

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

God's Love Letter to You



Modupe Kumapayi

God's Love Letters to You

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Almighty God, who also doubles as my heavenly Father, for giving me a personal love letter, His Word and Holy Scriptures that inspired the contents of this book.

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Preface

WHOEVER heard of a devotional guide called “God’s love letter to you”? But the truth is this book earned its title before its content were written.

As a new believer, I had a lot of questions and not enough answers. My curiosity led me to spending time studying the Scriptures. When I found the answers, I was looking for I would write it out on a blank space in my Bible or in a journal in such a way that it looked like God was writing a letter to me. It made sense to me. Come to think of it, wasn’t God really writing me a letter? Isn’t the Scriptures God’s love letter to us all? Even though written by mere humans, the words are inspired by God’s Spirit.

Anyway, while still in the habit of personalizing scriptures, at some point I was invited to a church programme. The church was pastored by a family

friend; and during the course of the programme, we were encouraged to come over to the church to pray together. One of my fondest memories of that programme was when we could go over to where scripture verses had been set aside and were allowed to pick them. I wrote mine all down. And though I didn't understand them immediately, I treasured them, and thought of them as God's love letters to me.

As the years went by, I would read the scripture verses over and over; but I only understood them in their original context until one day revelation-light began to seep in. Suddenly I could apply them to my every-day life. I began to draw insights from them. By them I was warned when I was doing wrong things. They showed me what is right and taught me how to live a good life. Many of such insights are what I felt the need to share with you here. Now it's not just God's love letter to me, but to you as well.

I believe the contents of this book are inspired by God's Spirit and I know they will help you just

as they helped me and continue to help me in my spiritual walk. But like all letters, you wouldn't know their contents until you open them; so, let's proceed to reading now.

1 | Good Gifts

“May God give you rain for your crops, so that they grow well in the good ground. Then you will have plenty of grain for food. And you will have grapes to make wine.”

Genesis 27:28, EASY

SOMETIMES the best intentions with the right approach don't always produce the best results. All Isaac wanted to do was fulfil his fatherly obligation by giving his first-born son Esau a good gift – a blessing that was his right – but Isaac messed it up, though not intentionally. Jacob, the second son and Esau's twin had connived with his mother, Rebekah, to take advantage of Isaac's failing eyesight to

deceive him and steal Esau's blessing. Isaac must have been crushed! Because not only did he fail in fulfilling his fatherly duties to Esau, he had let down his first-born son, who we are told he loved very much (Genesis 27).

Earthly fathers can't be fully depended on to dispense their duties towards their children, even if they have the best intentions and go about it the right way; interference can still happen, and they can get hindered. There are also some fathers who will not be able to fulfil any fatherly duties towards their children because they've passed away, or unfortunately because they won't try; sadly, it's just not priority for them.

So where does that leave the child(ren)? Esau grieved his lost blessing; and we can assume that he must have felt angry that his father let him down. Children with late fathers feel empty; and I can speak for the children of absentee fathers, being one myself, and say the feelings of

anger towards their father, resentment, insignificance and loneliness are felt every day.

So, if earthly fathers can't be fully depended on to always fulfil their duties and give good gifts, who then can be depended on? Of course, God. Through Jesus' teachings, He introduced God to us as the Father who loves us more deeply than any earthly father ever could; and He tells us that everyone that believes in Him (Jesus) becomes part of a spiritual family, God's family. That in itself is a good gift.

Having God for a Father has its perks. He carries out all His Fatherly duties and gives good gifts – from sorting our basic physical needs (Philippians 4:19-20; Psalms 68:6) to complex spiritual needs (2 Corinthians 3:18) and more. It's right there in the Scriptures that every good gift comes to us from God (James 1:17), one of which being a good future (Jeremiah 29:11), something Isaac wanted to give Esau through the pronouncement of the blessing but couldn't. God on the other hand can't be deceived and

can't be hindered. He is willing to do all it takes when it comes to giving His children a good future.

Esau lost his blessing, and his earthly father let him down; but later on in his life, I suppose, he found a father in God and received good gifts from Him. I say this because when he later met with Jacob, his conniving twin, he told him he had enough for himself (Genesis 33:9).

Perhaps today you've been let down by your father or a father-figure in your life, or you're anxious about your present needs or the future. Know that you can get rid of the feeling of anger towards your father/father-figure; and you can stop feeling anxious about your present and future needs if you rest in the love of your heavenly Father and look to Him for help with all your cares and worries.

How? Read portions of the Scriptures that remind you that God loves you, values you, prioritizes your needs and won't leave your future to happenstance (Psalm 103:1- end;

Matthew 6:25-34 and Jeremiah 29:11), and be sure to follow the prayer guide below.

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Pray that God help your heart accept and believe the concept of Him being your Father.*
- ♥ *Pray for an increased awareness in His ability to provide and sustain you.*
- ♥ *Pray for faith so strong that anxiety would give way to full confidence as regards your present and future needs.*

2

What's His is Yours

“Every piece of ground that you walk on will belong to you. The borders of your land will go from the desert in the south as far as Lebanon in the north. They will go from the Euphrates river in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.”

Deuteronomy 11:24, EASY

THE Israelites went from being slaves in Egypt to gaining their freedom. They would go from not having any proper settlement of their own to receiving land inheritance from God. What progress! At least this was the future promised the new generation of Israelites entering the Promised Land if they would fulfil the requirement, which was obedience to God.

Thinking of this reminds me of our Christian walk. Just like the Israelites, every believer was first a slave (John 8:34). The slavery of the Israelites can be traced to a sinful act committed by Joseph's brothers. Think about it, if they hadn't been jealous and hated him, they wouldn't have plotted to have him killed; and if they hadn't plotted to have him killed Reuben wouldn't have suggested they throw him into a well, and if he didn't make that suggestion, they wouldn't have spotted the Ishmaelites who were on their way to Egypt, and Judah wouldn't have gotten the bright idea to have Joseph sold. If Joseph hadn't been sold into slavery and later imprisoned, he wouldn't have risen to prominence, wouldn't have asked his father and family to move to Egypt, where he, Joseph, will later die and a new Pharaoh who didn't know him would reign and become threatened by the sheer population of the Israelites and turn them to slaves (Genesis 37, 39, 41, 46 and Exodus 1).

In the same way when as unbelievers we were slaves to sin; and this is traceable to the sinful act committed by the first humans: Adam and Eve. Many times, I find myself, and if you're being honest, you must have also wondered at what quality of life we would all be living if our forebear, the first couple, had stayed away from the tree God warned them against, especially its fruit. Equally so, they shouldn't have had any conversations with the Old Serpent – who was the Devil.

Wondering what might have been will do no good; because, they did sin and received the consequence of their actions and left the lasting effect of that one sinful act – the introduction of sin into the world. Sin became our master; we became controlled by our sinful nature (John 8:34). This separated us from God and we couldn't find rest for our souls.

God looked upon the Israelites, saw their pitiful state and raised Moses as their deliverer (Exodus 3:7, 10), the same way God looked upon

us, saw our pitiful state and sent Jesus as our Saviour (John 3:16). The Israelites received their freedom from slavery by the wondrous works God performed through Moses in Egypt, in the same way God put together a freedom, reconciliation and restoration package for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 5:12-21; Matthew 11:28-30).

The Israelites regained their freedom, and we became free-born. The Israelites, along with their freedom, received a promise of an inheritance. Since the earth is the Lord's, He gave them some portions. And we who have come to receive God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ also have alongside our freedom, an inheritance as children of God (Galatians 4:7).

The Israelites got tangible land portions, but what do we get? Apostle Paul in Romans 8:17 says because we are God's children, we also know that we will receive good things from Him. Those are the things that He has promised to

give to His children. Together with Christ we will receive the things that God has kept for Him. So, what's His is yours, is mine, is ours.

Jesus, being the first-born of all creation, is the natural heir of God the Father, and is entitled to all that's God's. But He has us for siblings and we get to share in His inheritance. You ask, what exactly is His inheritance? Jesus, while on earth, had certain privileges that we too will enjoy, privileges such as the Holy Spirit (who Himself is a gift that keeps on giving), power, authority, glory etc. But it doesn't end there; we also have eternal inheritance which we will know about and receive when we get to heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

The promise of inheritance given to the Israelites came with one condition: obedience (Deuteronomy 11:27). In addition to obedience, ours comes with the additional condition that we must agree to deny ourselves and be steadfast in the faith amid the troubles we face

in this life like Jesus did. This in summary is self-denial and self-sacrifice (Romans 8:17).

Sometimes the devil still tries to bring up our past sins and tells us we are unworthy of our inheritance. But who can say we are guilty when God has accepted us as right with Him in Christ? (Romans 8:33) Other times, sin tries to enslave us again. We only need to remember that we have become new people empowered by God's Spirit to master the flesh, and have become new persons. Our old way of life is gone and a new life has begun (2 Corinthians 5:17).

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Thank God for His salvation, acceptance and blessings.*
- ♥ *Ask that His Holy Spirit bring to your remembrance your new identity, and on days that you're feeling less than grateful, your inheritance.*
- ♥ *Ask that He give you grace to continue to live this new life that you've received.*

3 | Remember

“But do not be afraid of them. Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptian people.”

Deuteronomy 7:18, EASY

WHEN Pharaoh refused to set the Israelites free so they could go worship God, God brought upon Egypt ten miraculous plagues. Let's run through them (Exodus 7-11):

1. Water from the Nile turned into blood.
2. Frogs came out of rivers and invaded Egypt.
3. Out of the dust came lice that infested man and beast.

4. The houses of the Egyptians were full of swarms of flies.
5. Their livestock died.
6. Boils broke out in sore on man and beast.
7. Hail rained on Egypt.
8. Locusts invaded their territory.
9. Their territory was covered in darkness, and
10. Finally, all their first-born sons, even the first born of the farm animals, died.

It was after the tenth plague that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. But he soon changed his mind, took his horses, chariots and riders to pursue and try force Israel back. He followed Israel into the middle of the Red sea where God had miraculously made a path for His people to pass over on dry ground. Pharaoh didn't make it out alive; he and his troop drowned when God brought back the standing heap of water; they all perished. As a warning, God had earlier confused Pharaoh and his men by stopping the wheels of their chariots and made them

acknowledge that He, the Lord, was the one fighting for the Israelites (Exodus 14).

First picture the ten plagues happening in turn. Imagine yourself as one of the Israelites kept apart in Goshen where they were exempted from the plagues, but witnessing the divine retribution on all of Egypt except Goshen, until finally Pharaoh succumbed and hastened the Hebrews to leave Egypt. Now, think of what it must have felt like to again be confronted by Pharaoh and his horsemen at the brink of the Red sea. At that moment of dread, you witness the miraculous parting of the Red sea. There you are with the people of God walking on a dry path created by God on the sea floor. One moment, just before the final person had safely crossed the sea, you turn around and see Pharaoh and his army right behind you; and not yet aware of God's plan against the enemy, you become afraid. But the next moment you're letting out a sigh of relief as you watch Pharaoh and his

vengeful troop drown and die; none able to escape! (Exodus 14:5-30).

I don't think I could willingly forget any detail if I were to have witnessed it all. It would remain stuck in my memory forever. I'm sure it's the same with you. Israel never forgot the exhilarating experience. We wonder, however, why God would yet say to Israel, "*Remember...*" in our lead verse here?

The ten plagues, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the parting of the Red sea and Pharaoh's drowning with his army were all God's way of introducing Himself to His people and showing them how much He values them. They might have enjoyed the display of power but sadly did not retain the knowledge of who God was and how much He valued them. That's why He asked them to remember. The proof that they did not remember God can be seen in their reaction whenever they were faced with new challenges or needs.

In the New Testament, Jesus addressed His disciples' forgetfulness too. Not long after He had fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, and later four thousand with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, He talked to them about the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees; but they assumed He was on that topic because they didn't bring any bread with them. Jesus had to remind them that the essence of that display of His power during the feeding of the multitudes was so they would remember to trust Him with their basic needs; and as far as He was present and involved with them, they could never go hungry (Matthew 16:8-11).

I'm not quick to judge the Israelites though, neither am I quick to judge the disciples of Jesus; and that's because I can be forgetful too. There are so many things God has done for me in time past that I would have to think long and hard to remember. Scientists say forgetfulness to some extent is normal; that it can be a part of

aging. They also say it could be caused by stress and anxiety. God told the Israelites to remember. Jesus urged His disciples not to be forgetful too; and that's because being forgetful is common with us humans, especially when we are stressed and anxious: two emotions we feel when faced with challenges.

But why is it so important that we remember what God does for us? It's important because when we remember, not just the display of God's power but also who He reveals Himself to be through the display of His power, this way, we grow in faith and can face whatever comes our way. So, we must remember.

Asaph, the writer of Psalm 77, understood the importance of remembering; that's why he wrote this down when he was in trouble and seemed unsure of God's help (verses 9-12). *"Has God forgotten to be kind and help us? Is he so angry that he will not be kind to us anymore? Then I said, 'This makes me very upset! Has the Most High God stopped helping us? I will*

remember the things that the Lord has done. Yes, I will remember the miracles that you did long ago. I will think about everything that you have done. I will think carefully about all those great things.”

Though he started the psalm in fear, he finished it in faith. Fear will give way to faith and faith will make us strong and give room for God to do exploits in our lives. But first, we need to remember.

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Thank God for all the miracles you've been privileged to experience in your walk with Him so far.*
- ♥ *Pray for a heart that remembers God and His ability at all times.*
- ♥ *Ask for His help in any current challenges you face.*

4 | You're Enough

“Do not be afraid of them. Remember that I will be with you. I will keep you safe.” Then the Lord touched my mouth with his hand. He said to me, ‘I am giving you the words that you must speak.’”

Jeremiah 1:8-9, EASY

IT'S good to be aware of your limitations, but it's better to be totally dependent on God. When God chose Jeremiah who was already a priest to step into a space unfamiliar to him, God knew Jeremiah would protest and offer excuses; but He didn't wait for that to happen before immediately telling him what He knew of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-5).

Jeremiah didn't understand what God meant by saying He knew him. So, after God was done

speaking, Jeremiah starts telling God, who created him, about himself. He brings up all the excuses why he couldn't do what God asked him. He brought up his age to declare himself inexperienced. He spoke about not being an orator to prove his incompetence (Jeremiah 1:6). True as all of those were, God assured him that He would always be with him and would inspire his words, proving that Jeremiah was enough and would remain so as long as He looked beyond his limitations and depended on Him.

Jeremiah wasn't the first person to be reluctant to step into a new assignment; before him was Joshua. Joshua had been Moses' assistant for a long time. After Moses died, Joshua was called by God to fill Moses' shoes to lead the people into the Promised Land. First, Joshua was reluctant and began thinking up excuses why he couldn't replace Moses. His excuses must be why God said to him, *"No one can stop you from taking this land as long as*

you live. As I was with Moses, I will always be with you. I will never leave you alone” (Joshua 1:5). Joshua needed all the assurances he could get, and God willingly buoyed his faith and confidence.

