportunities, what about preparedness? Imagine if the opportunity had come for Nehemiah and our man hadn't prepared? He would have succeeded only in short-changing himself.

A lot of Christians have sob stories of how they wasted a good opportunity. Do you have some stories yourself? I know I do. Usually when we view our lives in hindsight, we always seem to know what we should have done differently. And even though God is merciful and does many times restore lost opportunities, there are some we know we can never get back. You can decide that the era of wasted opportunities is gone and stop moaning the loss; and embrace the new season that has begun. How? By staying prepared. This is also how you prove that you're intentional about fulfilling that plan God has revealed to you.

We aren't sure what skills, gift or talent Nehemiah had; but being a builder had never been mentioned, and so when he declares boldly to the king that he was going to do the work of rebuilding, we can be sure that he had given it some thought and had come to the conclusion that if this was what God had called him to do, then He would provide him with the ability to get it done.

Now, I must ask, have you settled it in your mind that that need (along the lines of your area(s) of interest) that God caused you to see, and that plan that has taken shape in your mind, that even though you might have zero known abilities in that area, you're completely sure

what God has called you to do, and He will equip you for? And even if you do have skills, gifts or you're talented in that line, you still must be completely convinced this is the work you must do.

The first is to prepare your mind. The second is to be aware of the physical things you need for the execution of your plan. Before the opportunity presented itself, Nehemiah had furnished himself with information about all that he would need to execute this God-given mission. And so when the king asked, he didn't stutter or request time to put a list together. If he had done any of those two things, he could have missed his opportunity. Lack of preparedness will cost us God-given opportunities. So, stay prepared. Find out all that you need to know and stay updated.

I couldn't possibly round up on this chapter without talking about the king. I know I have been mentioning him but permit me to say some more things about him. Aside God, the king seemed to be the next team member for Nehemiah; and many can take this to mean that its okay to partner with non-believers on the things that God calls us to do. To this I'd say, let's not make this a rule. Nehemiah's situation with the king was peculiar to him; even then, we know it was God who worked in the heart of the king, not like he was a willing participant all by himself. Let's do this instead: let's take this to mean we won't work alone; God will bring people our way, people who will play a role in what God has called us to do. And while we can't completely rule out non-believers as people whom God may seek to use, we mustn't actively seek them out to partner with us without God's direction or approval.

4



The Road to Destiny

LIKE in many cases, Nehemiah's included, journeying on the road to destiny often cause disruptions in daily routines, even demanding time away from secular job. All were prices Nehemiah willingly paid. We left off in verse 8 of chapter 2, and by that time Nehemiah had maximized the opportunity presented to him. Now in verse 9, he tells us he was already on the road to destiny, and in his possession were letters signed by the king, and in his company were officers and horsemen so he wouldn't be harassed. Let me share some details with you.

“Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen” (Nehemiah 2:9, NASB)

Let me guess, you already know what I'm about to write next. If you missed it, here it goes. Going from dreaming to doing will cost you something. Yes, it will.

For Nehemiah, there was a change in his routine and a separation from his secular job; the price you will have to pay might be different, but one thing you can be sure of is, doing will cost you something.

You may say, but was Nehemiah's price for being a doer really a sacrifice? I know I had earlier said that I didn't see Nehemiah's 'trusted' position as cupbearer as anything enviable because of how easily he could lose his life. But that didn't make the position any less important; because he had access to the king, and many people would have sought his favour. Plus there had to be perks to being the king's cupbearer. It was all of this Nehemiah had to leave behind in order to do the work God would have him do. So, you see, it was sacrificial.

Nehemiah's action will be foolishness to the world. They will say, who leaves their comfortable lifestyle, a job that comes with perks, just to go do some charity work? But the Christian will understand, seeing that we are familiar with the concept of giving up things of no eternal value just so we can be a part of something of eternal value. And so when we are confronted with a decision to make in order to be a part of something big God is doing and begin the work He has called us to do. We willingly pay the price knowing full well that we are better off doing so.

Having said that, there are and will continue to be Christians who struggle with the concept of 'paying the price'. For such, I have an advice. I'm not sure how helpful it will be though, but what has worked for me is conviction. If you're completely convinced God is leading you, then you won't find it hard to let go of the things you have to; only when you aren't sure, will you

continue to hold on tightly to everything else. So, are you completely convinced or still unsure? That being said, let's move on to verse 10. I'd share the verse.

“And when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel” (Nehemiah 2:10, NASB)

Aside paying a price, one more thing you can expect on the road to destiny is opposition. While on his journey, Nehemiah got to a necessary stop and gave the governors there letters from the king. The letters would have involved the purpose for Nehemiah's travel; and even though the letters were to enable him safe passage, they must have also hinted to many the purpose of Nehemiah's travel. And even though what Nehemiah was on his way to do was a good thing by all standards, some who heard of it weren't pleased.

The names of those who weren't pleased and opposed Nehemiah were mentioned; but I urge you to never see another human being as opposition but instead see the devil under whose influence these individuals are, as the real opposition. And yet the devil didn't just pick these individuals at random; they were picked because their hearts weren't right; they were more concerned for themselves and cared about only the things that mattered to them, like the strength of Samaria, which Sanballat governed, and Ammon which Tobiah may have ruled. It was to their benefit that Jerusalem remain in ruins.

Just like Nehemiah, you will discover that even though you plan on doing good and you don't bother

anyone, the devil will oppose you and cause someone somewhere to take offense. And you must know that it isn't about you, it's about the work God has committed into your hands; so you can say, it's really about God. The battle between good and evil has been in existence before you and I even appeared on earth, and might continue long after we are gone. So when opposition comes, don't take it too personal, and don't be easily discouraged. There's hardly anyone ever who has stood with God on something or has obeyed His voice on something that didn't face some sort of resistance/opposition. So when it's your turn, I dare say, rejoice. At least you know you're on the right path and in good company. As we go on, we'll learn how to deal with oppositions. For now, just have it at the back of your mind that opposition will come.

Nehemiah learns some people are not pleased; but what does he do? Turn back and forget the whole thing, or sit with them and try to come up with a plan that pleases them? No, he does none of those; instead, Nehemiah continued on his journey until he came to Jerusalem. He declared in verse 11a, **“So I came to Jerusalem...”**

5



A Time to be Silent

WHEN in Jerusalem, Nehemiah sets his plan into motion at an unusual time and in an unusual way. He tells us that three days after his arrival in Jerusalem, he gets up at night (for the sake of secrecy), with a few men who weren't even aware of what his plans were for Jerusalem, and went for a personal inspection of the city. This was necessary seeing that he needed to see for himself the extent of the work laid up for him.

But the men with him weren't the only ones who didn't know what Nehemiah's plans were. He tells us that even other officials didn't know; same with the Jews. Let's read some verses of Scripture.

“So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. And I got up in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem, and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Spring and on to the Dung Gate, and I was inspecting the walls of

Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which had been consumed by fire. Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I was going up at night by the ravine and inspecting the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. However, the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who were doing the work" (Nehemiah 2:11-16, NASB)

While this night time inspection carried out by Nehemiah cannot be made a rule for those of us who are getting geared up to be doers, we can however apply Nehemiah's silence-first approach.

Why did Nehemiah keep his plans to himself and not reveal it for a while? The Scriptures provide us no answer; but if we judge based on how Sanballat and Tobiah had reacted upon learning about his intentions for the nation of Israel, Nehemiah was better off keeping silent for a while in order not to gather too many enemies too soon. That and also because of the problem of distraction. Sharing your plans too soon, I mean before you've had a chance to make up your mind about everything that you need to do, will definitely do more harm than good. It gives room for people to come up with suggestions, advice, any of which the enemy can use as a fiery dart against your mind and emotions, true experiences many can testify as the reason their dreams got aborted or derailed.

You may say, it's understandable that Nehemiah didn't tell the men with him or the officials what he was up to, but what about the Jews, the priests; wasn't he

being unnecessarily secretive, seeing that these people couldn't have possibly stood against the work he was to do? Well, like I said, the Scriptures provided us no answers. In my own opinion, I believe Nehemiah needed silence and time to form his own opinions before sharing his plans with people. And there's nothing wrong with that; in fact, it is worth emulating.

I also feel the need to correct the notion that just because people will directly benefit from what God has asked you to do means they can't be used by the enemy against what God has asked you to do; or that just because a person is righteous doesn't mean the enemy can't influence them against you or the work you must do. If you hold these beliefs, then sooner than later you'd be in for a rude shock. The truth of the matter is anyone can be used. We must be at alert and implement preventive measures to ensure that we don't fall prey, even if it means being silent for a while. The time to be silent doesn't last forever; very soon, a time to speak arrives.

How do you know when it's time to speak? You either know by the Holy Spirit's leading or, like in the case of Nehemiah, you know because you've had enough time to form your own opinions (after careful assessment) and strong convictions. Let's read a few more verses of Scripture.

“Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been burned by fire. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace.” And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and

also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let's arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work" (Nehemiah 2:17-18, NASB)

Nehemiah no longer feeling the need to be silent about his plans, and now fully aware of the situation Jerusalem was in, the next day he turns the people's focus to the challenge that lay before them, and invites them to rebuild-with him. But that wasn't enough to get the people to join him. He takes the pains of recounting how God had helped him so far, with hopes of encouraging the people to join his team and do the work with him.

It worked!