Recently I started something new, maybe not new in the actual sense, but a new stage/version of something old; and I was constantly plagued with self-doubt. It got so bad that I wasn't able to write; not because I didn't have inspiration to write but because I had convinced myself that I wasn't good enough, and no one would read my writings. Other days, I would attempt to write but couldn't string together the right words; my sentences were winding, the verbs uncoordinated and my intended meanings lost. I would type out words, get disgusted and delete them, repeat the process again and again until I wearied myself, then stopped altogether. I spent days tormented by self-doubt until one day, I could take it no more. I took my issue to God in prayer. Amid sobs I tried explaining everything

I felt to God (self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy).

Then the Holy Spirit reminded me of two portions of the Scriptures that I have since used to overcome such crippling thoughts: 2 Timothy 1:7, that reminds me that I have God's Spirit in me and His Spirit doesn't cause me to be afraid; instead, He causes me to be powerful (mentally, emotionally) to serve God." The second text was 2 Corinthians 10:5, that reminds me to always pray against negative ideas and thoughts. Here I learnt that at the place of prayer I would be able to access God's limitless resources that will meet all my mental and emotional needs.

Undoubtedly, at one time or another you've given excuses for not doing what you ought to. Perhaps like Jeremiah, Joshua or me, you only gave those excuses or formed those opinions after thorough and honest assessment of yourself and your abilities. Please know that the feeling of inadequacy is rooted in fear, and can only be defeated by an increased dependence on

God. If you don't deal with such thoughts by renewing your mind with the word of God and praying through, you could end up short-changing yourself out of your glorious destiny.

Ever wondered what would have become of God's message to Judah if Jeremiah had refused to speak up? What would have happened to the people of Israel who were ready to enter the Promised Land if Joshua hadn't stepped up? I know God would have replaced Jeremiah and Joshua, and you would still be reading this devotional from someone else if I didn't overcome fear. Thankfully, Jeremiah came out of that conversation with God, though still with the reality of his limitations staring him in the face, but decided to speak up as a prophet ordained by God. Joshua too decided to stand up to do God's bidding. I chose to keep writing too trusting in God's help at all times.

Faith, trust in God, is the first step, I believe, you need in order to overcome fear and be able to walk into unfamiliar territory.

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Ask God to forgive you for all those times you tried to talk your way out of His will.*
- ♥ *Pray for a renewed mind and zeal towards this new phase/stage/chapter.*
- ♥ *Ask God to protect your mind from the seeds of fear and doubt; then ask for boldness to receive God's instructions and walk into your glorious destiny.*

5

Who's Speaking?

“Lord, please shut their mouths! When they deceive people or they boast, stop them doing that!”

Psalm 12:3, EASY

ANGER, confusion, anxiety, sadness are some of the emotions we feel when we find out we've been lied to and deceived. The aftermath of deception isn't pretty; we can see that in David's cry to God in the verse above. He wanted God to judge the liars and boasters around him.

The first deception in Bible record was at the Garden of Eden. The Old Serpent, definitely the Devil, approached the woman, Eve, and asks

her: *"Did God say, "You must not eat the fruit from any tree in the garden"? Is that really true?"* The woman replied, *'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But God said, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it. If you do that, you will die."* Then the snake said to the woman, *'No, you will not die. God knows that when you eat the fruit from this tree, you will understand things. You will become like God himself. You will know about good things and evil things"* (Genesis 3:1-5).

With that seemingly convincing, howbeit erroneous argument of the devil, the woman looked again at the tree, whose fruit now looked luscious and desirable to her. She thought it would be good to eat as it was beautiful to look at. She wanted to eat it because, as the devil said, it would make her wise. So, she took some fruit and ate it. Apparently, her husband wasn't immediately there. Wherever he went! On his return, his wife – with some feminine guileful

convincing of her own – gave some of the fruit to him; he yielded, and ate it.

Eve was deceived by a smooth-talker who must have boasted to himself that he would bring about the downfall of man. Satan succeeded through the woman. Adam and Eve fell. Apparently, the couple didn't realize this until it was too late. Then as predicted by God, Adam and Eve were punished for their disobedience to God's commandment. But the fate of the one who lied and deceived them was sealed too (Genesis 3:14-15).

While we can be sure that God will execute judgment on those who tell lies and deceive others, including those who boast of the havoc they can cause with their tongues, we however owe ourselves the duty of protecting ourselves from being deceived.

After Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit of the tree God had commanded them not to, and God had arrived on the scene, He asked two questions: *“Where are you?”* and *“Who told*

you?” This proves that who we listen to matters a lot as regards what we do and where we end up in life.

In order for Adam and Eve not to be deceived when the snake started to speak, Eve should have asked, who’s speaking? Clearly it wasn’t the voice of God as the snake’s suggestion contradicted God’s instruction. But Eve didn’t ask because she couldn’t discern. Discernment is what you and I need to be able to tell who’s speaking.

Discernment of spirits is one of the most useful gifts a believer can possess. It helps eliminate confusion, and shields one from lies and deception. It’s how Jesus could tell it was Satan speaking, and not Peter, when Peter tried to convince Jesus not to talk about pain, hurt and being killed, as had been divinely determined for Him (Matthew 16:21-23). Much later, it’s how Peter himself was able to tell when Ananias and Sapphira approached him with a lie (Acts 5:1-11). In these last days, there will be

more liars and false teachers (2 Timothy 3), so it is necessary that we are discerning.

How do you possess this gift? You already do. Every true believer has the Holy Spirit in them. The Holy Spirit is our guide. He helps us discern truth from lies (John 16:13). What you and I need to do is spend more time in fellowship with the Holy Spirit; this way we can tell who's speaking anytime. In the book, *The Holy Spirit between Me and Jesus*, Eleazar Ulinfun, gives an insightful paragraph on how to start a fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

“How can we start this fellowship? Let us imagine for a moment, the type of relationship we have with a loved one, for example a spouse or a child; usually if a spouse, the first thing we do in the morning is to say the appropriate form of greeting. Also, we will usually not do anything without seeking the opinion and possibly consent of a spouse or a loved one, especially

when our decisions may affect the relationship we have with that person. In the same way, we can start our day by simply saying “Good morning” to the Holy Spirit and by faith expect a response or reply – it will come, because He is a gentleman and must respond when spoken to. Next, for everything we are involved in we can start by asking His opinion on the matter, be it personal (material) or spiritual. He will find a way to answer us; and we will know He has given His response to the question, all by faith.”

Now there really isn't any need to further forfeit our peace or go through needless pain; the Holy Spirit is there to help us. Would you be willing to relate with Him?

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
- ♥ *Ask for an increased awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit.*
- ♥ *Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in your day-to-day choices and decisions.*

6 | Don't Quit

"I ran after my enemies and I caught them. I did not turn back until I had killed them."

Psalm 18:37, EASY

DAVID told us what happened in the beginning – he ran after his enemies. At the end, he caught and killed them. But what about what happened in-between? It's the same today. When you hear people who are big shots talk, they skip the in-betweens. They tell you they had big dreams and now they've accomplished it.

Hmm!

But how?

The in-between is that gap from when David started running and before he caught his enemies and killed them. It is the gap between dreaming big and actualizing the dream. It's the gap between knowing what God's purpose for your life was and actually fulfilling it. To make it very relatable, it's the gap between writing your New Year resolutions and following through on each item on your list. The in-between is an ugly place. That's why no one talks about it. But just because we don't talk about it doesn't mean it's not real.

When David started out to wage war against his enemies, he must have started highly motivated; same with us when we pursue a dream or when we first gave our lives to Christ; we're highly motivated, we want to follow through with God's purpose and will for our lives; but then, like always, the time of testing comes. When David, while running, began to run out of breath, with lungs burning, he must have considered turning back. When the one

who had big dreams has faced setbacks and wants to throw in the towel and quit... when the one who had pledged allegiance to Christ has become tired of the unending challenges involved with carrying one's cross and following Christ, and he/she begins to consider backsliding.... That part of life is the sweet story worth telling, don't you think?

“I quit almost as soon as I began,” she typed and added a sad emoji. The person I'm referring to is someone who started out the year with a dream, but by July hadn't even completed the first step in actualizing that dream. I'm sure her words are familiar, as many of us get stuck in the in-between. We quit almost as soon as we had begun; or rather, we quit as soon as it gets hard.

The in-between is the place where our inner-strength is tested, where discipline, endurance, resilience and patience are required. The in-between is a place of hard work and commitment. It is not a phase you can go

through on your own; because, we aren't meant to go through it on our own.

As humans, we easily become weak and tired; but there is One who never becomes weak or tired. We don't know and understand everything; but there is One who knows and understands everything. He is the One who can help people that are approaching/stuck in the in-between, people who are ready to quit, and those who have already quit. He makes tired people strong again. When people have become weak, He gives them more strength. He doesn't discriminate between young and old. He is willing to help all who ask and wait on Him to help them. This person is God (Isaiah 40:28-31). God is the One who sees us through the in-betweens of life, in both our spiritual and physical affairs. He is our best shot at not quitting.

A perfect example of God in action is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here our Lord Jesus was approaching the in-between. This would be

a tough, but required, phase before the fulfilment of His assignment of dying to redeem all mankind and His resurrection. The in-between for Him would consist of His arrest, His abandonment by His disciples, Peter's betrayal, the mocking and the beatings by the Roman soldiers, His unfair trial and the crowd's rejection. Just before the series of the inevitable began, Jesus models what we all should be doing if we indeed require God's help in seeing us through.

You know what He did?

He prayed (Luke 22:41-44).

Jesus went down on His knees and prayed. Then an angel came to Him from heaven and made Him stronger. But again, He began to have troubles in His mind, so He prayed again even more strongly until His sweat became blood dropping to the ground. When He finished praying and stood up, He was equipped to see His assignment through till the end. He succeeded, and every believer today is living

proof because we became saved. I pray that you too either have already come into this experience of salvation, or ready right now to come to Jesus Christ and receive His salvation.

You see, without any hope of eternal salvation in Christ, life on earth and after is utterly bleak. Without God, we will go through life as quitters, and there will be so many unfinished projects and abandoned dreams lying around. Would you not rather, going forward, do things differently and use the resources available in God? Would you not rather turn to Him for help and strength? It's the only wise thing to do on the days you don't believe in yourself and you can't maximize the doors He's opened for you; it's the wise thing to do on the days you are sure you've reached the end of your strength and can't carry on; it's the wise thing to do on the days you're dying under the weight of expectation and you've become desperate.

Do it!

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Ask God to help you put a priority on your relationship with Him. The stronger the bond, the more natural it will be to ask Him for assistance when things get hard.*
- ♥ *Ask for grace to trust Him to come through by infusing you with renewed zeal and strength.*
- ♥ *Reflect for a moment on your dreams and projects underway, ask God for strength to go through the in-betweens and come out victorious.*

7 | Know Him

“I trust in you, my God. Please do not let me be ashamed. Do not let my enemies laugh at me, because they are stronger than me.”

Psalm 25:2, EASY

DAVID found himself in trouble, in a battle with people stronger than him; so he prays: “O my God, Please do not let me be ashamed, do not let my enemies laugh at me....” He wasn’t the only one.

Peter was overwhelmed by the waves he saw; and just as he began to go down into the water, he shouted out a prayer: “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30). Blind Bartimaeus was told that Jesus from Nazareth was walking past him,

so he begins to shout: ‘Jesus, Son of David! Please be kind to me and help me!’ (Mark 10:47). Ten men who had a bad illness of the skin, saw Jesus and shouted, “Jesus, Master, please be kind to us” (Luke 17:12-13). A man who was one of the king’s officers in Capernaum had a son who was very ill and dying, and so he sought and found Jesus in Cana, Galilee, asking Him strongly to make his son well again (John 4:46-47).

These were different people in different situations; yet they had certain things in common. First, they were aware of their limitations. Second, they were aware of God’s existence and His limitless power. Finally, they were aware God wasn’t unapproachable nor uncaring; so, they trusted Him with their problems, and as is promised in the Scriptures, those who trusted Him to help them ended up very happy, their faces became bright (with joy) because they were not turned down/turned

away; there was no need for them to be ashamed (Psalm 34:5).

Prayer remains the most effective weapon to employ against the enemy of our soul. Nothing proves our need for God like prayer and our trust in God like prayer; also, nothing reveals God's attentiveness towards us like prayer. Billy Sunday says, "If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to the greatest source of power known to human beings."

This got me thinking, is there really anyone who is a stranger to prayer? Every now and then even the atheist has found themselves in situations where they hoped for the interference of a "higher power" in turning things around in their favour. So, no one, it seems, is a stranger to prayer. We make ourselves strangers to God who answers prayers when we fail to pray to Him.

God created us and knows us by name, even the very hairs on our head He knows and numbers (Luke 12:7). But do we know God to

whom we pray and claim to trust? Do we know that not only is prayer supposed to be a tool of holy war against the enemy, it is also an open line of communication with God? Take Moses, in his desire to know God, he cried out in prayer to Him: *“Please, show me your glory!”* (Exodus 33:18).

On his part, David compared his need-to-know God with a thirsty deer looking for a stream of water. He says to God, You are the God who lives, and I need life from you! When will I be able to come near to you and see you face to face? (Psalm 42:2b). The disciples of Jesus were physically with Him. He would often teach them using stories; but though they didn’t always understand Him, they didn’t leave it at that, but often went to Him and asked Him. He would in turn help them understand (Matthew 13:16). Paul praying for the Christians at Philippi, asks God to help them to know God better and better (Philippians 1:9).

When Jesus said to His disciples, and by extension every believer, *“Go on asking God for what you need. Then God will give it to you. Go on looking for what you need. Then you will find it. Go on knocking at the door, and God will open it for you. Everyone who asks for something will receive it. Everyone who looks for something will find it. God will open the door for everyone who knocks on it”* (Matthew 7:7-8), I’m certain He was hoping that our need will include getting to know God. So, when we ask Him in prayer to reveal Himself to us, He will do so more than anything else, since by that we are seeking a relationship with Him. He will do so to draw near to us, and would do so even more if we want an effectual door open for service in ministry so we can help others get to know Him too. Prayer is indeed a key; but it shouldn’t be used just for unlocking the resources required to meet our physical and material needs; we need it for fellowship with God and devoted service to Him.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray that you will keep growing in spiritual knowledge and insight.*
- ♥ *Pray for wisdom to understand who God is, who Christ is, and who the Holy Spirit is.*
- ♥ *Pray for an increased knowledge of who you are to God, your place in His family, all He has done for you and the future He has called you to share with Him.*

8

Same God Right Now

“I will give you back the years that the locusts have eaten. I will give you all that the great locust and the young locust, and other locusts and their groups have eaten. All that my great army has eaten I will give you.”

Joel 2:25, EASY

GROWING up I spent a lot of time with my maternal grandfather. I loved him a lot and believed everything he told me. One of the things he told me was that adults (himself, specifically) don't lie. That statement itself was a lie, but I didn't know that back then. I simply accepted what I was told as truth

because of who told me. Then one day, I caught my grandfather in a lie. I was disappointed and so I confronted him. Well, that day I realized every one (adults inclusive) told lies and I shouldn't take everything I'm told as truth regardless of who was speaking.

I had trust issues growing up as a little girl, and it became worse since becoming an adult myself. I second-guess everything I'm told, especially promises made to me. You can imagine how this would affect my relationship with God when He makes a promise. If you have difficulty trusting people, maybe you can relate. But I have learnt a thing or two about God and promises which I will now share.

God is not like my grandfather; God is not a man. He does not tell lies. If He promises to do something, it happens (Numbers 23:19), and we can believe this to be true because of the Holy Scriptures. It teaches us about the character of God, which includes His integrity; and it

contains different instances where God made promises and kept them.

The situation back in the time of prophet Joel was this: the people of Judah had continued to live in sin despite God's warnings. The prophet had foretold the punishment for their sins, and God had made good His word by sending locusts into the land to destroy it for a period of four years (See Joel 1). The locust invasion was God's judgment, because, sometimes, we learn obedience only through painful experiences. God knew the people would not be able to endure watching all that they worked for being destroyed, and both they and their livestock starving, without making a change. So, He made them another promise, a promise of restoration when they had an inward change of heart and turned away from their sins.

He said to them He would give them back their lost years. He would restore their losses when their repentance was genuine and heartfelt. This is good news for everyone that

has suffered any loss, especially as a result of sins.

The little girl in me however would have doubted God's promise. I would have asked how? Will He turn back the hand of time? How will He undo the damage that has been done? When will all this happen? I would have reached the conclusion that it's simply not possible.

God forbid for anyone to call God a liar. The very idea can never enter the mind of a professing Christian who claims to have the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:3). Certain Christians are tempted not to believe when they don't understand the "how" and "when" of God's promises. But we can learn from Bible events like this and grow in spiritual knowledge and insight. God didn't have plans of turning back the hand of time when He promised to give the people of Israel back the wasted years, and restore their losses. He meant He would help redevelop their land, making it healthy again for

sowing and reaping. The restoration will happen little by little, gradually.

All this we know now; but at the time of the promise, the people of Israel didn't know, but simply believed God's promise because He said so. We also will receive promises from God and may not immediately understand the how and when of those promises, yet we should simply believe them. How will we do this? We do so by focusing on the character of the promise-Giver, and simply have faith.

God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He has kept His word from way back and won't stop doing so now. His promise to you won't be the exception. So, if He says you've suffered enough losses as a result of your sins and that He will restore your losses because of your repentance, you've got to believe that even if you don't know how or when it will all come together.

Remember this when you are tempted to doubt God's word and promises to you; it

doesn't make sense to doubt God anyway. Our duty is to love God and live within His will, and not to try to figure out everything He says or second-guess Him, as doing so will only leave us frustrated and faith-less.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God for forgiveness for all the times you've doubted Him and His ability to keep His word.*
- ♥ *Invite God to help you grow in faith and build a relationship of trust with Him.*
- ♥ *Thank Him in advance for the fulfilment of all the promises He has made to you.*

9

Up in His Arms

“I am with you, so do not be afraid. I am your God, so do not be upset. I will make you strong and I will help you. My powerful right hand will keep you safe.”

Isaiah 41:10, EASY

B EING called from the world and chosen by God to be a member of His family is truly a thing of joy. But it also means trouble! You see, the believer is in the world but no more of the world. Physically we constantly face persecutions and challenges. Spiritually we have the flesh, our previous master, to contend with, as it seeks to rule our lives again. But we

must not fear nor lose our peace; rather, we should face our troubles bravely because we're operating from a place of victory. As Jesus assures us, He has already destroyed the power of this world on our behalf (John 16:33).

This promise of Jesus was brought into focus by the Holy Spirit when I needed it. Who better to encourage us when we are down than the Holy Spirit? What better tool to use than the words of Jesus, who not only is the Son of God, but is the most important Priest, our great Priest, who understands us. He perfectly knows how weak we are and can get. He understands the internal struggles between the flesh and the spirit. He had been through similar struggles while He was here as man, because He faced similar situations physically and spiritually but overcame. He wants to help us, and tells us to come to Him boldly for help, promising to be kind to us in whatever is our need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Who do you look to for encouragement? It's an important question. Bible scholars refer to Isaiah 41 as an address to exiled Jews during their captivity in Babylon. God seeing their painful experience, spoke to them tenderly through the prophet Isaiah, assuring them of His presence with them and dispelling their fears. He promised to make them strong and to help them. He even promised their security.

We don't need to look to others before we can receive encouragement from God. We have the Person of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside every believer (John 14:16-17). God succour us, through the Holy Spirit who is available to encourage us 24/7, through the months, all year round, and through life. The kind of encouragement the Holy Spirit gives is a guide to us in navigating the troubles we face physically and spiritually, and helps us understand everything that is true, including vistas of the future, despite our present sufferings which all play a part in God's big

picture in our lives. The kind of encouragement the Holy Spirit gives shifts our perspective and helps put Jesus in focus so we don't get discouraged by the pressures that surround us. We only see Jesus, how great He is, how good He is and how much we are valued. This helps us remain undistracted by the circumstances around us.

If you're like me, then you have a hard time opening up to people; no one in your circle of friends completely gets you. And, since you don't open up, you can't receive encouragement from them when you need one. You know, I believe it's mostly for people like us that Jesus had the Holy Spirit give encouragement. He anticipated our needs and made provisions for us. But it doesn't end there. The Holy Spirit will live continuously on the inside of a believer that's daily yielded to Him. So, it's our duty to make our lives conducive for Him by being inwardly pure.

I urge you to be mindful of what you allow through your eye gate, ear gate and mind gate. Open your heart to give the Holy Spirit room to operate. Don't diminish His activity that creates awareness of the Truth in us. The Holy Spirit brings to remembrance the words of Jesus; so, it's our responsibility to stay in the word and be familiar with it. The Holy Spirit is with us to help us, but we have to want to be helped. It's left to us to prayerfully communicate our needs to God.

Now that we know what to do and are aware of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can remain up in our Father's arms in spirit, lifted from the cares and worries of this world, patient and full of joy when we have troubles, and stay winning internal conflicts between the flesh and the spirit.

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Pray to God to give you strength and endurance as you navigate challenging situations in the journey of life.*
- ♥ *Invite the Holy Spirit to journey with you in your day-to-day life.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to keep holy in what you desire, say and do.*

10

Doing Your Part

*“You will pray to him, and he will answer you.
You will do the things that you have promised
to him.”*

Job 22:27, EASY

JEPHTHAH wanted to win a battle against the Ammonites and so asked God to help him win; he took it a step further, telling God that if he returned home safely, he would give God a burnt offering of whatever first came out through the door of his house when he arrived (Judges 11:30-32). Others made similar pledges, like Hannah who struggled with childlessness and endured long periods of infertility before finally having children. She

could have prayed to God and had faith that He heard her and would give her heart's desire; but she took it a step further: she told God if He gave her a son, she would give him to serve Him all his life; and as a symbol of his consecration, nobody will ever cut his hair (1 Samuel 1:11).

God did put the Ammonites under Jephthah's power, and he won, just like God heard Hannah's prayer and gave her a son. In Jephthah's case, he gave up ownership of his daughter without knowing it. Hannah also gave up ownership of her son, Samuel, but did so knowingly. None of what they did would have mattered when the time finally came for Jephthah and Hannah to do their part. We can argue and say neither of them should have made a vow to begin with; but do we know for sure if either of them would have had their hearts desire if they didn't pledge vows? It's also good to note that they pledged vows based on the outcome of their prayers; it was still left to God

to answer the prayers if He willed. In both cases, their desires aligned with God's will.

When I was old enough to understand certain things, my mother sat me down and told me a little bit about the situation surrounding my conception. She and my father were still in the polytechnic; they had me outside of wedlock. My biological father rejected the pregnancy, and his parents didn't get involved. Her own father was upset, disappointed and forbade everyone from reaching out to her to help her. She was afraid and alone and sought solace in a church. Her mother later found her and helped her find a place to live with her relatives. One of the days she was scared about her future and mine, and prayed to God to keep me safe. But she took it a step further and told God that if He took up responsibility for me as a Father, He could have me as His servant all the days of my life.

Could she have simply just asked God to take care of me without the vow? Yes, but how do we know it's not because of that covenant and

agreement that I'm still alive, sheltered so much and have found God and purpose early? Exactly, we can't tell. The heart of this particular piece isn't about whether it's wrong or not to make vows to God, but about how difficult it sometimes is to do your part of the bargain.

Making a vow is easy, but following through is hard. When Jephthah saw his only child, his beloved daughter, come out to welcome him on his return from the war, he was so upset that he tore his clothes. What happened thereafter is a theological controversy. I don't believe, though, that she was offered as burnt offering to God; it's not like God to accept human sacrifices as do the heathen gods. Most likely, just as Hannah did with her son Samuel, Jephthah consecrated his daughter to God for the rest of her life, possibly not getting married nor having children. This is more plausible as the Bible doesn't record any event of her being killed on an altar of sacrifice. In her case, it wouldn't have been easy for Hannah to part with a three-year-old son, who

was her only child at the time. Samuel went on to become God's priest and prophet at Shiloh in place of Eli.

Same way I see my mum struggling with my decision to go into ministry even though she had already decided on it before I was born. Notice one thing all three have in common: besides making a vow, Jephthah, Hannah and my mum were able to do their part, evidently not in their own strength. God helped them do their part by giving them inner strength. I see it every day in my mum; her initial struggle to accept my decision, the awareness that the Holy Spirit gives her, the realization that has dawned on her that I really belong to God and not her, and finally her acceptance of the situation. She proves this by letting me go, and praying daily for me.

Inner strength is a gift from God. He gives it to us so we can do our part and follow through on our commitment to Him. Commitment here doesn't include just the vows, but our duties/

responsibilities as believers. On our own we may want to do the right thing, but we will end up doing the wrong things except we're truly committed to the vows we have made to God. We may love God's law and want to obey His rules, but our body will end up making us do something else. And why? It's because no matter how saved we are, as humans, except we fully yield to the Spirit and walk by the Spirit's rule, we are prone to following the flesh and straying from our vows to God. The flesh, mind you, never wants to do God's will (Romans 7:21-25; Galatians 5:16-17).

The strength we have on the inside can be built by an increased awareness and total dependence on God. I mean awareness that stems from knowledge about God's sovereignty which in turn leads to reverence and exposure of our frailties and limitations; the reason we're to totally depend on God and the Holy Spirit.

We can continue to look into God's word to learn more about Him and ourselves, and then

pray for inner-strength. We were never designed to be effective and productive Christians on our own (John 15:1-5). We must constantly remain connected to God for our daily dose of strength if we are to do our part.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner-man.*
- ♥ *Ask God to make you someone that can be trusted to do what is right and His will at all times.*
- ♥ *Pray for the Spirit's grace to follow and do His leading always.*

11

Building Blocks for Trust

“The Lord your God will go in front of you. He will fight to help you, as he fought for you in Egypt. You saw him do it.”

Deuteronomy 1:30, EASY

ONE thing we can all agree on is that the Israelites (first generation who came out of Egypt) were people who knew how to express their feelings. What I mean is, they didn’t know how to pretend. When they were hungry, they cried out; when they were thirsty, they murmured; when they were afraid, it showed. The only sad part is, even though they were never in denial about their unpleasant

experiences, they never truly learnt how to seek to improve their circumstances.

The wilderness was designed to reveal God to them, reveal His ability to provide, to protect and to preserve. The situations they faced there were supposed to help them build a trust-relationship with God. So, if they were hungry, thirsty or afraid, they were expected to seek to improve those conditions by presenting their needs before God and waiting to see what He would say and do about it. Their inability to learn to trust God was what cost them entrance into the Promised Land, with the exemption of Joshua and Caleb.

Some things cannot be taught; we simply learn it with experience. From the earlier verses, including the text above, we can feel Moses' frustration at his failure in trying to help the people learn the simple act of trusting God by what He said and what He had done in the past. Recounting the event, he said:

“26 But you refused to go into the land. You turned against the Lord your God. 27 You complained to each other in your tents. You said, ‘The Lord hates us. That is why he brought us out of Egypt. He wanted to give us to the Amorites, so that they would kill us. 28 We do not know what will happen to us now. Our brothers who explored the land have made us afraid. They say, “Those people in Canaan are taller and stronger than we are. Their cities are big and strong. They have walls around them that reach up to the sky. We even saw some men there who are descendants of Anak.” ’29 Then I said to you, ‘Do not be so frightened of those people. 30 The Lord your God will go in front of you. He will fight to help you, as he fought for you in Egypt. You saw him do it.”

You and I are more like the Israelites than we would like to admit. I wish I could say that when I am in unpleasant circumstances, after I’ve

prayed, my fears are immediately dispelled because of what God says and because of what I've seen Him do. If I said so, I'd be lying, and if you are being honest, you can relate. Since we can't have a relationship with God without trust, we will have to consciously learn to trust Him.

The first step in learning to trust God is asking for help with it like the man with the sick son in Mark 9:24 did. *"Immediately, the boy's father shouted, 'Oh! I believe! Help me to believe more!'"* Jesus had told the father of the boy with a bad spirit that his son would be healed if he believed. It wasn't enough to come to Jesus because He could heal his son, his faith and complete trust would be required for his son to be healed. The man was courageous enough to admit that he needed help with believing. Jesus didn't scoff at his request and then turned away; He healed the man's son. We too must be willing to express our vulnerability before God, asking Him to help us trust Him.

The second step will be to choose what to focus on. What you choose to focus on can either build your faith and trust in God or feed your fears. Apostle Paul told the church at Philippi, “Fill your minds with thoughts about good things. Remember what I have taught you. Remember the message that you heard from me. Remember what you saw when I lived among you” (Philippians 4:8a, 9). We too, after praying about our concerns, must choose to think on good things. We must remember who God is, how great and good and kind He is, how much He values us, what the Bible teaches us about Him and what we have seen Him do in the past.

We know if we want to build trust/faith in God, we have to ask Him for help with it; we have to choose to focus on the right things, not the circumstance. Then one thing is left: we need to learn how to wait, to be still. This means to stop being frantic, but to wait long enough to hear God give direction, and watch Him do what

He wants in the situation. The danger of not doing this is that while you are frantic, you give room for the enemy to manipulate the situation and make you react with your senses instead of the spirit in you, which is under the influence of God's Spirit. This is something we have to learn to do on our own – being still, that is; and it's not impossible since one of the things the Holy Spirit helps with is self-control.

Our similarities with the Israelites don't have to include being eluded of God's best for us, nor missing out on the fulfilment of His promises. We can choose to do things differently and receive all God intends for us. The question is, are you willing to put in the work?

You need to pray, focus on the right things, and be still.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Invite God to help you deepen your bond with Him.*
- ♥ *Pray for willingness to do your part in building your trust and faith in God.*
- ♥ *Pray for courage to let go and let God.*

12

A Different Kind of Bread

“God will bless you with lots of grain to make bread.”