The people verbally committed to doing the work with him; but not just verbally, they put in the work.

While we might be tempted to interpret this to mean we will always need a big team before we can start doing the work God has called us into, I'd advise we don't interpret it that way. While the literal work of rebuilding started with a team of willing participants, Nehemiah had started out when it was just him and God who were on board.

Remember when he made inquiries? When he prayed for four months day and night, waiting for an opportunity and preparing for it? Remember the trip to Jerusalem? Surely the number of Nehemiah's team mates grew with time, but that's not how it started. So I advise, instead of waiting for a large number of people to join you, start where you're at with what you have and can do. In time God will add people to your team.

Part 2

*The
In-Betweens*

6



A Weapon called Discouragement

EARLIER, we established that while you're on the road to destiny you can expect opposition; and I tell you, that one of the weapons the opposition uses is discouragement. It might be employed just before you begin the work God has called you to do, or like in Nehemiah's case, just as you begin it. Let's read a verse of Scripture.

“But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked us and despised us, and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” (Nehemiah 2:19, NASB)

The devil who is the real opposition had earlier on influenced Sanballat and Tobiah; but now we learn he has a new recruit: Geshem. And just as the work began, all three of them heard about it. The verse above tells us how they reacted to the news. Nehemiah said they mocked and disdained him and his team, despising the work they were doing. By the questions the adversaries

asked, it is clear their goal was to prevent them from continuing the work by causing them to lose their confidence and enthusiasm (which by the way is what discouragement means). Their tactic makes sense if we put into consideration that these men thought Nehemiah was acting independent of the king's consent, and because the city had been presented before the king as a place that promoted resistance against his government, and was expected to continue to lie in ruins.

Till date the enemy uses the weapon of discouragement through situations, humans who openly don't like us, even by those who claim to like us. They seek to cause us to lose our confidence and enthusiasm so we can quit the work committed into our hands. But we must be careful lest we fall into the temptation to quit. Many people have fallen by the way side because of discouragement. You and I can't afford to add to the number of those who have fallen; and one way we can prevent this from happening is by first knowing that the weapon of discouragement exists, and then, second, respond excellently in the face of it.

You may ask, does anyone really not know that discouragement is a thing? Well, not that people don't know, it's rather that some people don't give it much thought because they assume they are immune to it; probably because of their strong convictions; so when it hits, as is often the case, even to the best of us, they have no defence against it, and end up falling like a pack of cards.

But enough of that, let's learn how to respond excellently, by learning from Nehemiah's response.

“So I answered them and said to them, “The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20, NASB).

While some people may choose to deal with discouragement by keeping silent and absorbing it all in, this I however do not recommend. Nehemiah doesn't keep silent. In the verse above, we learn that he answered them. Though they had asked him what it was he was doing and had implied he was rebelling against the king, Nehemiah doesn't provide them with suitable answers for their questions or clarify anything, instead he declares his confidence in God's ability to cause them accomplish their aim/purpose since the work of building, which they were doing was for Him.

He declares their continuous determination to do the work of rebuilding in spite of what those against them had said. He informs the recruits of the opposition, of their limitations, or better yet, their true state/fate. Nehemiah's declarations must have encouraged, not just himself but those who worked with him. And if that isn't a beautiful example of how to respond to discouragement, then I don't know what is.

Here's how you can apply it. In order to shield your mind and emotions from the fiery darts of discouragement, make sure you believe and then declare to yourself and those who care to listen your confidence in God's ability to help you not only begin but successfully finish what He has committed into your hands. Also, believe and declare that you are working for and with God. You didn't send yourself; God did. So you

have His backing. Hence quitting is not an option. And last, but not the least, believe and declare whatever has been written concerning the enemies of God's purpose, I mean, don't put off reminding the enemy of his limitations and his fate. These methods work; so don't fail to internalize and use them to shield your mind and emotions.

Before we move on from this topic, let me remind you of what not to do with those who seek to discourage you. Don't sit with them and attempt to help them understand where you're coming from and what you're doing. Why bother with people who don't want to understand, people who have already made up their minds to believe whatever they want to believe and cause you endless problems? Instead of focusing on changing their mindset and response to you, focus on your mindset and give the appropriate response.

7

Partners in the Work



GOD had put in Nehemiah's mind the desire to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and the things he could do by himself he did; but the actual work of building, he was wise enough to know that he couldn't do all by himself. He needed a team, he needed partners in the work, so he extended an invitation **(See Nehemiah 2:17-18)**.

I checked the dictionary and found a definition for the word partner that I like very much. Let me share it with you. It reads: "A person who takes part in an undertaking with another or others, especially in a business or company with shared risks and profits."

The reason I like this definition very much is because it highlights two things for us who will be doers and will be in need of partners to do the work with us. The first is that a partner takes part in an undertaking; the second is that a partner shares risks and profits. And in Nehemiah's story, we see how this plays out, beginning in chapter 3. There we learn that the work had started, but perhaps more importantly, we learn who Nehemiah's partners are. From the long list we find out there's a high priest, then priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, officials,

women, Levites and even merchants (**See Nehemiah 3:1, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 32**).

What I want us to bear in mind is that God can send our way all kinds of people; those with a different status than us, those with different careers, of a different gender etc, whomever God sends our way, one thing we can be sure of is that just like those who partnered with Nehemiah, they will be interested in the work and willing to lend a hand, even if some will do more work than others (**See Nehemiah 3:11, 19-21, 24, 27, 30**). From time to time, we might encounter those who claim to be interested in the work but refuse to actually participate in the work, just like Nehemiah did with the nobles of Tekoa. Let's be mindful of such people; they are not to be regarded as partners (**See Nehemiah 3:5b**).

You may ask, were those who worked with Nehemiah only Jews? According to the list provided, there were men from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon and Mizpah, Zanoah, district of Beth Zur and the district of Keilah who came to do the work (**See Nehemiah 3:2, 5, 7, 13, 16-17**). So, not only Jews did. However if they joined in the work, they'd have their reasons for doing so. Some Bible scholars are of the opinion that they did so out of loyalty to the nation of Israel and specifically Jerusalem. This implies they perceived they were better off being for the work than being indifferent or against it. We can't fault them seeing that they too qualify to be partners. Didn't we say partners share the risks and profits? These ones weren't only after the profits, they shared the risk of the work with the others who had come to work as well.

One thing that can't go unnoticed when you read this third chapter is Nehemiah's strategy as he worked with

his partners. While some were obviously willing to work on whatever portion of work was assigned to them, there were those who (I assume) were only interested in certain areas of the work. Nehemiah was wise enough in handling this group of people. He didn't turn them away; instead he allowed them work in the areas they were interested in **(See Nehemiah 3:10, 23, 28-30)**.

Here's how we can apply this in our dealing with those whom God sends our way; we have to be wise. Let's pray for wisdom and also borrow Nehemiah's, and remember that we can get the best out of people when we are flexible. Please, don't get me wrong, I don't mean we ought to be flexible to the point where we allow people do as they wish with the work God has committed into our hands; instead, we allow people to help us in areas they are interested in/feel led to. Sometimes when we insist in only one area where they can help, we run the risk of losing out on what they can offer altogether.

There is also one person who can hardly go unrecognized among the builders. His name is Baruch. Let me share a verse of Scripture about him.

“After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest” (Nehemiah 3:20, NASB).

While there were those who refused to get their hands dirty, there were those who did. There were also those who did so selectively, and then there was Baruch who is said to have worked zealously, that is with great energy or enthusiasm, which is commendable. I'm drawing our

attention to him so I can make a point; and it is that different people will give themselves to the work in different ways, and that too is okay. It's great that Baruch worked zealously but not everyone will have his energy or enthusiasm and we should still appreciate them regardless why? Because with all of Baruch's energy or enthusiasm, there's no way even he could have gotten all the work done himself, the input of others will still be needed. I wish all the people God sends our way would be a Baruch, but that hardly ever happens, still we can be thankful for those who are Baruchs and those who aren't..and we know why.

You may ask, did Nehemiah participate in the work or was he just giving directives? Even though in the third chapter, the focus is on the other builders, do you really think that Nehemiah could have gotten the people to cooperate with him and get as much work done if he had folded his hands and did nothing? The answer is no. What I believe is that Nehemiah joined in the work, he was a hands-on leader. And this is what this means for us, that just because God sends people our way to make our task easier doesn't mean we get to fold our hands and do nothing. What is expected of us is to continue in the work, remaining committed to it till the very end.

8



New Recruits, Same Tactics

GOD had raised Nehemiah to do the work of rebuilding and leading the team of people whom He would send his way to join in the work. And the devil who is the opposition had influenced Sanballat to be his representative in opposing the work Nehemiah and the people did. It seemed he was also tasked with gathering new recruits for the opposition. Let's read a few verses of Scripture.

“Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry, and he mocked the Jews. And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy people of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore the temple for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish it in a day? Can they revive the stones from the heaps of rubble, even the burned ones?” Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him, and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox were to jump on it, it would break their stone wall down!” (Nehemiah 4:1-3, NASB)

It wasn't news that Sanballat was opposed to the work that Nehemiah and the people were doing, he and Tobiah had made their stance known from before the work began (**See Nehemiah 2:10, 19**). But it seemed they were only just getting started. You see, as the work progressed and he learnt about it, Sanballat became furious and very angry; and like before, he resorted to mockery, asking questions aimed at discouraging Nehemiah and his men. This time, Sanballat did so in the presence of people whom when recruited would be powerful enemies for Nehemiah and his crew.