Deuteronomy 28:5, EASY

WHEN the devil tried to get Jesus to speak to stones and make them bread, since He hadn't eaten for forty day and was very hungry, He replied saying *“No! The Bible says that food alone cannot cause people to live. They need to hear every word that God speaks. That is what gives them true life”* (Matthew 4:4). And that's how we came to discover that sustenance doesn't only come from the bread or food we eat to nourish our physical bodies but also from a

different kind of bread, which is the word that God speaks, which nourishes our spirits and gives us life.

There are different ways we can hear God's words, but none quite like the Bible. Apostle Paul says, *"16 Everything that is written in the Bible comes from God's Spirit. It helps us in many ways. The Bible teaches us what is true. It warns us when we are doing wrong things. It shows us what is right. It teaches us how to live good lives. 17 As a result, people who want to serve God can know how to live properly. They will be people who can do all kinds of good things"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

One of the days while I worked as an assistant in a church, the senior pastor walked up to me and told me to look out a particular window that had the view leading outside to a busy main road. I looked out the window; then he asks me for the first thing I saw. I replied I could see the bank across the road. He said the first thing he could see was the eatery nearby.

He asked if I was in need of money. I affirmed his assumption and he told me he was hungry that was why he saw the eatery first. We both laughed and then he proceeded to tell me something I haven't forgotten since then. He said the window that gave a view of all the solutions to our problems is the Bible, God's word; so, it's important that we read the Bible.

He was right, but not completely. If all we needed to do was read the Bible, then reading it would be enough. Once we read it, we would understand and get all the solutions we need. But that's not true. If it was, then how come we have people who are always looking into God's word but don't "see" clearly. How come there are people who are always listening to sermons but don't understand what they hear? And if we do not have insight, how can God's word nourish our spirit, give us life and sustain us? What we need is insight into God's word, and this is something the Holy Spirit helps us with.

Anybody can get a job, get money and buy the bread they need for sustenance; but not everybody can make bread. Anybody can sit with the Bible and read it; in fact, anybody can listen to sermons; but not everybody will get the insights they need into God's word or the insight that gives spiritual nourishment and wisdom to solve life's challenges.

To make this different kind of bread, which means turning the stories and letters we read in the Bible into something beneficial to us, we need insight that the Holy Spirit gives. This is why David prayed saying, *"Open my eyes wide! Then I will see great things in your Law"* (Psalm 119:18).

Does this mean that all we need to do when we sit with the Bible is to pray that God give us insight through the help of the Holy Spirit? No. If we are to assign roles, that will be stating God's role, and just like the opening scripture above says, God will indeed bless us with lots of grain to make (this different kind of) bread, but

we also have a role to play. We must approach the Bible with readiness to learn. This will involve having an open mind and also making the environment conducive (shutting out distractions, circumstantial and environmental). When we have done all this and God's word begins to sustain us, we will agree with this quote on God's Word by *Religious Digest*.

God's Word will never fail.

Generation follows generation, yet it lives.

Nations rise and fall, yet it lives.

Kings, dictators, presidents come and go, yet it lives.

Hated, despised, cursed, yet it lives.

Doubted, suspected, criticized, yet it lives.

Condemned by atheists, yet it lives.

Scoffed at by scorners, yet it lives.

Exaggerated by fanatics, yet it lives.

Misconstrued and misstated, yet it lives.

Ranted and raved about, yet it lives.

Yet it lives, as lamp to our feet.
Yet it lives, as light to our path.
Yet it lives, as the gate to heaven.
Yet it lives, as standard for childhood.
Yet it lives, as guide for youth.
Yet it lives, as inspiration for maturity.
Yet it lives, as comfort for the aged.
Yet it lives, as food for the hungry.
Yet it lives, as water for the thirsty.
Yet it lives, as rest for the weary.
Yet it lives, as light for the heathen.
Yet it lives, as salvation for the sinner.
Yet it lives, as grace for the Christian.
To know it is to love it.
To love it is to accept it.
To accept it means life eternal.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to help you see the great things in His word.*
- ♥ *Ask for His strength to endure the race of life and His secrets for winning it.*
- ♥ *Pray for wisdom to keep referring to God's word and obeying it.*

13

Purpose-driven Life

“I have chosen you to bring righteousness. I will take hold of your hand, and I will keep you safe. Through you, I will make a covenant with my people, and you will bring light to the other nations.”

Isaiah 42:6, EASY

HAVE you ever wondered about your life, about how much longer you get to live or when your life on earth will be over? Those are questions we are likely never to get answers to, even if we ask the Lord. All we need to know is that life is short and we need to make the most of it. Now here's a question you

can ask the Lord and be sure to get answers to.
“What is my purpose on earth?”

You see, everything God does is purposeful, even His most complex creation – man. God created each human to fulfil different purposes. Before each and every one of us was born, God knew us first; and while He formed us, He already decided on what we must be and do in the world (Jeremiah 1:5).

When angel Gabriel informed Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son, he also told him the purpose for the life of the child. *“He will teach many people in Israel. Then they will turn their lives back to the Lord their God and they will obey God again”* (Luke 1:16). When the angel visited Mary and told her she would conceive a Son, he gave her a glimpse into the purpose of the Child’s life. *“He will be great. People will call him the Son of the powerful God who is over all. The Lord God will make him king. He will rule as his ancestor King David ruled. He will rule*

over the family of Jacob for all time. He will be king for all time, without end” (Luke 1:32-33). Even the opening verse reveals God’s purpose for the Messiah, Jesus to God’s people before Mary even conceived. John’s and Jesus’ purposes were already decided before they were born. Their earthly parents were informed, and we can assume they in turn passed the message to each child. We know this to be true because the man John and Jesus walked in their purposes.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, speaking on purpose says, *“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”* Life is short; so, it should be lived meaningfully and productively, and discovering the purpose of our lives will make us useful, not just to the world but to our Creator, God. Not everyone’s purpose is announced during their birth as John’s, Jesus’ and Samson’s (Judges 13:2-5).

Some receive divine visitation from the Lord, like Jeremiah did (Jeremiah 1:1-5), and others like the twelve apostles, including Paul, had to follow Jesus to discover their purposes in life (Matthew 4:19; Acts 9).

The beautiful thing about purpose is not only that it makes you useful, but also tells you about yourself. Rich Villodas points at John the Baptist for example, he says “because John had discovered purpose, he knew who he wasn’t (i.e., the Messiah, Elijah or some other prophet); and he knew who he was (a voice of somebody shouting in the wilderness – John 1:23)”. Another thing about purpose is that it streamlines what you do, making the time you have optimized and maximized!

In Paul’s case, he says of himself: *“My Christian friends, I do not think that I have reached that place yet. But this is what I do: I do not think about past things that have already happened. Instead, I try hard to reach the things that are in front of me. I am like a*

runner who wants to reach the end of the race. I run straight towards that place, so that I can win God's gift. Because I belong to Christ Jesus, God has called me to live with him in heaven. That is God's gift to me at the end of the race" (Philippians 3:13-14). Only one thing mattered to Paul, and that's what he expended his energy and time doing, serving God with all his heart.

It's sad but true that our churches are full of people who love God but don't know their purpose. We do God, the world and ourselves a disservice when we are not aware of our purpose or walking in it. We must take initiative to lead a purpose-driven life and it starts with us prayerfully seeking to know; after all, God has already said we should call to Him and He will answer us and tell us great and secret things that we do not yet know (Jeremiah 33:3). After prayer, we must be open to receive God's leading.

It is however important to note that in our quest to discover our God-given purpose, we

might not receive direct pointers. It might come to us as we continue to follow Jesus, which is God's will. Bishop T.D Jakes shares another way we might find the answers we seek in order to live a purpose-driven life. He says, *"If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose."*

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Thank God for your life.*
- ♥ *Ask God to help you give priority to what truly matters.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to help you set new goals around your purpose, and to follow through faithfully.*

14

Always and Forever

“I will always trust the Lord to be with me. He is very near to me, so I will not be upset.”

Psalm 16:8, EASY

JOHN Piper says, *“My feelings are not God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God’s word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes – many times – my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens – and it happens every day in some measure – I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but*

rather, I plead with God: Purify my perceptions of Your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.”

In your relationship with God, are there some truths you’ve decided to believe at all times and on all occasions? If the answer is no, then it means you aren’t prepared for hard times. And, sadly, even if you aren’t ready for hard times, it cannot always be good times. Are John Piper’s words so relevant? They are relevant because during hard times, our feelings tend to override the truth and we stop believing certain things. It’s just like Jesus said in the story about the farmer who planted seeds, specifically the seeds that fell on soil with rocks in it. Let’s read it in Matthew 13:20-21. *“Other seeds fell on soil with rocks in it. This is like some people who hear God’s message. These people are happy to believe it for a time. But they are like plants that have not grown down well into the soil. So they only believe for a short time. They may have problems. Or other*

people may do bad things to them, because they obey God's message. When that happens, these people soon stop believing.”

God’s word is truth, and remains unchanging in and out of season. What has a tendency to change is our attitude towards the truth. This is why it’s best to prepare ahead for hard times by deciding early the truths you’d believe at all times and on all occasions. David, for instance, concluded that (for as long as he observed God’s law) he could always trust the Lord to be with him, and believed that the Lord was very near to him. This I love so much and would use too, because, in hard times we have a tendency to feel that God is far away and that we’re alone, all of which are lies.

Do you get it now?

Let’s search the Scriptures for truths that we can decide to believe all the time and on all occasions. The first one should be that you are loved always and forever. The Holy Scriptures is full of verses that tell us this truth. But an

absolute favourite for me is Jeremiah 31:3. *“At that time long ago, the Lord showed himself to his people. He said, ‘I have always loved you and I always will love you. My faithful love for you continues for ever.’”*

Even though in its original context the message was to the people of Israel, now it has become a message to Christians everywhere. You can choose to believe that you are loved and God is not unfeeling or uncaring towards you, even when you're praying for healing and it doesn't happen as fast as you would like it, or when you're praying for a new job and all you're getting are rejection mails, or when you're praying for a spouse to act right but he or she is continuing to act left etc.

The second one should be that God has a purpose for your life. There's a reason for our lives, a purpose that will be revealed if only we spent time seeking it. Whenever you get in that phase of wondering what the meaning to life is, remember your life isn't pointless. Here's a

scripture that will help: Ephesians 2:10. *“It is God who has worked in us to make us what we are. He has given us a new life because we are united with Christ Jesus. He saved us so that now we can do good things in our lives. Those are good things that he has already prepared for us to do.”*

The third one should be that God will use every of your experiences to work out something good! In Romans 8:28 Apostle Paul says, *“We know that God works to help those people who love him. He uses everything that happens to them to bring something good. He does this for those people that he has chosen to serve him.”* In other words, there is purpose in our pain, a message in our mess, and our waiting will be used to build character and inner strength in us as well as equip us to strengthen others. Even if what we go through might not make any sense to us initially, it does to God; and in the end it will be for our good and for the good of others.

The fourth should be that God is still in control. He is in control when we see Him divinely intervening in our situation, and He is still in control when He is quiet and we can't seem to figure out how or when He will intervene. See Isaiah 55:8. *"The Lord says, 'Remember! My thoughts are not the same as your thoughts. The way that you do things is not the same as the way that I do things.'"*

The fifth should be that God remains all powerful! This particular one is very important. Our real enemy, Satan, likes to make us think he is all-powerful; but how can a creature be greater and more powerful than his Creator? No matter what Satan throws at you, even if they are in quick succession, remember that he has God who is greater authority and to Whom he must answer to! And he can't defeat God! There's no question about that. My favourite verse of Scripture for this is when the Devil mentions God as Job's *protective hedge*. That's in Job 1:10a. *"You do not let any bad things*

happen to him. You keep him, his family and all his things safe.”

That's five, try search the Scriptures yourself and add more. These verses and truths will serve as anchor for your soul when hard times come.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *As you meditate on these words, ask that the Holy Spirit bring them always to your remembrance.*
- ♥ *Also pray that as the word of God is brought to your remembrance, your anxiety will be replaced with the peace that only God gives and your hope will be revived.*
- ♥ *Pray for interest in God's word so you can read more and know God more.*

15 | Our Guide for a new Life

*“The Lord is a guide for those who serve him.
He teaches them to obey his covenant.”*

Psalm 25:14, EASY

BEING a part of God’s family means we have chosen to believe in Christ. Now, not only did Christ die on the cross on our behalf, but we also have died there with Him. The life we live now in our body is a new one. And because it’s a new life, we are going to be walking paths we do not know, paths like obedience to God and for which we need a guide.

In our lives before Christ, we rebelled against God by living in sin, and we were comfortable in

the darkness that we were in; but now God has called us into His marvellous light, and says as we walk along paths that are new to us, *“I will change the dark places that are in front of them, so that they become places with light. And I will cause the rough ground to become flat. Those are the things that I will do for them. I will not leave my people alone”* (Isaiah 42:16b). What this means is that He, God, will be our Guide. He will teach us obedience.

Obedience plays a huge role in our relationship with God. It can make or mar it. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, not only were they sent out of the garden as punishment, their fellowship with God was broken. Thankfully, Jesus has borne all the punishment of our past sins and given us back the opportunity of having a relationship with God. Believing in Christ is the first step, but in order to strengthen our relationship with God, we must be obedient to Him. However, we

don't become obedient by wishing it upon ourselves, we learn obedience.

God teaches obedience in two ways: by Knowledge and by Experience. By Knowledge: God has made His commands clear and accessible to all of us through the Bible; this way we know how to obey and follow Him. It then becomes our responsibility to read the Bible, study it, meditate on it day and night and even memorize it. But knowing God's expectations doesn't mean we will always do what God expects of us. We have Adam and Eve as examples of this, which is why God also teaches us obedience through experience.

By Experience: Jonah was given the chance to obey God by going to Nineveh and telling the people of their sins and God's plan to punish them; but instead, he decided to run away to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, found a ship ready to sail to Tarshish, paid for the voyage and got into the ship. But he couldn't get far away from the Lord. A big storm happened, which

resulted in people throwing into the sea all the material things the ship carried. Jonah knew he was the reason for the boisterous waves and fierce wind the mariners were facing, and told them to throw him overboard perhaps that was another attempt of his to get out of obeying God. But instead of letting him die, God sent a great fish to swallow up Jonah for three days and three nights.

There in the belly of the fish, which surely would have been uncomfortable experience, Jonah had enough time to reflect and repent. When God searched Jonah's heart and was sure he was ready to obey, He told the great fish to spit Jonah out of its stomach. The fish dropped Jonah off on the seashore. Funny how the fish proved more obedient than Jonah! Anyways, the moment God spoke to Jonah the second time, he started off straight for Nineveh, obeying God's orders to the letter (Jonah 1-3).

Before you scoff at Jonah, you have to admit that you've been in his shoes more times than

you can count when you became a believer and had access to all of God's commands. Did you wilfully obey God's commands even in the seemingly insignificant areas of your life? Did you obey Him in all situations? If you are being honest then the answer will be no. And that's because most of us learnt obedience by experience. Even as we mature in Christ, we still have our moments when we fail to obey God and, in the end, God allows us get into uncomfortable situations so we can learn to do what is right moving forward.

Some might think God's way of teaching us obedience through experiences is a bit harsh; but whoever heard of a son/daughter who was never corrected? We are all God's children and He reserves the right to teach us not to do wrong things even if the way He chooses is to allow us go through uncomfortable/painful situations. In the end, it serves a good purpose (Please read Hebrews 12:8-11). Wouldn't it be easier for God to make us all obedient to Him? It would, but

God won't do that. He rather has given us free will because His desire is not to control us. One way we can stay motivated about obeying God is by knowing that every of His command is for our own good.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray for grace to submit to God's training.*
- ♥ *Ask that He help you grow through knowledge and all your life's experiences.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to help you mature and be stronger in faith.*

16 | Loved Always

*“You gave me life and you loved me faithfully.
You took care of me and you kept me safe.”*

Job 10:12, EASY

D ID you know that you are ever in the thoughts of the One who created you and gave you life? He is thinking of you right now! And you know what else? He loves you very much. He has always loved you and will always love you. I made up my mind very early to believe these truths about God. You should too, because if Satan can get you to doubt God's love for you then he will succeed at separating you from God, slowly but surely. We don't want Satan to win against us now, do we?

Satan is very clever and so wily. He does not speak outright to us like he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden, but creates doubt in our hearts as he attempts to convince us that we are unloved through the unpleasant situations we face. Apostle Paul wasn't ignorant of the devices of the enemy; that's why when writing to the Christians in Rome, in extension believers everywhere, he states clearly that he believes God loves us very much. He says, *"Christ will always continue to love us. Nothing can stop that! We may have troubles. Things may make us sad or afraid. People may do bad things to us. We may have no food or no clothes. There may be great danger. People may even try to kill us. But none of these things can stop Christ from loving us"* (Romans 8:35).

The frequently asked question that follows Paul's declaration is, if God loves us so much why do His children face such unpleasant situations, why doesn't He just stop them from happening? It is important that we know that it

is because we are God's children that we face so many unpleasant situations. We have chosen to be friends with God and that means enmity with the world. The devil who is the enemy of our soul will do anything and everything, even if it means manipulating situations, to try get us to "curse God and die" or backslide (Job 1:8-11; 2:9).

While it is true that God has the power to stop us from going through unpleasant situations, He doesn't stop it all of the time; instead, He allows it because troubles can help us. God loves us too much to let us remain baby Christians; so, He allows us to face troubles because they help us mature; they help us learn to really trust Him; in that way our faith is strengthened (James 1:1-4; Romans 8:28).

Contrary to the world's view, when God's children go through troubles, we are not left alone to deal with them. Jesus is sitting at God's right side in heaven praying to God on our behalf (Romans 8:34), just like He prayed for

Peter before Peter's faith was tried (Luke 22:32). The good that Jesus' prayer does for us is that it helps us continue to believe in God; that He is always there to help us, that He will not let things be too difficult for us; that He will help us stand against temptations by being strong in the spirit, and that He will help us see the way out of our troubles (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Let's read the personal account of Paul on all his troubles. *"At five different times, the Jewish leaders punished me with whips. Each time they hit me 39 times. Three times the Romans punished me with sticks. People threw stones at me to kill me once. Three times I have been on ships that broke in the sea. Once I was in the sea for a night and a day. I have travelled on many journeys. I have been in danger from rivers and also from robbers. I have been in danger from my own people and also from Gentiles. I have been in danger in cities and also in the wilderness. I have been in*

danger on the sea. I have been in danger from false believers. I have worked very hard, and I have been in pain. Many times I have not slept. I have often been hungry and thirsty. Many times I have had no food. I have often been cold and without enough clothes. All these troubles have happened to me..." (2 Corinthians 11:24-28a). How else do you think he could get through all of those troubles and still keep believing, if he didn't have some help from Jesus?

In this life we may never understand the full dimension of God's love; but we can learn its characteristics. God's love makes Him patient with us; it makes Him kind to us. It's the reason He is jealous over us. It's the reason He took on the form of a slave and walked the earth in order to die for our sins. It makes Him polite in His dealings with us, and makes Him want to please us as well. It stops Him from quickly becoming angry with us despite the wrong things we do. He doesn't keep our wrong doings in His

thoughts. It's the reason He isn't happy when bad things happen to us, and He is able to rejoice with us when good things happen to us. It's the reason He accepts us with our flaws and shares our problems with us. It's why He believes in us, and it's why His hopes and plans for us are best! (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7).

Speaking on God's Love, Max Lucado says, "God's love supply is never empty." We can choose to believe this because it is true; and we can take it a step further by drawing from God's limitless love supply for our everyday living.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray that when crisis hit, you won't ever forget that God loves you.*
- ♥ *Ask that the Holy Spirit help you remember that God allows unpleasant circumstances for your own good.*
- ♥ *Ask for wisdom to grow through your troubles.*

17

Give Him Your Best

“Show that you respect the Lord in the way that you use your money. Offer the first part of the harvest from your farm to him. If you do that, you will store more food than you need for yourself. You will have more wine than you can drink.”

Proverb 3:9-10, EASY

MY mum told me that when I was a little girl, I was stingy. I didn't like to share what I had with anyone, not even with the person who bought and gave me what I had. She was referring to herself, and cited several examples to me. But the one that stuck, because I remember it, was when she buys me Chupa chups, which was my favourite

lollipop. She would give it to me and then ask me to share it with her. I never could understand why, and so would simply ask her to go back to the store and buy one for herself.

The other night when my mum was praying, she suddenly started thanking God for my life, especially my growth since I became a believer. She mentioned how I was no longer stingy, how I had somehow learned to share, and how she believed my bond with God had something to do with it. I couldn't help but smile. I could blame my stinginess on the fact that I was an only child; but it's more informed of me to accept that it was a flaw that God helped me to drop.

Cain wasn't an only child, but had a hard time giving his best. There was a simple yet unspoken rule to obey: to the one who has given you, you must give back, and when giving, you should give the best. Cain wanted to obey this rule but only did so partially; he brought some of the fruits he had grown as gift to God but didn't give the best! On the other hand, his

brother Abel also wanted to give God a gift, and brought some of the first lambs of his sheep, and fat from the best of his lambs, all of which he offered. God wasn't happy with Cain and his gift, but was pleased with Abel and his gift (Genesis 4:3-5).

Abel knew how to please God; he prioritized Him in his giving by giving the first and the best! And there would have been a bountiful reward for his obedience if he hadn't been murdered by his brother. How was Abel able to give God the best? Perhaps he caught an early revelation of who God was, and what power He had; so, his giving was done in complete faith, not as mere rituals (Hebrews 11:4, 6). Cain was better than the younger me because while I would have held back what I had; he gave from what he had even though it was unacceptable. This had me thinking: how come many Christians, like the younger me, have an issue with giving back to God and withhold gifts from Him? How come many Christians, like Cain, give to God less than

their best? Our excuses will vary, but the root cause is the same: we don't really know God, neither do we know the power He has.

We are quick to forget that God is the one who has given us everything we have; every good gift comes to us from Him (James 1:17). So, if He asks us to give the best of what we have, it's because He is capable of giving it back to us and even giving much more than we can ever ask or even think about (Ephesians 3:20). Our devotion to God cannot be complete if we can't release our grip on the things, He has given to us when He asks us to. Being stingy is a flaw that God has to help us to drop; and parting with our best is something God's grace is available to help us to do.

There are, however, things we need to know about giving our best to God. Sometimes all we have are little things to offer. God knows exactly what you have, so don't be ashamed; go ahead and offer it. He won't think less of you and your offering. The little that you are offering to God

becomes much when you've offered it. That's how much God values sincerity in our giving, and it also guarantees that even the little we give will attract multiplication, which is the reward due. Little things always matter to God. He never discriminates, and is not partial towards large giving. He judges both large and small giving the same way. All of this we can learn from the story of the widow who gave God her best! (See Luke 21:1-4.)

Now that we know all this, can we accept that we withheld from God and failed to give Him the best due Him because we were child-like in our thinking? We lacked understanding. But now, going forward, things should change and be better. We should mature and stop being children. As you consider whether or not to begin to give God your best, read this poem titled *Surrender* by Martha Snell Nicholson:

Let me hold lightly
Things of this earth;
Transient treasures,
What are they worth?

Moths can corrupt them,
Rust can decay
All their bright beauty
Fades in a day.

Let me hold lightly
Temporal things,
I who am deathless,
I, who wear wings!

Let me hold fast, Lord,
Things of the skies,
Quicken my vision,
Open my eyes!

Show me Thy riches,
Glory and grace,
Boundless as time is,
Endless as space!

Let me hold lightly
Things that are mine.
Lord, Thou hast given me
All that is Thine!

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to open your eyes to see that all you have is from Him.*
- ♥ *Pray that He help your mind to accept this truth.*
- ♥ *Pray that He give you grace and a willingness to give Him nothing less than the best.*

18

Hidden in Plain Sight

“The Lord your God will go in front of you. He will fight to help you, as he fought for you in Egypt. You saw him do it.”

Deuteronomy 1:30, EASY

FOR the Israelites who left Egypt, they couldn't be relieved of their fears until they saw God act with their physical eyes. But for us, we're told to believe before we see, to walk by faith and not by sight, to believe that God is on our side, and that He goes in front of us to lead us, fight for us and help us just like He had done in time past. All we're told to believe is true because God is indeed right in front of us, beside us, around us, hidden in plain sight, hid from our physical eyes. Jesus, when

speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, told her: God is Spirit and people who worship Him must worship from their spirits in a true way (John 4:24).

The worship Jesus was talking about isn't the songs we sing when the choir leader says it's time for "worship". He meant a relationship with God. We who will walk with God will do so not relying on our physical senses but our faith in God. Without seeing God, we believe He exists. When we pray, we must believe that He hears us and trust that He will handle our concerns. When we read the Bible, we believe that the words there are inspired by His Spirit and allow it to guide our Christian life; and when in any trouble, we believe His promise to help us.

Merely knowing all these, however, still doesn't necessarily make us people full of faith all the time with no doubts. Sometimes, doubt about God seeps in; we doubt His presence or ability to protect or provide what we desire.

Take Thomas for example. He had been with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry; but when Jesus died and had been buried for three days, the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord,” implying the Lord had resurrected as He said He would. Thomas had a hard time believing that. He said, *“I will never believe that He is alive again unless I myself see him. I want to see the marks of the nails in his hands. I want to touch where the nails were with my finger. I want to put my hand into his side where the spear went in. If I cannot do that, I will not believe!”* (John 20:25). His unbelief was a stumbling block for him.

Eight days later when Thomas was with the other disciples behind closed doors, Jesus appeared to them again, this time to help Thomas believe, though by using his physical senses. This time, he saw with his eyes and touched with his hands. But that encounter didn’t end without Jesus urging us to believe

even without seeing, because this makes God really happy.

I also remember Elisha's servant who was greatly panicked because he saw a troop of Syrian army with horses and chariots all-round the city to take his master. But Elisha was calm because of what he believed. Then, to ease his servant's fears, Elisha asked the Lord to open the eyes of the servant. God did just that. The servant saw angels on chariots of fire all about, concluding there was indeed no need to fear (2 Kings 6:16-17).

Many times, we are like Thomas or Elisha's servant, struggling with doubt and needing proof. Jesus wasn't angry with Thomas neither did God refuse to open the eyes of Elisha's servant; just like He isn't angry with us when we struggle with doubt. If we let Him, He can help us believe, just like He helped Thomas and Elisha's servant. We have to continue to walk by faith and deal with doubt whenever it arises, instead of letting it build. Failure to deal with

doubt will lead to discouragement, heartache, depression, a disconnection from God and spiritual, even physical death.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Invite God to help you deepen your emotional bond with Him.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to rid you of doubt.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to strengthen your faith.*

19 | Exceedingly Fruitful

“I will give you many descendants. These will make many nations of people. Some of your descendants will become kings.”

Genesis 17:6, EASY

B EING fruitful, to Abraham, meant having a child with Sarah, his beloved wife. God had promised him that, but took it a step further and said He would make him exceedingly fruitful by giving him posterity of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and many descendants that would make many nations; some of those descendants becoming kings. The promise however came with the

condition of obedience to the command of circumcision of every male in his family.

Being fruitful, for believers in Christ, should mean living in a different way from sinners in the world. It means loving people, being happy and at peace despite adverse conditions we find ourselves. It means we are to be patient, kind and good. It also means we can be trusted to always do what is right, that we respect other people and we rule ourselves properly (Galatians 5:22-26). And as we continue to live differently from the world and share the good news with people, the people who are touched by our lifestyle and witness and testimony, and turn from sin unto Christ, are also part of what constitute our fruitfulness. Jesus says we can be fruitful and exceedingly fruitful on one condition: that we continue to live in Him, and remain in Him (John 15:4, 8). He says if we are separated from Him, we can't produce a thing.

As those who have the same mind-set as Jesus, being fruitful and exceedingly fruitful should

not be limited to physical and material things, it should have a more spiritual meaning. That mind-set should drive us to fulfil the condition in order to obtain the promise. How then do we live in Him and remain in Him? How do we have an intimate and organic relationship with Him?

A study of the lives of Peter, James and John, the inner-circle disciples of Jesus, gives us a glimpse of what we are to do. Peter, James and John went from meeting Jesus to becoming His disciple; being His disciples meant they spent a lot of time with Him, learning from Him and unlearning the ways of the world. It also meant trying to live according to His teachings. Then they went from being His disciples who followed Him about to being Apostles preaching the good news and leading many to Christ, even taking on roles of leadership in the early Church. All the while still living in the way Christ taught them.

Wow!

What growth!

These men were fruitful and exceedingly fruitful! We can learn a thing or two from them. We too must strive to be disciples of Christ, spending time with Him by studying His word and frequently communing with Him in prayer. We're to let the Scriptures dwell in us richly, be our guide for unlearning the ways of the world, and living differently, not just reading the word but putting it to practice, daily living according to Jesus' teachings. May the Holy Spirit help us with such growth!

The disciples went from being followers of Jesus to receiving the great commission and becoming preachers of the good news. We too must share in the responsibilities of the great commission. When we do all of this, we really show we're living in Christ and remaining in Him, being fruitful and exceedingly fruitful.

Now that we've looked into God's word and discovered the meaning of being fruitful and exceedingly fruitful, the next step is to examine our lives to identify what's stopping us from

achieving it, and doing away with the old life of unfruitfulness. Every child of God is expected to be fruitful and exceedingly fruitful; those who are will eventually hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you will spend eternity with Me.” It will be revealed that those who aren’t were only professing to be Christians but do not really know the Lord nor were transformed by Him. Sadly, they will be cut off, separated from Him and doomed in eternity (John 15:2). May this not be you nor me!

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Invite the Holy Spirit to come into your life and transform you.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to help you grow in the knowledge of Christ and His ways.*
- ♥ *Pray that God give you grace to live a productive and effective Christian life.*

20

You're
Winning This

“When your enemies attack you, the Lord will knock them down. They will come from one direction to attack you, but they will run away from you in seven different directions!”