You'd agree with me that as the number of those on the side of Nehemiah grew, so did the number of those opposed to him. And if I'm being honest, Nehemiah and his crew seemed to be the weaker side. Emphasis on the word 'seemed' because though they appeared weak, they really were stronger because they had God in their corner. And this is something you and I who are committed to being doers must take note of. There's no promise anywhere that you won't have opposition or that they'll change for the better or that their numbers will not increase. Please know this and know peace. Just because you're doing what God has called you to do doesn't mean an opposition free life. But what you can however count on is God being on your side. Truth is, you've been declared the winner regardless of what tactics your opposition resorts to.

Speaking of tactics, Sanballat resorts to his previous one which is mockery, with the aim of discouraging the workers. It's true the enemy does repeat old tactics, not because he doesn't have new ones but because he knows just how powerful the old ones will be, provided they are

used on you at a time when you've let down your guard. Soon we will read about how Nehemiah responds so we can learn how to; but first, let's dissect the mockery disguised as questions that Sanballat asked, including the declaration Tobiah made.

Sanballat:

- He called the Jews feeble – directly attacking their strength.
- He asked what they were doing even though it was plain as day – ridiculing their effort.
- Asked if they'd be able to restore the temple by themselves and if they'd be able to offer sacrifices – declaring the coming together of the workers would be a waste in the end.
- Asked if the work can be finished in a day, even though everyone knew it couldn't – attempting to discourage further efforts on the part of the workers.
- Asked if the stones, the ones from the rubble was any good and if the burnt ones were in a condition that could be improved, seeing that they would most likely be weak and cracked – ridiculing the materials they used.

Tobiah:

- He declared that the building that had been done so far was of poor quality – this too was an attempt at getting the workers to stop their efforts altogether.

I took the pains of listing it out because only then we can know what to guard against as regards “what people say” about our efforts and resources. I mean the ones we’ve put towards doing what God has asked us to do. By now you know, you can expect people to speak words that attack your strength, words that attempt to show how unimpressive you are, words that ridicule your efforts, including the ones your partners have invested, and say they’ll all end up a waste. They’ll make ill comments on the time spent and whatever improvements you’re trying to make. I know it’s a lot to take in, but you’re better off knowing all these and being mentally prepared than not knowing the challenges at all, thereby letting your guard down and being grounded to a halt.

I assume you’re wondering if Sanballat and Tobiah said all they said in front of Nehemiah and his crew or they did so privately and someone else informed Nehemiah and his crew about it. To this I’d say, does it matter? Either ways, Nehemiah and his crew heard of Sanballat’s and Tobiah’s reactions, and what was said about Nehemiah and the work. Except Nehemiah and his crew were careful, these negative reactions and words would have achieved the desired aim or purpose of the adversaries. What I want us to take away from this is that whether directly or indirectly the enemy will attack, what’s important is that we stay prepared and respond excellently.

Now here is how Nehemiah responds. *“Hear, O our God, how we are an object of contempt! Return their taunting on their own heads, and turn them into plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their guilt and do not let their sin be wiped*

out before You, for they have demoralized the builders”
(Nehemiah 4:4-5, NASB).

Nehemiah’s response was to take the matter to God in prayer. In his prayer Nehemiah not only tells God the wrongs of those on the side of the opposition, he asks for retribution. Nehemiah’s tone in his prayer seemed harsh, and it’s easy to conclude that he was feeling very angry. This is an expected reaction anyway. Now while I do recommend that we take our frustrations to God in prayer, I’d not advise that we pray the words of Nehemiah’s prayer verbatim. While I can’t say for sure how God handled Nehemiah’s prayers, I know for sure what God did for Nehemiah and his crew after Nehemiah was done praying. He gave them strength and grace to remain committed to the work. Don’t believe me? Let’s read verse 6.

“So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.”

One thing we can be sure of when we take our frustrations to God in prayer is that, God will be sure to give us what we need the most, even if it’s not something we’ve asked for.

9



More Recruits and a Conspiracy

I know the title of this chapter is frightening, but I promise it's not something that can't be handled. Let's read a few verses of Scripture.

“Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. So all of them conspired together to come to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it” (Nehemiah 4:7-8, NASB).

As the work progressed, the number of those on the side of the opposition increased. There was Sanballat in the north (Samaria), Tobiah in the east (Ammon), Gershem to the south (Arabia) and the Ashdodites in the west. Perhaps we can take this to mean, the devil was becoming more desperate to see the work stop. Those on the opposition even decide to try something new; they conspired to physically attack Nehemiah and his crew

and cause a ruckus, since what they said to the workers whether directly or indirectly wasn't producing the desired result.

You may ask, does this mean we too can expect an ever increasing number of those who will be against us? That's a question only God can answer since He alone knows the end of a thing from the beginning. However, what I can tell you if you ever find yourself in such a situation is that so far you're on God's side and in the centre of His will, there will be more who are for you than those who are against you. Remember always that one with God is majority.

While some people would spend their time worrying about what the enemy will do next, so much so that they end up being paralyzed with fear and will not be able to do the work God has committed into their hands anymore, we mustn't be like them. These chapters, while detailing some of the moves the opposition is most likely to make, they're not aimed at filling us with fear and dread for the enemy, but aimed at furnishing us with information so we can stay prepared and even ever more determined to finish what we have started, seeing that God remain for us and not against us.

Now that you know that conspiracies and threats of physical attack is something that can happen while you're doing God's bidding, let's see how Nehemiah responds.

“But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night” (Nehemiah 4:9, NASB).

Nehemiah doesn't dismiss the information he's heard but along with his crew they take action spiritually and physically. It does seem like what anyone would do, but I tell you some of us will act presumptuously about God's preservation and not take the initiative to pray or even take proper protective measures physically as well. This must not be me nor you.

But it doesn't end there. It seemed like that was just the beginning; because, after their praying and setting up of guards, Nehemiah and his crew continued the work. But as we learn, while the workers were getting tired the enemy camp was perfecting another devious plan, which they agreed would work if they caught the workers off guard. Of course, Nehemiah and his crew didn't know all this, but thankfully, the Jews (obviously prompted by God) who had heard of the plans of the opposition went and informed Nehemiah and his crew (**Read verses 10-12**).

What can we learn from this? Aside knowing that the enemy can be relentless, we mustn't forget that God too is relentless in His love and care for those who love Him and walk according to His purpose. If God was mindful of Nehemiah and his crew, we can be sure of the same treatment from God; and if God made sure to provide them with information of what the enemy was up to, then we too can be sure we won't be left in the dark. God will make sure we know what we ought to know so we can do what needs to be done.

Speaking of what needs to be done, even though Nehemiah and his crew had prayed earlier and had set up guards when they had heard what those in the opposition were up to, upon hearing their plans over and over again,

Nehemiah does more than he did before. He stationed (armed) men in the lowest parts and exposed places, and armed people in families. He even went as far as encouraging the people since they had been afraid (**See verses 13-14**). You know what happens next? The enemy camp learns that their plans had been exposed! I assume they also knew of the lengths at which Nehemiah had prepared in case they were attacked, and miraculously that caused the enemy to put on hold their sinister plans to physically attack Nehemiah and his crew and cause a ruckus (**verse 15**).

You may say, but we can't adopt Nehemiah's strategy in our day; how then should we handle conspiracies? While we may not be able to adopt Nehemiah's strategy completely, we can learn from him the importance of preparation. At the beginning phase when he and his crew learnt of the plans of the opposition, and even in the later phase, Nehemiah and his crew didn't ignore the threats. They heard it, prayed and set up guard; they even set up more guards and encouraged themselves. We too can pray, and must ask for godly wisdom in handling whatever situations we face. And just like God helped Nehemiah to stay prepared physically, He too will share His knowledge with us, so we can take responsible physical measures in protecting ourselves. That done, we must remain encouraged.

Another may say, but since the opposition didn't end up attacking them, didn't all their preparation go to waste? It's easy to think that way, but I don't think so. You see, if they were too relaxed before, they now knew they couldn't afford to let down their guard. It's better to be too careful than be care-less (**See all the security**

measures Nehemiah and his crew put in place going forward in verses 16-23). Besides, if the enemy thought they would be easy prey, at least now they knew Nehemiah and his crew weren't and would never be. In case you're planning to talk yourself out of preparing, please know that even though God has plans to save you, you're required to play a part. Play your part and be reassured that it won't be a waste of your time.



Ministry or Distraction?

CAN you tell ministry work apart from distractions, especially when it's not exactly the work God put in your mind to do? Perhaps after we're done exploring the fifth chapter of Nehemiah's autobiography, you might be able to.

Now concerning the events in this chapter, Bible Scholars say it's most likely to have happened during the rebuilding of the walls. That being said, here's a breakdown of the issues on ground:

- The issue was amongst the Jews, the poor Jews and the rich ones.
- The poor Jews made allegations against the rich ones.
- There was scarcity of food in general and families had to source for food. Of course payment was required, and those who didn't have money to pay found themselves mortgaging their properties in order to obtain food. And there were others who couldn't afford to do so because they had borrowed money to pay the king's tax on their properties; this group remained without food.

In general the poor Jews wondered why even though they were all Jews, their rich brethren were okay with receiving, as payment for food or collateral for borrowing money, their children and turning them into slaves while their parents stand by helpless to even redeem their children, all because their properties which they could have used to free them had already been mortgaged to these same people (**Read Nehemiah 5:1-5**).

Since there was a great outcry, you'd agree with me that it was impossible to not be aware of what was going on. So Nehemiah was aware. And how does he respond? Let's read a few verses of Scripture.

“Then I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. So I thought it over” (Nehemiah 5:6-7^a, NASB)

All that Nehemiah heard stirred up anger within him. As someone whom we've established to care greatly for the welfare of the people of Israel who were also his people, it's understandable, I should say, that he should react this way upon hearing this news. Yet Nehemiah kept his anger under control; instead, he spends sometime thinking the whole thing over. We don't know what exactly Nehemiah thought about, but judging by what he does next, we do know he was prompted to act, not only because he cared about the welfare of the people but also because he wanted to re-establish God's standards among the people.

And so Nehemiah addresses the nobles and the leaders among the people. He informs them of their error (lending money to the poor at interest rate was

against God's command, see Exodus 22:25); he also spends time appealing to their conscience, reminding them that while some Jews, like himself were seeking to help their brethren by buying them back from slavery, how come they were busy finding ways to keep their brethren in slavery (by this he was referring to the interests they were charging their brethren and their actions of selling their poverty-stricken countrymen as slaves to foreigners). Perhaps they hadn't initially thought of it that way, but when they eventually did, they couldn't say anything in their own defence.

Nehemiah takes their silence as a cue to continue; so he declares that their action against their brethren was wrong, encouraging them to walk in the fear of God, lest they end up being ridiculed (perhaps for their disunity) by their enemies. He informs them that even he and his brothers and servants were actively lending without interest to their fellow Jews, before asking them to do so going forward without charging interest. He also urged those who had already charged interest and received it to return it that very day. Fortunately, Nehemiah's words were well received and the guilty parties agreed to make changes. To be certain they didn't go back on their word, Nehemiah goes to extra length to get them to commit to their word (**Read verse 7^b-13**).

So now that you know all this, what do you think, was Nehemiah still on track or was he distracted? Here's what I think. While it's true that Nehemiah temporarily left the work of rebuilding the walls to deal with an internal problem, I dare say he was still on track and wasn't distracted. If we take time to revisit Nehemiah's prayer in chapter one, we will be reminded that the habitual sins

of Israel was what led to the consequence of the people being led away to exile and their land left in ruins. Now, although the temple was rebuilt and the rebuilding of the walls in progress, of what use would it be if that too was completed and the people begin another cycle of habitual sinning? Wouldn't all the work of rebuilding go to waste sooner than later? True, the walls being rebuilt was important; but just as important were the conditions of the hearts (i.e. spiritual state) of the people who would live within those walls, wouldn't you agree?

Still not sure if you'd be able to tell for sure if something is a distraction? To make it plainer, you can tell what's not a distraction from what is. Consider that Nehemiah's resolution of the existential problem still aligns directly with the work God had put in his mind to do. To be double sure of your own peculiar case, you can take a cue from Nehemiah as you deal with associated matters related to your core calling without having your emotions racing against each other. Take time before you respond to things. Think them over, and while you're at it, invite the Holy Spirit in. He would surely give you the guidance you need.



Like Father Like Child

THE character of one who is called/led of God to serve in any capacity, whether big or small, must reflect that of a true child of God. Even more, it must remain consistent with the Spirit of Christ. A lot of Christians get busy serving, and neglect Christ-likeness, which is even more important than our service to God and humanity seeing it is the primary determinant in whether or not our services will be recognized by God and deserving of a reward.

Nehemiah was one who didn't neglect his character; he conducted himself wisely among the people. Let me share a few verses here.

“Furthermore since the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor’s food allowance. But the previous governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because

of my fear of God. I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table 150 Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep; also birds were prepared for me, and every ten days all sorts of wine were provided in abundance. Yet for all this I did not request the governor's food allowance, because the forced labor was heavy on this people" (Nehemiah 5:14-18, NASB)

Of his conduct, Nehemiah said though he was in a position of leadership for the twelve years that he served, neither he nor his kinsmen received or eat the governor's food allowance nor received any monies from the people; and the reason for this was because these so-called privileges the previous governors enjoyed would be at the expense of the people. Nehemiah cared for the welfare of the people and also feared God.

He maintained focus on the work of rebuilding, and so did his servants; they weren't distracted by the availability of land neither did they make any moves towards acquiring land for themselves. Even though his position, coupled with the situation the state was in, made for a perfect opportunity to acquire cheap/free land.

He freely fed a number of Jews and officials, even visitors. Provisions for this came to so much, but it came out of his own pocket; he made sure not to burden the people in any way.

You'd agree with me that Nehemiah was filled with love for the people, and the happiness of others was his

priority. He also strove to maintain peace; his patience in the work God gave him was enviable too. His kindness and goodness towards the people was obvious; he also had integrity. Soon we will see how he finishes the work set before him; he wasn't rough in his dealings with the people. We've read how, under severe provocation he put his anger under control. When I think about a child of God who assumes the role of a doer and finds his/herself in the company of God's people leading them, these are the character traits I hope to see. I dare say God hopes to see those qualities too. So, Nehemiah was no phony; he was like this all through the years.

And before you say Nehemiah was one of a kind, please, note that all that the character traits we noticed in him are evident in the fruit of the Spirit (**Read Galatians 5:22-23**); they are the work the Holy Spirit does in us provided we are fully yielded to Him. In other words, Nehemiah couldn't be one of a kind. We all have the ability to be the same kind as he. So let's yield ourselves fully to God's Spirit, then act and behave like Nehemiah.

You may ask, is it possible to serve without these character traits? The answer is yes. Yes you can serve without loving people. Many people these days, including professing Christians in high office, serve while only loving themselves and money. Many people these days have zero joy in their service; they do it while sneering at God, neither do they care for the happiness of others. Many people serve these days while promoting disunity, all in a bid to further their selfish interests. Many people serve these days and are ready to quit at the first sight of delay, trouble or suffering. There are those who serve

these days without being friendly; they are selfish, inconsiderate and generally bad to those around them. They aren't devoted to the work God has committed into their hands, neither are they gentle towards people in general. And when it comes to their emotions, they let it control them, leading them into all kinds of sin against God and the people. For them, there's absolutely no sign of self-control.

For as long as there are Christians who do not yield to God's Holy Spirit's work of transformation in them, there will continue to be Christians who serve without the fruit of the Spirit. And the fate of these sort of Christians, we can safely say, is not going to be acceptable service, neither can they look forward to a good reward from God. If you've been serving this way, you need to effect some changes, beginning with a prayer of repentance.

As chapter five ends, Nehemiah is seen praying. Let's read it.

“Remember me, my God, for good, in return for all that I have done for this people.” (Nehemiah 5:19, NASB)

He is asking God to bear/keep in mind his labour of love, as He should. You can tell why it was okay for Nehemiah to say this: it's because he knew that when God reviewed his unselfish service which reflected his character, God wouldn't find anything that would disqualify him of a reward. If you believe your service and character align with God's will, feel free to repeat Nehemiah's prayers verbatim.



Prioritizing Priorities

THOUGH there's no mention of the opposition in chapter five of Nehemiah's autobiography, they are far from being done in playing their devilish role. As soon as chapter six opens, we learn they are up to no good again. Let's read a few verses of Scripture.

“Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach was left in it, although at that time I had not installed the doors in the gates, Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, “Come, let's meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they were plotting to harm me. So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and am unable to come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” **(Nehemiah 6:1-3, NASB)**

It seemed Sanballat had people monitoring the activities of Nehemiah, especially the progress he was making with the walls. And as soon as he heard how far

Nehemiah and his crew had gone with the work of rebuilding, he got together with Geshem to come up with a plan. The plan was to extend a seemingly friendly invitation to Nehemiah. Although it would appear that he was being invited for a conversation or discussion with them, in the actual sense the real plan was to get Nehemiah to leave Jerusalem so they could either kidnap him or assassinate him in isolation. Then with Nehemiah out of the way or dead, his crew would lose heart and the work will eventually stop.

Their plan seemed perfect and the only thing standing in their way was Nehemiah's acceptance of their invitation. They saw to it that he got the invitation. But Nehemiah, upon receiving the invitation and while examining it, notices whom the invitation was from and the location of the proposed meeting; he easily discerns that the motive behind the invitation was a plan to harm him and stop the work. Quickly Nehemiah sends a response, turning down the invitation. If his response can be summarized, it would be: "This is a distraction. I have other priorities."

In chapter 10 titled, Ministry or Distraction, we had talked about discerning distractions, and now I think we might have an opportunity to add to what we learnt then. When you receive an invitation from those who you've registered as siding with the opposition while you're at work doing what God has asked you to do, would you see it as ministry or a distraction?

Be honest.

Are you sure you wouldn't have seen it as part of ministry, thinking perhaps God was working out something in them, and meeting with them would help

them come to their senses to appreciate what God was doing through you. Explaining away distractions, I dare say, is to self-destruct; it didn't help Judas Iscariot, didn't Demas, and will help no one.