Deuteronomy 28:7, EASY

YOU'RE winning this thing called life because God will help you win. Take a minute to digest that information. I don't know about you, but I for one can't do life alone. I can't fight my battles alone. I get overwhelmed easily, and I'm always in need of help; and it's so reassuring to know that I will win this thing called life because God will help me win.

I love the words of the verse above; in one sentence it means the outcome of the battles God's people face in life has been decided, and it's in our favour. Provided we are willing to live in obedience to God Hallelujah! The victory has been given to us already by God. Our real enemy, which is Satan, is the one constantly bringing up different battles against us, battles that are his attempts at separating us from God and His purpose for our lives; but his end has been decided a long time ago.

I'm constantly thinking of all Apostle Paul went through. He was in prison more often than any other disciple. People hit him with whips many times and nearly died many times. At five different times, the Jewish leaders punished him with whips, and each time they hit him thirty-nine times; three times he was punished by Romans with sticks, people threw stones at him to kill him once, three times he was on ships that broke in the sea, once he was in the sea for

a night and a day, he travelled on many journeys and was in danger from rivers and from robbers.

He was in danger from his own people the Jews, and from Gentiles too. He was in danger in cities and in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, and in danger of false believers. He worked very hard and was in pain; many times, he wouldn't sleep, many times, he would be hungry and thirsty, many times, he had no food. There were times he was cold and without enough clothes. All these troubles happened to him, yet he won because God helped him (2 Corinthians 11:23-28a; 12:9).

How do we know he won?

Let's read 2 Timothy 4:7-8a. These are the very words of Apostle Paul himself at the close of his life. *"I have worked to serve Christ well. I have finished everything that God wanted me to do. I am like a runner who has run to the end of the race. I have continued to believe God's true message. So now a gift is waiting for me. The Lord will make me completely right with*

him...” He knew what God’s purpose for his life was and made it his only goal. The devil knew this too and stirred up all sorts of battles against him; but still, Paul won!

God is willing to help us win; but we need to be in the right position to receive this help. Apostle Paul shares this secret with us in 2 Corinthians 12:9a, *“But he said to me, “I will be kind to you and I will help you. That will be enough for you. When you are weak, I will show that I am completely powerful to help you.”* Did you see that? Do you get it? God revealed the secret to Paul. He said to him, *“When you are weak, I will show that I am completely powerful to help you.”*

The thing is, God always knows when we are weak, spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally; but are we that self-aware? A lot of people don’t know when they are weak. For others, they know they are weak but don’t know how to ask for help. Sadly, if we can’t admit when we are weak, and not humble enough to

ask God for help, He won't be able to help us win. Apostle Paul understood perfectly the message I am trying to pass across. He understood it so well that he was happy and proud about his weaknesses! He didn't have to pretend to be strong all the time anymore or be without help. Whenever he was faced with battles disguised as troubles, he simply rejoiced because he knew he would win as soon as he admitted he couldn't do it in his own power, and that he needed help. God then intervenes and makes him strong enough; and he wins!

You weren't created to face life alone; you weren't created to fight your spiritual battles alone either. Everything was designed in a way for you to do it with your life-Partner – God! Don't you see it in the verse above? Read between the lines. God is saying to you, stop trying to be strong all the time. You won't win that way. You can't win all by yourself. God is the One that will help you win! Let Him help you win.

Someone would say, “If I were God, I would see what my children need and then just do it with or without their consent.” Good, you’re not God; neither am I. The ways of God are totally different. Consent is important to God; it symbolizes agreement. In the Scriptures, you hear Jesus say to the disciples, “Come follow me” instead of “You must follow me”. You hear Him say to a person in need of His help, “What would you have Me do?” He wants to do life with us but wants us to want it as much as He does. He wants to help us but wants us to ask Him for help, because, it’s just better that way.

So, what’s it going to be? Will you be joining me on the winners’ side? If yes, then say the prayers below in faith!

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ♥ *Tell God all about your challenges.*
- ♥ *Invite Him to do life with you.*
- ♥ *Admit to Him that you are weak and in need of His help, ask for grace to let Him help you in His way.*

21 | Starting Over

“If someone cuts down a tree, the tree may not die. New branches may grow from it.”

Job 14:7, EASY

WHERE I live, there's a tree whose branches are cut off every so often, deliberately, by the owner; but with rain, sunshine and patience, new branches grow to replace the old. And if you hadn't seen the tree when the branches were cut off, you wouldn't have known it ever was bare. For as long as the tree isn't uprooted from the ground, when the branches are cut off new branches grow to replace the old. Such is the miracle of nature. We are humans, not trees; yet, there is significance in the verse above, a

lesson that can be applied to our lives. But first, let's learn a little about Job, the person who spoke the words and what condition he was when he spoke.

Job was a very good man who was fair to everybody and did the right thing. He was afraid to make God angry and so, refused to do wrong things. Job had a wife, seven sons and three daughters. He had 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels. He had 500 pairs of oxen and 500 donkeys. And he had many servants. There was no one in the East who was richer than Job. God was pleased with him and helped him, keeping him and all that were his safe. Everything seemed to be going well; but unknown to Job, Satan had argued that Job was good and fair and served God because of what he benefited from the relationship. God knew that the accusation was false yet He allowed Satan to interfere with Job's family and resources, but restrained him from touching Job's life.

And so, in one day, Job lost almost everything! He was crushed by grief and anguish; and just as we sometimes do, he tried to find the reasons why he was in that situation, hoping that when he knew the reasons, he could find the solution. But he couldn't find any good enough reasons. Initially his faith in God was still strong, but as time went on, his hope waned. One day, while at his lowest point emotionally, he compared himself to a tree and concluded that a tree had more hope than he did. His only hope was now reserved for eternity, when he would be with God. At that point, Job allowed his feelings to override the truth. The truth was that he was more valuable to God than all the trees in the forest, and for as long as he remained alive – which God made sure of anyway – there was hope for him to recover all he had lost, even if he would have to start over (See Job 1-2 & Ecclesiastes 9:4).

When the time of testing was over, the Lord made Job richer than he was. Instead of 7,000

sheep, he had 14,000; instead of 3,000 camels he had 6,000; instead of 500 pairs of oxen he had 1,000, and instead of 500 donkeys, he had 1,000. Again, he had seven sons and three daughters to replace the ones he lost. God made sure he lived long enough to enjoy the restoration and see his grandchildren. And when he died, he did so as a very old man (Job 42:11-17).

While we may rejoice at the happy ending Job had, we mustn't overlook the pains he must have endured while starting afresh. He went from having farm animals and farmhands to having next to none. When he gets the new ones, a lot of time and effort would go into raising them and training them. All his ten new children wouldn't have come at the same time, and even if he had ten wives to give him ten children within nine months, it would take time for the children to grow and mature, a phase he had already passed with his older children who died.

There's no way he could have gotten through all of that in his own strength.

Sometimes in life, we find ourselves in situations that require us to start over; and like Job it might not be as a result of something we did, but of circumstances beyond our control. As someone who has had to start over several times in different areas of my life, I know those times can be scary and tend to leave us overwhelmed with emotions. But we must never let our feelings override the truth. The truth is that starting over is a situation God allows for a purpose. We may not be given detailed explanations, but we can be sure that it's an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord.

Starting over is one of those experiences we aren't expected to go through alone. God is with us at the start of something, during the course, and right till the very end. We can draw from His limitless resources for our emotional needs (Philippians 4:13). Starting over signifies hope! Even though Job thought a tree had more hope

than him, he later realized he was far from the truth. As long as we remain alive, there's hope for us; there's hope that in our starting over, God will intervene and turn things in our favour. Truth is, starting over can mean better experiences; and Job's life is proof of that. If God is calling you to start over, it means He has a plan to prosper you beyond your imaginations and prayers!

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Thank God because He is compassionate and understanding.*
- ♥ *Ask Him for grace to start over when He asks you to.*
- ♥ *Ask for grace to remain hopeful in His intervention.*

22 | Surrender

“Teach me to do what pleases you, because you are my God. Let your kind Spirit lead me, so I can walk in a safe place.”

Psalm 143:10, EASY

CHARLES U. Wagner says, “Surrender is abandonment of self. It is a total yielding, it is relinquishing my rights, it is giving God *carte blanche*. It is holding everything lightly, and being occupied with Christ.”

The psalmist’s prayer above can be summarized thus: “Teach me!” and “lead me!” And those are the cries from a heart that’s surrendered to God’s will, a heart open and ready for a long-term relationship with God.

You know what's the opposite of a surrendered heart? It's an unyielding heart. An unyielding heart wouldn't want to be taught to do what pleases God because he/she is too busy pleasing self and occupied with self. Such persons wouldn't want to be led by God's Spirit because they believe they don't need such help.

To be unyielding is to be unwilling to change, to refuse to be submissive. An unyielding heart is characterized by lack of softness or flexibility; and at the root of every unyielding heart is pride. Pride in one's self, pride in one's knowledge and abilities, and pride in one's possession and accomplishments. Let's take a look at the life of King Nebuchadnezzar who ruled over Babylon part of the time of Daniel.

One day Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that made him afraid, it troubled him so much he wanted to know what the dream meant. Daniel helped him understand his dream. In Daniel's interpretation of the dream, we learn that the king was soon to find out the consequence of an

unyielding heart. One would think the information would convict the king, fill him with a sense of urgency to repent, and his heart's cry would be, "Teach me what to do.... Lead me in the way to go!" But he said none of those; instead, he was satisfied with knowing only what the dream meant. Daniel however proceeds to give the king unsolicited advice to avert God's judgment. But, as we are to later find out, the king doesn't heed any advice. He was proud!

While walking on the flat roof of his palace one day, Nebuchadnezzar took in the panoramic scenery before him, how great Babylon had become, and took pride in himself, his power and his accomplishments. But while he was boasting to himself, he suddenly heard a voice meting out the consequences of his folly. After that he lived like an animal for seven years. When the years were complete, he regained his senses and from the words he spoke afterwards, we see that the element of pride was gone. Once

pride was eliminated from his life, acknowledging God's sovereignty and surrendering to Him became easy for the king (Read Daniel 4).

We don't have to go through such extreme circumstances before we surrender to God. Solomon says in Proverb 6:16-19, *"There are six things that the Lord hates, or even seven things: Eyes that show how proud a person is. A mouth that speaks lies. Hands that kill people who have done nothing wrong. A mind that chooses to do wicked things. Feet that hurry to do evil things. A person who tells lies in court. A person who causes trouble in a family."*

I'm not surprised that at the top of that list is pride, because God's desire is to have an intimate long-term relationship with us; and pride stands in the way of that happening. For instance, God requires us to acknowledge Him as the highest authority in our lives, and to surrender/submit to Him. But pride would

make us reject His authority. When in a relationship with God, we aren't allowed to have an exaggerated view of ourselves and our abilities. Pride makes us do just that. While God requires us to be wholly dependent on Him as our Teacher, Guide, Provider, Security etc, pride tells us we don't need God and are self-sufficient. Do you get the picture now? Pride is a tool the enemy devices to stop us from being surrendered to God and being in relationship with Him.

Now that we know what pride does and the outcome of an unyielding heart, it would be wise to humble ourselves and be surrendered to God. Instead of ignoring His existence, we're to acknowledge His existence and sovereignty. Instead of taking all the credit for our successes, we're to acknowledge God's part in all we achieve. Instead of believing that we're self-sufficient, we admit that we need God's help. Instead of placing our trust in our wealth, resources and possessions, we place our trust in

Him. Instead of being occupied with ourselves and our plans, we seek to know God's will; and instead of being a know-it-all, we open our hearts to receive His advice, teachings, leading and correction. You and God will not walk together unless you've agreed to His terms. Will you agree with Him?

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray that Jesus should supply you with power and strength to be fully surrendered to God.*
- ♥ *Pray that your eyes be opened to see God as He really is.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to be wholly devoted to Him and not occupied with self.*

23 | Our Guide and Guard

“He will take care of you, so that you do not fall. The one who keeps you safe will not sleep.”

Psalm 121:3, EASY

I like the idea of someone ensuring that I know which way to go and how to avoid pitfalls. I like the idea of being safe and someone ensuring my safety. But what I love most is that this someone is God. Who else knows the path of life and can point us in the right direction? Who can establish us and make sure we do not fall into error or away from the path of life? Whose power is matchless and remains undefeated and can be trusted with

keeping us safe? Only God! Don't you feel blessed to know this God and to have received such a promise from Him?

Divine guidance and protection are privileges enjoyed by children of God. A great representation of this truth can be seen during the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt. See Exodus 13:21-22. *“As they travelled, the Lord was leading them. During the day, he was there as a pillar of cloud that went in front of them. During the night, he went as a pillar of fire. This gave them light, so they could travel during the day or the night. The cloud did not leave the people during the day. Nor did the fire leave them during the night. It was always in front of them.”* With the pillar of cloud during the day and pillar of fire during the night, the children of Israel who weren't familiar with the way they were traveling knew where to go and when to move. It's also beautiful to see that the cloud never left them during the day nor did the fire leave them during the night! This means at

no time did they lack direction. God was committed to the cause of guiding/leading them.

While the pillars of cloud and fire meant guidance to the Israelites, it had a different meaning to the neighbouring nations. It proved to them that the Israelites weren't alone, either during the day or at night. They would have concluded that an invincible and very powerful God was guarding them and that would have made them afraid of the Israelites. They were right to be afraid because God was indeed committed to keeping His people safe. He was always there to ensure this.

The pillars of cloud and fire were real, not imaginations. It was a miracle! While I would love to experience these phenomena, God has other ways of leading us and ensuring we know what we're to do and where to be per time. He has also provided a means for us to seek His protection.

- **Through the Word:** Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is like a lamp that shines as my guide. It shows me the right way to live.”* When we spend time reading and meditating on God’s word, we come to know what is good or bad, what is right or wrong, and learn how to live good lives, serve God, and do good deeds. Beyond that, we discover who we really are and what God would like us to do, how and when we should do it.
- **Verbally:** Every now and again, God speaks to us audibly in order to give guidance. Prophet Elijah says in 1 Kings 19:11b-12, *“...a very strong wind broke the mountain apart. It broke the rocks into pieces as the Lord came near. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a very quiet voice.”* Even I can attest to Elijah’s experience. God’s voice is very gentle. It’s like a

whisper across your heart; you can know it's Him when what He says doesn't violate His commands or is contrary to His word.

- **Through Dreams and Visions:** Again, God has given me guidance and continues to give His children guidance through their dreams. Elihu, Job's friend says in Job 33:15, *"Sometimes God speaks to people in dreams and visions. He speaks to them at night, while they sleep in bed."* It is important to note that not all dreams come from God. You know the dream is from God if it's part of a conversation between you and Him; say, you prayed about something and in the dream, you received godly advice. You know a dream is from God if it reveals the truth about a person, place or matter. You know a dream is from God when you just can't shake it, the dream lingers, as if nudging you to take action. More importantly, you can only know for sure when you've prayed about the dream and the Holy Spirit confirms it in your spirit.