Think about it. By now I'm sure most of us would agree that we would have seen it as ministry, and not a distraction. How did Nehemiah discern what this truly was? I believe the answer weighs heavily on the character of those who had invited him for the meeting. These men, especially Sanballat, had been consistently against him and the work from the very beginning and didn't even pretend about it. Wouldn't it have been foolish for Nehemiah to forget all that and just carelessly accept the invitation? I mean, up until chapter four, Sanballat was planning to take Nehemiah and his crew unaware and attack them. That evil intent wasn't hid from Nehemiah. I know that most of the work of discernment and preservation is by the Holy Spirit, but I tell you, we can discern evil plots and avoid ending up as prey by being very observant and doing away with sentiment. Yes, it really can be as simple as that.

People don't change that easily, and many bad events don't happen in isolation; sometimes, it's because someone ignored the warnings all around.

You may ask, so is it only those in the opposition that seek to distract one, can't even godly people be used to lure one away from one's purpose? Well, you're right to think that way. For, even godly people, presumably with the best of intentions, have naively been used by the enemy to distract God's people, luring them away from His purpose for their life. In this case, discerning whether their invitation/advice/suggestion is a distraction can be

done by considering how it aligns with God's revealed will for your life and, of course, by spending time consulting with the Holy Spirit.

And when you finally discern a distraction, the right way to respond is how Nehemiah did, by simply choosing to prioritize the work God has committed into your hands. Those who prioritize people pleasing would have a hard time following this suggestion of mine though.


So Nehemiah declines their invitation; but do they take no for an answer? They didn't. Let's read that:

“Then they sent messages to me four times worded in this way, and I answered them with the same wording”

(Nehemiah 6:4, NASB).

Did you see the number of times they tried to persuade Nehemiah? Four times! What I love here is that Nehemiah wasn't going to change his mind just to make them feel less rejected. He made them realize those four times that his priorities hadn't changed. For as many times as a distraction presents itself to you, would you be willing to say no over and over again??

You see, one of the qualities a doer must possess, aside being able to set their priorities right, is also being able to stand by their decision. There really is no room for giving in to distractions and people pleasing. As we can now see, these things, when indulged, do not only have the ability to stop the work God has called us to do, but can also cost us our lives. God forbid!



Accusation and Blackmail

TRYING to persuade Nehemiah to meet up with them had failed; this also means the work of rebuilding progressed. But Sanballat refuses to back down. I should remind you that Sanballat is under the devil's influence; he is the one who is the real opposition against everything godly. And while he might use one person, like in this case with Sanballat who was his chief representative, Satan can also decide to use many other people. See what Sanballat comes up with afterwards.

“Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same way a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. In it was written: ‘It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; for that reason you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, ‘A king is in Judah!’ And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let’s consult together” (Nehemiah 6:5-7, NASB).

Next up is accusation and blackmail. Sanballat (in cahoots with Geshem, also spelt Gashmu) accuses Nehemiah and the Jews (his crew) of planned rebellion against the king, and Nehemiah specifically of claiming kingship. In fact, Sanballat claims this was the reason for rebuilding the walls. Furthermore, Nehemiah is also accused of hiring prophets to proclaim himself as king. Sanballat then threatens to inform the king. He seems to be giving Nehemiah a way out. He could save himself, provided he left the work, met up with him to talk things over and clear his name. Since all we've read are contents of an open letter, it's safe to say the person who handled the letter knew of its content, he and probably a number of others did.

Oh, the urge to take up Sanballat on his offer and clear up these false accusations! But does Nehemiah take the bait? **See verse 8:**

“Then I sent a message to him saying, “Nothing like these things that you are saying has been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.”


Nehemiah doesn't ignore the accusations; but he doesn't give in to Sanballat's blackmail either. He sends a brief, yet blunt message back to Sanballat denying his accusations. You do know that whilst you're doing the work God has committed into your hands, you're likely to experience accusations, even blackmail, right? How do you intend to handle them?

Some people's response will be to ignore them. Agreed, there could be cases where it's best to ignore such fallacious accusations. In Nehemiah's case, it would

have been unwise to do so. First because the letter was an open one; enough people will be privy to its content, this would include outsiders, and they may misinterpret his silence to mean he had been cornered and was likely guilty. So, he was better off clearing the air.

Secondly, in verse 9, Nehemiah reveals the effect the accusations could have on the people who were working with him; they could be frightened and discouraged and eventually stop the work. So, his reaction, should it be a bold/courageous one had the power to positively influence the people; courage can be contagious, you know. And so silence was just not an option. You may ask, how do we know when to ignore, and when to speak up? I think Nehemiah's case gives us an idea of this; but to be absolutely sure, we can always consult with the Holy Spirit and listen for His counsel.

After replying Sanballat, Nehemiah prays. He asks God to strengthen his hands (**See verse 9^b**). You may ask, was it his hands or heart that needed strengthening? I believe Nehemiah prayed that way because he was considering the negative effect that that open letter could have had on him (and his crew). In simple terms, he was asking God for renewed strength so he could continue the work. I believe we can't go wrong if we pray in this manner too.



Thus saith the Lord?

DO you know there's something called spiritual intimidation? This is when someone who claims to be sent by God, reveals something to you, usually something frightening, but it's all in order to make you do what they want, which is usually not in alignment to God's revealed will. This is also a tactic the enemy uses to oppose those who walk according to God's purpose. Even Nehemiah went through it. Let's read a few verses:

“When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, “Let’s meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let’s close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.” But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And who is there like me who would go into the temple to save his own life? I will not go in” **(Nehemiah 6:10-11, NASB)**

Nehemiah had refused all the invitations directly sent by Sanballat, however when someone whom he assumed

was godly and on his side sent for him because he claimed to have received a special revelation from God, Nehemiah went over to see him, that and also perhaps because Shemaiah was said to be shut in, meaning he was probably in a trance-like state. What was this revelation of his? Shemaiah claimed to be privy (by divine revelation) to a plot against Nehemiah's life.

And what was Nehemiah to do with this information? He was expected to be frightened into accepting the suggestions that comes next, provided it could guarantee the preservation of his life. What was the suggestion? It was suggested to Nehemiah that he take refuge in the house of God, within the Temple; if he did this he would have to stop the work, but more importantly he would preserve his life. Yet upon hearing this, Nehemiah rejects the suggestion. He says he wouldn't flee nor go into the Temple to take refuge. But wait a minute, what was so wrong with stopping the work in order to preserve one's life, especially seeing that it was a "message from God"? Or, would the devil be interested in preserving Nehemiah's life?

To all this, Nehemiah has the most spirited reply:

"Then I realized that God certainly had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason, that I would become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could taunt me. Remember, my God, Tobiah and Sanballat in accordance with these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets,

*who were trying to frighten me.” (Nehemiah 6:12-14,
NASB)*

Ha! Now you see it: a way to discern a false prophet’s message. Nehemiah wasn’t a reckless fellow who didn’t care for his life but lived only to work; he rejected the suggestion of this man because of what he knew to be true. The very suggestion of this false prophet revealed to Nehemiah that he wasn’t sent by God but was a paid hireling of those in the opposition. According to Nehemiah’s reasoning, God wouldn’t send someone to tell him to go ahead and break an order that He, God, had put in place concerning unauthorized persons and the place of worship. (See Numbers 1:51; 18:7, 22-23).

Thinking that God was making an exemption for him would have been presumptuous of him. And God would have counted that as sin. Also, imagine how the Jews would have reacted upon hearing that Nehemiah did such a thing. His reputation would have been tainted. Nehemiah outsmarted the opposition, preserved his reputation, and was fit to continue the work by not loving his life so much that he’d disregard God’s direct command.

Having read all this, you should by now be able to discern spiritual intimidation when it confronts you, and in case you missed it, one sure way is to listen for the suggestion that always accompanies the frightening revelation; it always encourages us to disregard God’s direct command. And while there are times when these suggestions are even more cleverly disguised, we should still be able to discern truth from lies. This becomes easy when we have the habit of consulting with the Holy

Spirit. You do know His job is to guide us into all truth, right?

As was Nehemiah's custom, after this experience of his, he takes his frustration to God in prayer. Tobiah and Sanballat are named, as well as Noadiah, a prophetess who was also a paid hireling of those in the opposition. Nehemiah asks God to bear in mind their works. You'd agree with me that Nehemiah's prayer this time gives room for God to decide how best to deal with those who did the devil's dirty work for him. Should we go ahead and pray for justice? Yes, we should; however, in my opinion, the only true justice God could have given Nehemiah and can give us, is to help us finish the work we have started, with those siding with the opposition having front row seats when we make the victory lap.



Betrayers in The Camp

SO far as regards the recruits of the opposition, we've only seen Sanballat at the forefront, coming up with all sorts of schemes against Nehemiah and his crew. But towards the tail end of chapter six, Nehemiah reveals that Tobiah had done his bit too. Let's read about it.

“Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah’s letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arab, and his son Jehobanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence, and were reporting my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me” (Nehemiah 6:17-19, NASB).

Tobiah had an alliance with the nobles of Judah. Can you believe it? As Nehemiah reveals, it was because of who Tobiah's father-in-law was, and because of the family Tobiah's son had married into as well. Tobiah and

his son, both Ammonites had married Jewish families. Well, what became apparent was that when certain nobles of Judah considered who to be loyal to, they reckoned they were better off with Tobiah. So, regardless that the work Nehemiah was doing would be for the good of all the Jews, those nobles cared less and pursued their own selfish interest. These were men who should have been loyal to Nehemiah. I'm sure it must have taken a while for Nehemiah to discover the betrayal of those nobles, but in the end he did. If I'm to guess, it probably would be when he discovered some of the things he had said about Tobiah to them being mentioned in the frightening letters Tobiah sent him.

As a doer, you can expect betrayal from among those whom you trust, and this is why betrayal is often very painful. They are people you presume to be on your side, people with whom you should feel safe and secure; instead, they chose to pursue their own selfish interests. Betrayal when not handled properly becomes a weapon in the hand of the enemy to cripple the one who has been betrayed from moving forward in their divine destiny.

Nehemiah was betrayed, how did he handle it? From Nehemiah's narration, it seems he didn't handle it. But he did. How? Sure it must have hurt when he found out those who were supposed to be on his side were in cahoots with the opposition; and he probably felt it. But he didn't dwell too long on this negative emotion. And although the betrayal had the power to cripple him, Nehemiah chose to move on with his divine destiny in spite of what had happened.

That's exactly how I advise we handle betrayal too: when you discover it, because God will make sure to help you discover it, if the deed has not already been done, you can take it as a cue to begin to be mindful around those who are inclined to things that are only beneficial to them and will not mind getting it at any cost. The Holy Spirit is sure to help you discern them. However, if the deed had already been done, then you can go ahead and feel your feelings; but you must not stay sad forever, lest you give the enemy a foothold into your life and destiny. Even more importantly, remind yourself that you must move on. If, despite being betrayed Nehemiah (and Jesus) could move on and finish the work, so can you.

I know there will be some of us who would struggle more than others with moving on. Thankfully, I know a way out for those of us who fall into this category: JESUS. We can open up to Him about our struggles. He will listen to us, heal our wounds and give us strength to move on.

Part 3

The End?



Finishing Well

IN the verses I'm about to share now, we'll see that the work God had put in Nehemiah's mind to do had been completed. I'm getting excited again as if I'm just reading these verses for the first time. Let me share them already.

“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they realized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God”
(Nehemiah 6:15-16, NASB).

The work that God had put in Nehemiah's mind to do, and that he had courageously taken the first steps towards achieving before God sent him people to work with, was finally completed, and in impressive time. And you know what's even more impressive? That the work was completed despite fierce opposition! Thankfully God didn't kill all those on the side of the opposition, for

they were alive and well to hear about the work being completed! Nehemiah says, once those on the side of the opposition heard of it and the other nations around saw it, they lost their confidence (to attack, I believe); they couldn't deny that God was on the side of Nehemiah.

I wish I was there to see the look of satisfaction on Nehemiah's face the day they completed the work on the walls. Did he allow himself to think back to how it all started? I wish I was there to hear the shouts of jubilation in their camp that day, with the workers seeing that their efforts had not been in vain. On the other side, I wish I could see the looks on the faces of those in the opposition too. I know it would have been looks of bewilderment! How could this have been possible?

Strangely, I have already witnessed these things. The day my first two books were made available to the public, I looked in the mirror and saw my face. I did have a look of satisfaction, a feeling of fulfilment. And that's because I allowed myself to think back to how it had all started. I also remember running around my living room, dancing and praising God because I knew He was the one who put the desire in my mind. He was also my first team mate and my biggest cheerleader! He was the one who rewarded my efforts by turning my desires into my reality despite the opposition within and without, and many challenges. I knew what God and I had achieved, along with the good people He sent my way. The resounding victory was bound to leave the enemy perplexed.

It's your turn to finish well. Read that over and over until you believe it. You too can finish well, that is if you're determined to not just dream about conceiving an

idea. If you're courageous enough to take the first steps and remain committed to putting in the work required, if you're determined to keep going in the right direction in spite of the opposition and whatever tactic they employ against you and the work (because God won't take away your every opposition), you'd have to push forward while they are right there doing what they do. Be sure of this one thing though, that finally you will win, if and only if you're willing to trust in God and His providence throughout the entire journey.

Will you be willing to do all of this?

Just before I round off this chapter, I know someone might be tempted to think, finishing well partly means doing something in record-breaking time. But it isn't. While it is good for us to make good use of our time, finishing well for us, just like it did for Nehemiah, must mean we began the work with God and finished with Him.

Many people begin and finish things but not many still have God in their corner by the time they are crossing the finish line. Why? Because they've compromised along the way. These ones can't be said to have finished well. So, please, in all our doings, let's endeavour not to lose God along the way.



17

Starting Over

THE work of rebuilding the walls had been completed. So it was safe to say everything was over and done with, right? However that wasn't the case. In the seventh chapter of the book of Nehemiah, we learn that truly the walls had been rebuilt, doors installed, gates kept, singers and Levites appointed, not forgetting choice men had been put in charge of Jerusalem and left with instructions by Nehemiah (**See Nehemiah 7:1-4**). But it didn't all end there, for God still had some things for Nehemiah to do.

Before we explore the other work God had for Nehemiah, tell me, did you know that the reward for hard work with God usually is more work?

Don't get me wrong, I don't mean that God doesn't bless us for our obedience to Him, because He does. What I mean is, if God finds you willing to work with Him and obedient to His leading, you will most likely be entrusted with more glorious work. So the end of one thing is really the beginning of another thing. I want to know if you'll be okay with that. You should be because

we can't settle for doing just one exploit with God when our entire lives ought to be filled with exploits. Plus, you ought to know by now that only good things emerge (whether immediately or in the long run) when we yield ourselves to do God's bidding. So, let's keep yielding ourselves.

Here is a scripture to find out what God wanted Nehemiah to do.

"Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the other people to be enrolled by genealogies" (Nehemiah 7:5a, NASB).

RE-POPULATING the land, but first a census. That's the work God wanted Nehemiah to do next. And, while repopulating the area (i.e. convincing people to settle in Jerusalem) and a census might seem like a less intimidating task compared to his previous assignment of rebuilding the walls, it would not be a walk in the park either.

There's no record of Nehemiah grumbling about his new assignment, even if I doubt it was something he was interested in doing. What we know is that he was willing to get the work done, the same attitude he had even when he was to do something he was really interested in and enthusiastic about. I know this to be true because it had to be while he was getting ready for the new assignment that he found the list of those who had returned with Zerubbabel (**See verses 5^b-73**)

You may ask, does God only call us to do something we are interested in and enthusiastic about? From my experiences with God, my answer to this is no. Sure,

there will be times when what God asks you to do will be something you're already interested in and enthusiastic about; but there will be times when it's something you really couldn't be bothered with, something you'd rather have pushed on someone else or hope someone else would be called to do. Writing this, I'm reminded about my writing experience. You see, while I love to write, I could care less for going through the work after it's been to the editor and designer. I find it quite boring and I'd rather be doing something else. Yet, I always feel a strong leading by God to do so. I don't find it enjoyable; but in the end, I'm always thankful that I obeyed because I end up seeing something that requires further attention.

I should also add that although Nehemiah's new assignment seemed to be an important part of his old assignment, same with the example I gave. It doesn't necessarily mean that all the new assignments you'd receive from God will be a part of the old as well. While some might be, others might not; and there will be cases where they're both: a part of the old and something new. Regardless of which it is, what's important is that we say yes to God as many times as He calls. And not just say yes, but face the work with the right attitude and enthusiasm. And when we have a servant's heart, we will always have the right attitude.



Starting Small

IN the verses we are about to read, Nehemiah doesn't take centre stage. Though he is still around, he is this time in the background while someone else takes centre stage, with a whole list of others. Before we proceed any further, I should ask, how do you feel about being in the background? Be honest with your answer. While some will struggle with it and eventually fight outright for the centre stage, others wouldn't mind, because what's more important than being the centre of attention and being in the background is doing God's will. If that was your answer, then you and Nehemiah think alike.

You see, by chapter eight, we see that God still had something in mind to be done: a nationwide spiritual revival (**See verses 1-18**), and this time He didn't put it in Nehemiah's mind nor any one person, but in all the people. He put in them the desire to hear the word of God; and not just that, they were also the ones who would request the person He had appointed and equipped for the work. And this person wouldn't be Nehemiah. Let's read from the Scripture; it's a long read though.

“And all the people gathered as one person at the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hasbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left. Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiab, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:1-8, NASB).

Ezra was the one who took centre stage in God's plan now, along with a whole list of others. Do you see Nehemiah's name anywhere yet? The right answer is no. Nehemiah's name doesn't appear yet, it only does so finally in **verse 9**; even then, it is so we know he was present, and not grudgingly or disrupting what's going on, but supporting the work God was doing. There we see Nehemiah working alongside Ezra and the Levites to work with the people whose holy emotions had been stirred up after hearing God's word (**Read verses 9-12**).

Nehemiah could have said to himself, how could God have bypassed me? And look at this people, they are such betrayers! How dare they cry out for Ezra, that old man! What's so hard in reading out the Scriptures? Haven't I prayed for this people and made many sacrifices for them and the land? An ungrateful bunch, all of them! Away with them! And in that carnal emotion stomp off. Thank God Nehemiah didn't think that way nor walk away. He had a servant's heart and was willing to do God's will, even if it meant playing a small role in it. It didn't matter to him. That is what I believe God expects of us all. Even when starting over means starting small for us, we must not be offended by it. Instead, we must participate fully, knowing well that it's a privilege to be a part of what God is doing.