- Other ways include through Godly advice from other Christians, through illustrations etc.

There is one sure way to receive God's protection. By praying for it and receiving it by faith. David says in 2 Samuel 22:4, *"I praise the Lord because he deserves it! When I called to him for help, he saved me from my enemies."* We too can be assured of God's protection when we ask Him for it. He even does more than we ask for! We also have to beware of deliberately putting ourselves in dangerous situations and counting on God to protect us. Jesus says doing so amounts to tempting the Lord our God (Matthew 4:7).

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray that God helps you to continually depend on Him as your Guide and Guard throughout life.*
- ♥ *Ask God to direct your dreams and visions.*
- ♥ *Pray for understanding of your dreams and visions.*

24 | He Will Make You Happy

“When God does that, it will make you very happy. You will be safe, like someone who gets plenty of good water from a well to drink.”

Isaiah 12:3, EASY

I remember the day before my twenty-first birthday. I was really anxious, not for deep reasons like thoughts about my future, but because I really wanted to have a party and spend the entire day being happy and surrounded by family and friends. The reason for my anxiety was the money I had. There was no way I could afford to throw myself a party and cater to those who will be in attendance. When I was tired of being anxious, I surrendered my anxiety to God, told Him what I

wanted and added that even if He didn't do it for me, I would still be grateful on my twenty-first birthday.

When I got home that evening, I was at peace. Not long after I got home my aunt beckoned on me and asked me to come into the kitchen. I got there and was stunned to see the most beautiful cake with birthday wishes addressed to me decorated on it! She also told me to quickly contact my friends because I was having a party the next day! All the arrangements had been made! It was all more than I could take in at once. I quickly sent out the invitations. Then, right on cue, as the day came, I was so happy surrounded by family and friends; even more because God did what I asked for.

Have you ever experienced something like that? Has God given you beautiful memories to keep like that? If you haven't, then know that God can make it happen. He can and will give you beautiful memories of being happy. As I

write this, I can imagine the question that might be on your mind: “Does God want me to be happy?” It’s okay to ask this question. You wouldn’t be the first to ask it; the people of God whom prophet Isaiah spoke the words in our opening verse to must have wondered about it too. I have had moments when I doubted if God wanted me to be happy, thinking He perhaps only needed me to be useful to Him. I thought so reading what Ralph Waldo Emerson said about life. *“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”*

Is Emerson, right? Two truths can co-exist. So, I’d say, God wants us to be useful. He also wants us to be happy. He gives us reasons to be happy when He turns a situation around in our favour, like He did for me on my twenty-first birthday and continues to do for me every now and again; and like He promised to do for the people of Judah when He saved and rescued

them from their enemies as soon as they turned back to Him. Also like He will do for you when you ask and you receive, when you seek and find, and when you knock and doors are opened to you (Matthew 7:7). God wants us to be happy. What He doesn't want is for us to be led by our desires to be happy and seek happiness at any cost.

When it comes to happiness and desires, we may be tempted to compromise that's why we are encouraged to focus more on the joy we get from being forgiven of our sins, being reconciled with God, having a relationship with Him, discovering purpose, walking in our calling, serving Him, our reward in heaven etc. You see, while happiness is connected to earthly experiences, joy is connected to spiritual experiences, and while happiness is temporary, joy lasts.

Different things make people happy, including such things as sexual pleasure, even immoral sex, or more money, or when evil

things happen to people, they don't like or can't get along with. People are also happy when they feel important, having what belongs to others, drinking, wild partying, homosexuality etc. Now we know God will not indulge us by encouraging us to go after such things just so we can be "happy". The happiness God wants us to experience is one that isn't against His ways and doesn't end up in spiritual decline. We will be praying amiss if we ever ask for anything God hates. Our happiness should come from good events, like when God intervenes and righteousness wins, when justice prevails, when slavery ends, when people are no longer denied their rights, when crimes against children stop, when someone is miraculously rescued from an accident, when babies are born, when you rescue someone from abuse, when the right person becomes president, when your needs are met etc.

Happiness can also come from clean fun; when you spend time with family and friends,

sharing humour and good laugh or eat with them, shop with them, go sight-seeing with them, or go on a mission trip with good Christian friends/your church family, or when you can afford to eat pizza and have a drink at your favourite pizza hut etc. Or from nature: like when you see a yellow butterfly, enjoy the many colours of the sunset, watch the sun rise, watch the clouds drift, smell beautiful flowers or even count the stars. God has designed our hearts to long for happiness, and He'll continue to provide all good things that will bring us happiness and satisfaction.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God for grace not to be led by your desires.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to turn your circumstances around for your good.*
- ♥ *Ask for new experiences of happiness so they can be memories for you to keep.*

25 | In the Last Days

“The Lord is the one who will take care of you. He will protect you, so that no danger can hurt you.”

Proverb 3:26, EASY

WOULD you say you judge situations well? Are you a good judge of character? Discernment is the ability to judge well. It takes discernment to be able to read the room, to observe things about a situation that others can't, and to be able to judge a person's character. Some synonyms for discernment are sensitivity, insight and perception. One of the ways God

takes care of us and protects us in these last days is by giving us the ability to discern.

What I mean by “last days” is fully explained by Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-9. He means a time when people only love themselves and you can’t take every “I love you” to be true, a time when people want lots of money and are ready to do anything to get it, including hurting you, a time when people are proud and want to be great at any cost, a time when people speak unkindly without a care in the world and have no regard for authority, a time when being good to others is a thankless job, when people will not respect you, won’t be kind to you though you are kind to them, when they start a quarrel with you for no reason, when they slander you, have little or no self-control, when people don’t like things that are good and godly, when your friends turn against you and act without considering the consequences, when people don’t love God and would rather fulfil the lust of the flesh, when

people pretend to be serving God, when false teachers are on the loose etc.

In these last days nothing is ever as it seems; people are not who they say they are, and there are strange philosophies peddled as the gospel. Jesus says there would be so much deception in these times that even believers could fall victim except God intervenes (Matthew 24:24). And God does intervene by helping us discern through the power of His Spirit.

God is truth. He is the source of truth and His word is truth. Through His Spirit, He helps us decide what's truth or error in situations and with people; this way, He shields us from needless pain by revealing people's true character and intentions to us, exposing lies and preventing us from being carried away by every wind of doctrine.

Contrary to the world's view, intuition isn't discernment. With intuition you can sense things, but you aren't completely sure. But with discernment, you are sure because your source

is God; and with this knowledge He gives wisdom, so you know what to do afterwards to avoid being hurt.

God is a revealer of secrets. He wants to make things known to us; that's why He says, "*Call to me and I will answer you. I will tell you great, strange things that you do not know*" (Jeremiah 33:3). But as long as we believe we can get ahead and along in life all by ourselves and understand things well enough for ourselves, we will continue to fall victim to deceivers. Only if we trust the Lord completely with everything and in everything, not claiming that we are wise, will we enjoy the ability to discern (Proverbs 3:5-7).

Discernment is essential to the believer. Paul praying for the Christians at Philippi says, "*This is what I pray for you. I pray that you will continue to love each other more and more. I pray that you will know God better and better. I pray that you will understand all those things that are true. Then you will be able to choose*

what is best in the way that you live. Then, on the day when Christ returns, you will be completely clean. You will not be guilty of any bad thing” (Philippians 1:9-10). He believed that with a keen sense of discernment they would know and understand what is true, and that this will enable them make better choices in their lives and relationship with others. The same goes for us today. We must ask God in prayer for the ability to discern with the help of His Holy Spirit.

Now we know what discernment is and what it isn't, and how essential it is; but it is also important to know that discernment isn't a license to meddle in the lives of others or set ourselves up as judge of people's sins.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God for grace to trust Him with everything and in everything.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to reveal to you the things you need to know, and the wisdom to handle the information correctly.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to control yourself and not be arbitrary judge over others.*

26 | Serving with Love

“God blessed them. He said to them, ‘Give birth to children. Grow in number. Fill the earth and rule over it. Rule over the fish in the sea. Rule over the birds in the sky. Rule over every different kind of living animal that moves along the ground.’”

Genesis 1:28, EASY

EVERY time I read this scripture I’m reminded of my mother’s wise words. She’d say, God commanded us to fill the earth and rule over it, rule over the fish, the birds and every kind of living animals; but He never said we should rule over other humans. Whenever she’d say that, she would go on to

explain that some of the problems in the world arise from our lack of understanding of that scripture. God places people in positions of authority and power to serve, not to rule.

Of course, I agree.

The words of Samuel come to mind here; they're actually the words of God to Israel after they had rejected Him as their King, and asked for a man to rule them just like the other nations.

God, revealing the consequence of their request, said to them: *“This is how the king will rule over you: He will take your sons to be his soldiers. They will ride his horses and they will drive his chariots. They will have to run in front of his own chariot. The king will choose some of your sons to be officers in his army. Some will be leaders of 1,000 soldiers. Others will be leaders of 50 soldiers. Some of your sons will have to plough the king's fields. They will have to cut his crops at harvest time. They will have*

to make weapons for the king to fight wars. They will have to fix his chariots.

“The king will take your daughters to serve him. They will have to make perfume for him. They will also have to cook and bake bread for him. The king will take your best fields, vines and olive trees away from you. He will give all these to his own officers. He will take a tenth part of all your seeds and grapes. He will give them to his officers and servants. He will take your male and female servants for himself. He will take your best cows and your donkeys. He will use them for his own work. He will take a tenth of all your sheep and your goats. You yourselves will become his servants too. Then you will complain loudly to the Lord about your king that you have chosen to lead you. But the Lord will not answer you when you do that” (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

It's a long read, but it shows the intoxication of power and control. It also fully

captures the greed and unfairness that occurs when people “rule”. The Israelites would have been just fine with God being their ruler; but they fell into error the moment they requested for a man to rule over them. Eventually they found out when their problems multiplied.

That was then, and this is now. We don’t have the luxury of having God as political ruler today; instead, we have authorities in government. God has given them these positions; but just as it was in Bible time, so it still is. There is greed and unfairness in the land; and it begins from the top, from people in positions of authority in the government. To the existing government our obligation is to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and obey them (Romans 13:1-2); but our duties don’t end there. If you are in a position of authority, change can begin with you; and if you believe God is preparing you for any form of leadership, then know that God wants you to be an agent of change.

Jesus introduced that change by saying, *“And do not call each other “leader”. You have only one leader. He is the Messiah that God has chosen. The person among you who is most important will be your servant”* (Matthew 23:10-11). He was saying we should be more interested in doing the work when in positions of authority than in the title. He was informing us that even when in authority, we must bear in mind that God is the highest authority. He was pointing out that those positions are for serving, not ruling. Jesus reveals what should motivate our service by saying, *“You must love each other, in the same way that I have loved you”* (John 15:12).

Jesus’ love is unconditional, sacrificial, selfless, committed and indestructible; and if we love others the way He did, serving, and not ruling, becomes possible, and with God’s grace, it can become something we can commit to. John Stott says, “The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not

force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.”

Just because we know all this doesn't automatically mean we will become “good”. David knew all about God's way of doing things but still abused his seat of authority by sleeping with Bathsheba and planning Uriah's murder (Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12). Instead of falling into the sin of presumption, we must take a cue from David's heart cry after he had been confronted with his sin and experienced its consequences. David asked God for a new and clean heart and a renewed spirit (Psalms 51:10). We should too.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to make your heart new and clean, and for a renewed spirit and a new attitude.*
- ♥ *Pray that He should help you make decisions that will showcase His love for others.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace that when in leadership position you will serve with love.*

27 | He'll Give You Shade

“The Lord is the one who keeps you safe. He is very near to you. He will give you shade from the hot sun.”

Psalm 121:5, EASY

ONE day a man went out of town to the east side of the city; there he built a little hut using sticks and leaves and sat in the shade of the hut, watching the city. Not long after, the leaves of the shelter withered away in the heat. God quickly made sure that a little plant grew tall enough with leaves broad enough to shade his head. The man saw the plant and went and sat under it. The shade of

the plant was very comforting and made him very happy; he knew that if the plant wasn't there to give shade when the sun rose and shone and the hot wind blew, he would be very weak and might even wish to die.

Meanwhile in the city were people who were once neck deep in sin and had recently received the news that in forty days their city would be destroyed. Though the news had come from a stranger, they believed it and responded the right way. They repented of their sins and begged God to be kind to them so they would not die. When God observed the change in the people, that they not only repented but were now living the right way, He decided to give them a different kind of shade from an impending judgment. He forgave them and did not destroy their city as He had said.

To one man, a shade was physical; it was the broad leaves of a plant that protected him from the hot sun; to the city, the shade was spiritual; it was God's pardon that prevented them from

facing impending judgment. Both man and city received shade, and it was God who provided it, just like the psalmist proclaimed God's help in the scripture above. The man in the story is none other but prophet Jonah, and the people in the city were Ninevites (Read Jonah 3 and 4).

Isn't the story comforting? Doesn't it make you happy to know that God is so close and attentive? He sees our physical and spiritual needs and doesn't ignore them. He, the perfect Father that He is, divinely intervenes and provides for us all that we need. No wonder He is widely referred to as Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord our Provider. Our physical and spiritual needs differ from person to person and from day to day, but we can always count on God's limitless resources to meet our needs. God's provisions are always available to those who trust Him. Do you trust Him to meet your physical and spiritual needs? I hope your answer is yes.

Sometimes our answer is no, and the reason can be because we've been disappointed in the

past. Jonah who represented the man in the story I shared had a desire that wasn't as conspicuous as his need for a physical shade. He thought the worst of the people of Nineveh, and hoped when they heard his message, they won't repent and would be wiped out! He really hoped that God would destroy them. But God didn't, and Jonah became angry. On the outside, it seemed like Jonah's desire aligned with God's; after all, it was God that sent him to preach such a message in the first place. God did indeed send Jonah to preach such a message, and the motive of God was for the people to come to the realization of their spiritual state and make a change. So, in the actual sense, Jonah's request wasn't in alignment with God's.

God's will was to save the 120,000 Ninevites in the city, and meeting Jonah's desire would get in the way of that happening. Sometimes we too are like Jonah; we ask God for certain things, whether physical or spiritual, that are simply outside God's will for our lives and that

of others. This is the reason why our prayers, even if we asked them in faith and trust God for an answer, we get divine snub, and our prayers are unanswered.

Another unpopular reason why Jonah's request went unanswered was his motive; it was wrong. Jonah wanted to be validated as the prophet that said something and it came to pass, at whatever cost. Imagine that! When he didn't get his way, he feared he would be known as the prophet whose words didn't come to pass, which could be why he asked God to take his life (Jonah 4:3). Does this sound familiar? If your requests have the wrong motives, it is unlikely that God will answer them.