You may say, how are we sure it wasn't because Nehemiah was governor and Ezra was priest and scribe that Nehemiah didn't get offended and quietly played a supporting role? To this I'd say, do you really think that's all that there is to his attitude and conduct? That because he understood roles alone is why he accepted to be on the side lines? Haven't you met people who want to do

the job of everyone, even if the roles have been clearly defined? Haven't you met people who can't stand to not be the centre of attention, and when they aren't they do all they can to make sure the person who is goes through hell and whatever's been planned get ruined? Nehemiah had the right heart posture and the right spirit within him. That's why he thought the way he did and acted the way he did. Let's pray to God to help us maintain the right heart posture at all times, that and also to renew the right spirit within us.

And if you're thinking, perhaps Nehemiah was able to deal with this because it was a one-day event, you're wrong. On the second day, Ezra was still taking centre stage, and continued to do so for several days, even going as far as leading the people to continue a forgotten practice – the feast of booths. Let's read from the Scripture.

“Then on the second day the heads of fathers’ households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe so that they might gain insight into the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. And that they were to proclaim and circulate a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of other trees with thick branches, to make booths, as it is written.” So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courtyards and in the courtyards of the

house of God, and in the public square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths. Indeed, the sons of Israel had not done so since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was very great rejoicing. He read from the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a festive assembly in accordance with the ordinance” (Nehemiah 8:13-18, NASB).



Doing it God's Way

GOD'S plan was a nationwide spiritual revival. And He had already set the ball rolling with Ezra at the forefront and Nehemiah somewhere in the background lending his support. At least that's what we read in chapter eight. In chapter nine we learn that the revival is still on; but there's no mention of Nehemiah at all, possibly because now, he was just another face in the crowd. I'd explain what I mean; but first, let's really understand what's happening in chapter nine of Nehemiah's autobiography.

“Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the wrongdoings of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and they cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their

God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethabiah said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! May Your glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise!" (Nehemiah 9:1-5, NASB)

There was fasting going on, separation, confession (genuine repentance), reading and hearing of the Scripture and worship; but those aren't all. There's prayer led by Ezra (**Read verses 6-37**), which is a prelude to a renewal of covenant (**verse 38**). A lot's going on, yet no mention of Nehemiah at all; and we know he isn't serving at this moment because it would have been mentioned. So, where was Nehemiah, and what is he doing? Because of what's revealed in **chapter 9:38-10:1**, which we will soon get to, we can be sure that Nehemiah was present at the revival, but not just present for the sake of it; he was participating in the activities alongside the people. Ha! That's why I said he was another face in the crowd.

Sometimes starting over isn't a call to work; sometimes it's a call to spend time with God. This isn't a very popular opinion though. For many who desperately want to become doers hate the idea of rest, especially when that rest really means spending some time soaking in God's presence. They consider it a waste of time. And I wonder why, when this very activity ministers to our soul and can be regarded as a lifeline for us.

Nehemiah, I believe was led at that moment to do something that didn't include achieving a physical aim/purpose, that wouldn't draw an applause or earn him the admiration of others but would minister to his own soul,

afford him an opportunity to be in right standing with God, be reminded of God's word, worship with the people, as well as pray along with them while being reminded of God's faithfulness and power in Israel's long history. That, amongst many other things, and thankfully, he saw as gain, and did just that. When this sort of individual returns to serving, he would do so more refreshed and restored, even more motivated. We'll see how this plays out as Nehemiah does more work for God later on.

When God calls you to stay a while longer in His presence instead of thinking it's a waste of time and occupying yourself with serving and doing, answer Him. The work can wait; your soul which is more important to God, needs attending to, and while you might not immediately see how this works out, in the long run you will. One thing I know for sure is, both you and the people God sends you to, will benefit from you paying attention to your spiritual health. So be intentional about it and never neglect it.



Being The Example

AT the tail end of chapter nine, we learn that the people had renewed their covenant with God. And not just by word of mouth, they had prepared a document that Nehemiah their governor, along with a list of priests, Levites and leaders signed on behalf of the nation (**See Nehemiah 10:1-27**). But it doesn't end there. We are told what the people had decided. Here are the verses.

“Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given through Moses, God’s servant, and to keep and to comply with all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and statutes” (Nehemiah 10:28-29, NASB).

They “*take on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law.*” Though their methods are not advisable, their hearts were in the right place. Claiming a curse on themselves if they break the covenant and swearing loyalty to God and His law, should be taken to mean the people now fully aware of what God expects of them, were now really committed to doing it. Some of the specifics of the renewed covenant states that, they would obey the requirements of the Law regarding marriage, (no commerce on) the Sabbath, the seventh year, support for the temple etc **(See verses 30-39).**

I’m sure by now you’re wondering how this applies to the dreamer turn doer. Well, I’ll tell you how. At the beginning of this chapter, I had mentioned how Nehemiah, the priests, Levites and the leaders of the people had signed the written covenant on behalf of the nation, right? Why do you think they did, aside the obvious reason of being able to understand what was being read from God’s Law at the revival? The answer is simple: it was also because of the position they occupied.

If being a child of God means choosing to live for God, then working with God as a doer places a double demand on that choice of ours. Nehemiah strove to live right before God inspired him to undertake the rebuilding of the walls. While he was at it, he was still committed to living an exemplary life, and even now that he was done with that assignment and doing other things with God and for the people, he was still expected to remain committed to living for God – which means living according to God’s Laws.

Being a doer, like we've seen in the life of Nehemiah, especially in Chapter 10, comes with expectations. Are you willing to meet God's standards? This is lifelong commitment we're talking about, not a one-time thing, because one thing that will never end even if our projects do is the demand on us to live for God and serve as examples for those around us. You may say this is common knowledge, but if it truly is, how come there are "Christians" out there doing exploits "for God" but can't be bothered about prioritizing God's Laws?

It's like they believe they are the exemptions to the rule. I tell you none of us are exempt from full obedience to God and His Law. No matter how many exploits we do in our lifetime, what will still be more important than their total number is if we are still striving to live right, and whether we are conscious of not leading others to sin. As soon-to-be doers, or already doers, let's not have the wrong set of priorities.



Thanksgiving!!!

CHAPTER 11 of Nehemiah's autobiography touches on the residents of Jerusalem, including the method adopted to increase the population in the city. It also provides the list of those who lived outside Jerusalem. And the first 26 verses of Chapter 12 give us a list of the priests and Levites who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. While we will not dwell on those portions of Scripture, we must know that they are not in Nehemiah's autobiography for nothing. If he paid special attention to them, they were definitely things God had led him to do and be mindful of.

Finally, in the verses that follow in Chapter 12, we learn that the walls are dedicated (**See verses 27-43**), together with the Temple offices; order and worship were restored (**See verses 44-47**). Let's now read portions of Scripture relating to the dedication of the walls.

'Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them

to Jerusalem so that they could celebrate the dedication with joy, with songs of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres. Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two large choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Dung Gate. The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall. And on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, and the women and children rejoiced as well, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from far away” (Nehemiah 12:27, 31, 38, 43, NASB).

I can't even read the verses above without smiling. I imagine that day must have been an occasion of great joy for all who were there. I remember the report Nehemiah had received in the beginning, all that had happened while the work was on-going and now, all that God had helped them to achieve so far. We can see that Nehemiah and all the people indeed had cause to appreciate God.

But let me ask a question. Who says dedication, thanksgiving, rejoicing, and offering of sacrifices must happen only at the end? While I quite understand the sentiments of doing this after the completion of things, what I'm driving at is that we are better off having a Thank You habit, and expressing it right from the beginning, at in-betweens, and at the very end of things. And we wouldn't be doing it just for doing sake; there'll always be reasons to be grateful to God if we paid close attention to the things He does for us, with us and through us.

One of the activities at the dedication was the offering of sacrifices, and animal sacrifices might have been involved. This was an Old Testament practice. While we will never have to offer animal sacrifices again, because of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, we can however feel free to give offerings to the Lord. This too can be a way to show Him our gratitude for involving us in the things that He does and allowing us to be honoured by it.

You may ask, doesn't everyone know that they ought to be thankful? Ha! While we all know it, many forget to do so. Some people who started out as dreamers, who then received ideas from the Lord and eventually become doers, go through what I call instant change, and unwittingly begin to call themselves "self-made". They forget all about the Lord and also forget to appreciate Him for the things He's done.

There are also another group of doers who trivialize the things God has done and instead give reasons for why things turned out favourably for them instead of really giving praise and honour to God, to whom all praise is due. I hope we never fall into these two categories. And it is because of these reasons I thought it necessary to remind us to be thankful throughout all the stages: beginning, midway, ending, and as many times as necessary.



Insist on these Things

THE walls had been rebuilt; before it was completed internal conflicts had been resolved, and even a great spiritual revival had taken place, and slowly the curtain seems to close on Nehemiah's achievements, or so he thought. I thought so also, but we thought wrong.

A time came when Nehemiah returned to Susa (Shushan), perhaps to give a report to Artaxerxes the king. In his absence from Jerusalem a lot happened! Not until he returned to Jerusalem did he discover all the atrocities that had taken place. Here are the things that had gone wrong:

- Eliashib the (high) priest had given Tobiah (a non-Israelite who had opposed Nehemiah and his crew) access to a large room from the chambers attached to the Temple which he had been put in charge.
- The portion of the Levites (which would be the tithes that served as income for them) had not been forthcoming, and so they had left to their fields in order to fend for themselves.
- Sabbath laws were being broken and mixed

mariages were happening again (**Read Nehemiah 13:4-6, 10, 15-16, 23-24**).

I know you're probably thinking, didn't these people recently renew their covenant with God, even going as far as taking on curses upon themselves should they disobey God's law? They even swore oaths to symbolize their loyalty to God, how come they had gone back to their old ways so quickly?

I wonder if Nehemiah thought the same when he returned and saw all that was happening. He probably did, but unlike many of us who would have taken it as a sign to feel sorry for ourselves, because it seemed all our efforts had amounted to nothing and even turn away from the people because they seemed irredeemable, Nehemiah does nothing of this sort; instead, he gets to work. I'll list out the things Nehemiah did, but first, let's read portions of Scripture (**Nehemiah 13, NASB**) that reveal the reforms Nehemiah made.

7 and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had committed for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courtyards of the house of God. 8 It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household articles out of the room. 9 Then I gave an order, and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned the utensils of the house of God there with the grain offering and the frankincense.

11 So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why has the house of God been neglected?" Then I gathered them together and stationed them at their posts. 12 All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. 13 To be in charge of the storehouses, I

appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah from the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen.

17 Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? 18 Did your fathers not do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath against Israel by profaning the Sabbath." 19 And it came about that just as it became dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered that the doors be shut, and that they were not to open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the Sabbath day.

25 So I quarreled with them and cursed them, and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take any of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

30 So I purified them from everything foreign, and assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each in his work, 31 and I arranged for the delivery of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

Nehemiah was busy!

- He expelled Tobiah from the room he occupied

and cleansed the Temple, then restored the proper usage of the rooms attached to the Temple.

- The Levites were stationed at their posts.
- Tithes were restored and new officials were appointed to manage the storehouse.
- The nobles of Judah were reprimanded and the Sabbath was restored.
- Mixed marriages were forbidden once again, purification was done also.

What do you think was going through Nehemiah's mind while he carried out these reforms? Was he trying to save face? Or was he doing it because his Number 1 concern was God, and his desire was that the relationship between God and the people be preserved? I think it was the latter rather than the former.

That being said, I'm glad Nehemiah included all of these "setbacks" in his autobiography so we can learn a thing or two from them. One, this sort of setbacks could happen while we're working for God, and sometimes we might have to revisit a chapter we thought should have been closed, a work we deemed completed. And when that happens, I hope by now we know how to handle it. In case you missed it, when you face setbacks, perhaps in the work God has called you to do or with the people He's sent you to, don't take it personal. These things happen.

Second, never give up. If you put God at the forefront of your mind, coupled with your love for people, then you'd find that you have sufficient grace to address the issues before you.

I should also add that one theme that Nehemiah's reform centred on was God. The people had deviated from God's Law, and Nehemiah insisted on it. We too can benefit greatly in all of our endeavours, the people we lead can too, if we have principles to live by and standards we will absolutely not compromise. These too will end up coming in handy when we are faced with setbacks.



WHILE scrolling through social media one day, I saw a reel. Not that I hadn't come across several reels, but this one in particular had my attention. It was an art work, a painting. It was huge but also breathtakingly beautiful. I loved the play of colours and everything. The artist however made the reel so the viewers could see how she got the work done, from start to finish; and in the reel, I saw her young daughter standing beside her and admiring the work.

But that's not all, at some point, the artist then goes ahead and hands her daughter a small paint brush and tells her to paint along a certain line. This she did with all enthusiasm and care. When she was done, her mother smiled at her and said to her, "Now you can say you played a part in this work," or something along those lines.

Those were the most beautiful words I had heard in a while. You should have seen the smile on her daughter's face. She must have thought to herself, what an honour to be included!

The interaction between mother and daughter that day reminded me of God and us. God is the Artist and we, His children, are constantly in awe of the things He does. But He doesn't want us to just stay on the side lines enjoying the view, it's His desire that we get involved. That's why He is consistently giving us a role to play in this world, a work that we ought to do. And when we do it, we can say, we were a part of something great!

Not convinced? Just take your time reading through Scripture, there are numerous examples of God inviting men and women, young and old, married and single, poor and rich to be a part of the great work He is doing. Nehemiah whose autobiography we've gone through is a perfect example. Wouldn't you agree that the work was really God's work and Nehemiah and all those who worked with him were being handed a role to play in this great work? I'm sure you do. And you know what else? God's not done handing out invitations.

As you read this, be sure there's an invitation being extended to you by God. He is always doing a great work, and now you know He wants you to be a part of it. How exciting! And what an honour to be included, right? Now that you know all this, don't stop being curious. You've got to discover what it is that God would have you do for Him, whether it aligns with your interest or not. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7-8?

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (NASB)

Prayerfully ask God, don't stop desiring to discover it until you do. And when you finally know what it is, whether it's in the Kingdom or in the Secular or both, be willing to take the next step to begin; and regardless of how the in-betweens are, keep at it. Only those who stick with it to the very end will enjoy the joys and other rewards that come with finishing.

I know I probably did not cover all that there is to know about dreaming, doing and finishing in this book, but that's okay. I believe the little I have shared with you is just enough to get you interested in the whole thing, and will motivate you to ask God for what might be left out that you'll need. And when you ask, you can be certain that through His Holy Spirit, He'll guide you into every truth, just like He does for me on countless occasions and continues to do for every true Christian all over the world.

I'm sure by now, you know which phase you're in and what you need to be doing. So go ahead and get right to it.

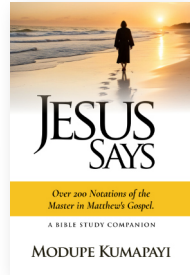
BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR



Letters In My Green Bag
A collection of ineffable, life-transforming ways to experience God.



God's Love Letter To You
A devotional guide.



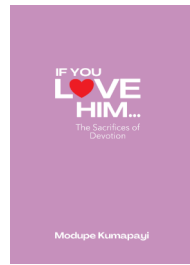
Jesus Says
Over 200 notations of the Master in Matthew's gospel; a Bible study companion.



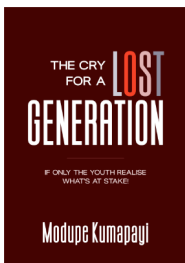
A Book For Dreamers
How dreamers transmute into achievers.



Take The Limits Off
A challenge to parents and guardians to release their wards to do what God wants and has ordained for each child.



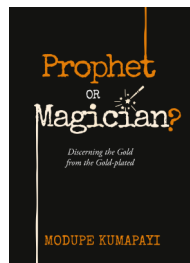
If You Love Him...
A book that answers the question, What is God's love? And it presents the challenge, if you love God, then what?



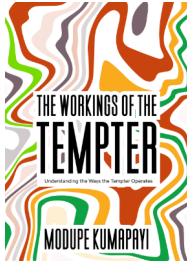
The Cry for a Lost Generation
A book that offers immediate help for anyone seeking God now and seeking to do His will regardless of their past.



Dinah's Defilement Is Your Defilement
A dramatic retelling of Dinah's story. A book that offers you a claim: You can separate yourself unto God and live free of Satan's defilement.

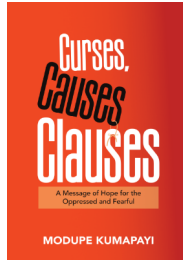


Prophet or Magician?
Prophet or Magician? Is a unique book, a mirror of sort, and reflects who God's true prophets are, and who impostors, charlatans, liars, false preachers are.



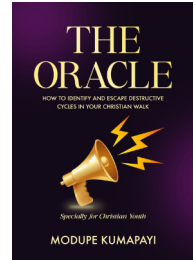
The Workings of the Tempter

The Workings of the Tempter is an unusual book; it retells Bible episodes of temptations and chronicles incidences of many who had fallen for the tempter's cunning ways of trapping those he lures into sin.



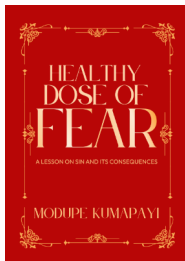
Curses, Causes and Clauses

Curses, Causes and Clauses is written to answer questions about curses, show you the way out of curses, and also teach you how to remain free from curses.



The Oracle

The Oracle reveals hidden truths about the Christian life. Opens the way to understanding why some Christians fell in the early church and how you can stand today and gain heaven at last.



Healthy Dose of Fear

Healthy Dose of Fear equips you to be a victorious, sin-overcoming, holy, upright, and heaven-assured child of God.

The Book

Do you know Nehemiah?

Not that one, I mean the cupbearer at Susa. The 16th Book of the Bible is ascribed to him. This author made some fascinating discoveries about Nehemiah which will interest you, not just in the entertaining way she tells Nehemiah's story, but more about Nehemiah's transition from a dreamer to a doer.

We all dream to achieve great feats. I do; I hope you do too. We all wish to be great achievers, but many fall short, not if they follow the examples Nehemiah offers. It's all here, and you can be counted as an achiever too if you step in line with Nehemiah. You'll like the reading!

The Author

MODUPE KUMAPAYI believes strongly that God has impressed upon her heart to share through her writings the knowledge she has gained in her walk with God and the insight she has been given in her study of God's Word. Her deepest desire is to arm people with the truth; and her greatest fulfilment comes from watching people thrive spiritually.