At the end of the book of Jonah, God was reasoning with him. We aren't sure he got the point, though. If he didn't, then it means he held on to his disappointment and refused to trust God anymore. Pray not to be like Jonah, and learn from his folly against the plan and purpose of God. Going forward, begin to make requests

that align with God's will with the right motives. Finally, when we pray to God to meet our needs, we need to remember that He knows better than we do, and will only do what's best, even if it's at the risk of disappointing us.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Thank God for His ability to provide all your needs.*
- ♥ *Invite the Holy Spirit into your prayer life.*
- ♥ *Ask God to help you always pray the right prayers and give you the grace to trust His decisions, especially when they override your requests.*

28 | Just Getting Started

“He said, This month will be the first month of each year for you.”

Exodus 12:2, EASY

OUT of the blues, I received a call from my former colleague and friend. She called to tell me she had gotten married legally and would be having the wedding party soon. After hearing about how she met her husband and all the events that led to the proposal, I said to her, does it feel like your life is just getting started? She laughed and said “absolutely!”

Almost everyone has the same attitude towards life; we believe when certain events

happen, that's when our lives truly begin. Even God shares that sentiment, regarding the Israelites as they get set to leave Egypt. He said the month wherein they ate the Passover meal would symbolize a lot of things to them, like the beginning of a new year and the beginning of a new life as free people, for after eating that meal, they would begin the exodus from Egypt, the land where they had been slaves.

With believers in the New Testament dispensation, God has declared that the minute we come to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus and surrendered our lives to Him, we also end our old lives as slaves to sin with a looming judgment of death and destruction in hell, we begin a new life as children of God who no longer have to be afraid of the wages of sin or worried about where we would be in eternity. If you've just given your life to Christ, truly your life's just getting started. Here's the testimony of Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20. *"Christ died on the cross on my behalf. It is like I died there*

with him. So I do not live my own life anymore. Instead, Christ lives in me. The life that I live now in my body, I live because I trust what he has done for me. He has loved me so much that he died on my behalf.”

Just as quickly as the euphoria of a new life fades, the reality sets in. My friend is excited to get married but we all know a wedding is just the beginning of the life-long journey of the married life, a journey that would require a lot of virtues from her and her husband in order for it to succeed and be fruitful. The Israelites would have been excited to leave Egypt, but little did they know that their journey to the Promised Land would require them to first pass through the wilderness where God was waiting to teach them series of spiritual lessons. In the same vein, a new believer would be excited about discovering God’s love, knowing his/her inheritance as a child of God, and the assurance of heaven. But that’s only the beginning. If our Christianity is to be productive and our place in

eternity secured, one thing is required. See that in Peter's advice in 2 Peter 1:5-8.

“So, now that you believe in Christ, you must grow as believers. Try very much to do always what is good. Then you should grow to know God more and more. Then you should learn to rule yourselves properly. That is not all. You should also learn to be patient and brave. And you should serve God in a good way. You should not only serve God, but you should be kind to other believers like your own brothers and sisters. And you should not only love other Christians, but you must love all people. You should grow as believers in all these ways, more and more. When you live in that way, it will show that you really know our Lord Jesus Christ. People will see that your life has good results.”

I promise, Peter wasn't trying to make up his own “1000 ways to being a Christian.” He was simply pointing our attention to a weighty matter: that believing isn't enough, spiritual

growth is important too. And, might I add that this advice doesn't only apply to new believers but those who have believed a very long time. While new believers might even accept this news with zeal, the old ones might presume they are mature enough and seek no further growth. Meanwhile I have seen many who have believed a long time but their lives have no good result for their belief. If you are in the category of those who have believed for a long time and your life has good results, it can only mean you tick all the boxes of the long list made by Peter quoted above; if not, then you're just getting started, and there's work ahead.

The writer of Hebrews speaking on spiritual growth in Hebrews 6:1-3 says, *"So we must go on from the first lessons that we learned about Christ. We must grow as believers so that we understand more and more. We should not go back to those first lessons again and again. We already know that we must turn away from wrong things that lead to death. We know that*

we must trust God. We have already learned about how to become clean. We know that leaders put their hands on other Christians to pray for God's help. We know that God will raise dead people to live again. And we know that God will judge every person one day at the end of time. Yes, we must choose to go on from those early lessons! God is ready to help us to do that."

Why is our spiritual growth so necessary? Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:2, *"You have heard the message that I have taught. Many other people also heard it and they agree that it is true. Now you must tell the same message to other people who will be able to teach it to even more people. Those should be people that you can trust as honest people and who can teach well."* Paul, through his command to Timothy, reveals the bigger picture of why we are saved: it's so we can lead others to God; and we must grow also so we can make disciples for Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to help you make your spiritual growth a priority.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to make the changes needed.*
- ♥ *Pray never to be complacent in the matter of spiritual growth.*

29 Another Protection Promise?

“He will keep you safe, like a bird keeps its babies safe under its wings. Because he keeps his promises, he will keep you safe like a shield and armour.”

Psalm 91:4, EASY

WHEN I got the above scripture, I thought to myself: “Not another protection promise scripture!”

But then I thought of it this way: for as long as the devil thinks up and plans new ways to hurt us, God’s already provided a protection promise scripture that guarantees our safety. And here’s

the good part: God never makes an empty promise. He keeps His promises.

The psalmist says God will keep us safe like a bird keeps its babies safe under its wings. I love watching birds fly, but that's all I know about them. To understand this scripture, however, I've had to read a little about birds online. I learnt baby birds are helpless against many threats, and rely on their mothers to protect them. And one of the ways mother birds protect their babies is to cover them with their wings. Just like a baby bird faces many threats, a believer's life is full of warfare; there are troubles in the day and at night, attacks on our families, friends, businesses/careers/ministries, finances, relationships, health and mind; sometimes it even happens in quick succession like Job's case. On our own we are helpless, but God doesn't leave us without help. Like the mother bird, He protects us.

I watched a pretty detailed video on the topic and saw how a mother bird shielded its baby

from the rain. It covered it up and gave it warmth. While doing this, the baby bird couldn't see anything; it simply had to stay still and trust that its mother knew what it was doing. It was a beautiful image portraying dependence and trust. God wants us too to depend on Him for our protection, and to maintain a state of calmness even in chaos, trusting wholly that He will sort things out.

Of maintaining a state of calmness during chaos, I remember Jesus sleeping on the boat during a storm that threatened to drown Him and His disciples. It's kind of similar to the posture of the baby bird (Mark 4:38-40), a posture that depicts our faith in God and His faithfulness in keeping His promise to protect us. The Psalmist goes on to say that God will keep us safe like a shield and armour. Since I've never been in war, I know little about both items; so again, I did some reading online. I discovered that the shield and the armour are used as protective gears; but they can also serve

as weapons. While God can protect us like a shield and armour, He has also equipped us to protect and defend ourselves.

But first we must know who we are up against. Let's read Ephesians 6:12, *"We are not fighting against human enemies. Instead, we are fighting against the rulers and the powerful spirits that have authority over this dark world. We are fighting against the bad spirits who live in the heavens."* Next, we need to know the kind of weapons we use to fight. Let's see that in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4. *"It is true that we live in this world as humans. But we do not use our human ideas to fight against what is wrong. It is like we are fighting in a war, but we do not use human weapons. Instead we use God's weapons. Those weapons are powerful enough to destroy the enemy's strong places...."*

Apostle Paul gives us a rundown of how God equips us for spiritual warfare. He says in Ephesians 6:14-18, *"So you must stand strongly. This is God's armour that you must*

*wear: God's true message will be like a belt that you tie round your body. Always do what is right. That will be like a metal shirt that you wear to keep your body safe. Be prepared to tell people the good news about peace with God. That will be like shoes on your feet. As well as all that, have faith to trust God. That will be like a shield that you hold in front of you. It will stop the Devil from hurting you with his arrows that burn with fire. Remember that God has saved you from your sins. That will be like a strong hat that keeps your head safe. Also, use God's message to help you. That will be like a sword that God's Spirit puts in your hand. As you stand strongly like that, always pray for God's help. Pray about everything as God's Spirit helps you to pray. For this purpose, watch carefully all the time...
.”*

If we study these verses carefully, we see that God has made sure that if we adhere to His advice, we will be fully equipped and covered.

Brigham Young Jr says, *“The only vulnerable place in our armor is where we ourselves leave it exposed because God has armed us at all points. He has made us impervious to outside attacks. But when we boil inside, destruction waits upon us.”* His words are true. We must make sure we leave no place exposed so we don’t become prey to the adversary. We give the enemy a chance to break down our defenses when we pay attention to some part of Paul’s advice and ignore the rest, when we continue in willful sin and take God’s grace for granted; we must keep our emotions and desires in check as well.

After we have done all this, not only will we be protected during spiritual warfare, in the end we will be standing tall and victorious.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray for grace to be fully dependent on God and to trust Him for your protection and preservation.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to help you put on the whole armour and not give room for the enemy to hurt you.*
- ♥ *Pray to take nothing for granted, but constantly be on your guard against the enemy.*

30 | Sweet Sleep

“When you lie down to sleep, you will not be afraid of anyone. Many people will ask you to help them.”

Job 11:19, EASY

THERE was a time that peaceful resting eluded me. Back then, I had sleep paralysis. For an accurate definition, I'd quote from an article on WebMD by Beth Roybal. Sleep paralysis is a feeling of being conscious but unable to move. It occurs when a person passes between stages of wakefulness and sleep. During these transitions, you may be unable to move or speak for a few seconds up to a few

minutes. Mine was accompanied with feelings of pressure on my chest and choking, and it happened every time I tried to fall asleep. It got to a point I dreaded sleep, be it in the night time or day time.

Aside sleep paralysis, there are several sleep disorders that prevent one from resting properly and peacefully; they include restless legs syndrome, jetlag, narcolepsy, night terror, sleep walking, insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea etc. These medically recognized disorders aside, there's also the fear of thieves and robbers, which is just as much a sleep disorder and likely what Zophar, Job's friend, was referring in the scripture above. There's also fear of spiritual attacks, and finally worry. When we worry about what we will eat and drink and about our future, sleep might elude us.

When I got tired of dreading sleep and all the terror that accompanied my sleeping, I presented the matter before God in prayer, and in time I no longer experienced sleep paralysis and started

sleeping well. For the other sleep disorders mentioned, pray about them too and seek medical attention if you so wish. When it comes to fear of thieves and robbers, spiritual attacks or worry, we will have to turn to the Scriptures for help. In dealing with fear, the first scripture that comes to mind is Paul's words to his protégé, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 1:7. *"Be strong because God has given us his Spirit. And his Spirit does not cause us to be afraid. Instead, his Spirit causes us to be powerful to serve God. He helps us to love God and other people. And he helps us to rule ourselves properly."*

God has given us His Spirit, and His Spirit does not cause us to be afraid. Fear is of the devil. Fear torments. We mustn't spend our nights and days afraid of thieves and robbers. After we have put the necessary security measures in place, like locking up doors and windows properly and keeping valuables out of public reach, and having prayed for God's protection, we must trust in God's ability to protect us and all we own. The

proof that we trust God will be seen if afterwards we have a peaceful rest. As children of God, we are targets of the enemy, but just because we are doesn't mean we should live in constant fear; instead, we should live prepared. The Psalmist says in Psalm 91:1-2, *"If anyone lives in God's safe place, the Most High God protects that person. I will say to the Lord, 'You are the strong place where I will be safe. You are my God, and I trust in you.'"*

The secret to living prepared is being in tune with God so He can be our safe space. Don't break your fellowship with Him in study of His word, and prayer. Never veer into secret and willful sin. As God reveals His will to you, align with it. As He leads you by His Spirit, follow Him. As He warns, take heed. When we do this, we enjoy all the safety that only God can provide, and rest well. He says in Luke 10:19, *"Listen! I have given power to you. You will even stand on dangerous snakes and insects and you will have authority over all the power of the Devil. Nothing will hurt you."*

I once heard the story of a pastor who was trying to have a good night rest when he was woken up by noise in his living room. He went there and saw everything was turned upside down. God opened his eyes and he saw the evil spirit responsible. He simply gave the spirit a command to return everything back to place, after which he went back to sleep. I'm not sure if the story is true or not, but that's the same attitude we should have when dealing with the devil. We shouldn't let him torment us with fear of what he might do to us; instead, we should exercise our power and authority over him, and not let him deprive us of rest in the day or at night.

In dealing with worry, my favourite verses are the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:31-34. *“So, do not worry about these things. Do not always say, ‘What will we eat?’, or ‘What will we drink?’, or ‘What will we wear?’ People who do not know God are always trying to get these things. But as for you, your Father*

in heaven knows that you need them. Instead, always think about the things that are important in the kingdom of heaven. Always do what God shows you is right. Then he will also give you the things that you need each day. So do not have trouble in your mind about what might happen tomorrow. Tomorrow will have its own problems. It is enough for you to be thinking each day about the problems of that day.”

Jesus’ cure for worry is pretty straight forward. He wants us to trust God with our needs, focus on doing the right things and live one day at a time. It will be best to take our Lord’s advice so we can sleep easy.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray concerning the areas discussed, whether it's a medical condition depriving you of sleep or fear and worry.*
- ♥ *Invite God to help you do your part and trust Him to do His part in helping you sleep well from now onward.*
- ♥ *Ask God for a trusting heart so the promises of God would be absolute in your heart.*

31 | Planting Your Seeds

“Plant your seeds in the morning, and continue to work until the evening. You do not know which seeds will become strong plants. Perhaps only some of them will grow. Perhaps they will all grow well.
Ecclesiastes 11:6, EASY

IN the Scriptures the word ‘seed’ is used metaphorically to mean different things. In the verse above, “planting your seeds” refers to the idea of working but let’s check out some other examples.

“Jesus then said, ‘This is what the story means: The seeds are like the message from

God” (Luke 8:11). In the story of the farmer that planted seeds, ‘seeds’ was used to represent messages from God/ the word of God.

“The field is like the world. The good seeds are like the people who belong to God's kingdom. The weeds are like the people who belong to the Devil” (Matthew 13:38). In the story about the weeds, the ‘good seeds’ refers to God’s children.

“Jesus replied, ‘You could not do it because you do not trust God very much. I tell you this: You may believe in God only a little bit, like a very small seed. Even then, you could say to this mountain, “Go away from this place and move to that other place.” Then it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you to do” (Matthew 17:20). Before Jesus made a sick boy well, He made an emphasis

on the importance of faith. He used a mustard seed as illustration.

“It is God who supplies seeds for the farmer to plant. It is God who supplies bread for food. God will help you in the same way. He will give you plenty of things so that you can help other people. You will be like a farmer who plants many seeds. And God will cause those seeds to grow. There will be many good results from the help that you give to other people. That will be like a great harvest” (2 Corinthians 9:10). Here Paul was on a lengthy discourse to encourage giving.

There are many more examples, but these four should do. So far, we’ve discovered that ‘seed’ can mean God’s messages/ His word, those who belong to God’s kingdom, a.k.a. Christians/believers, then faith and giving. Solomon, in our opening verse, encourages us to

“plant our seeds” all day until evening because seeds have the ability to grow and multiply. This isn’t just a physical fact, it’s also a spiritual truth. Since the writer emphasizes the word “your seed”, it’s safe to ask, do you possess any of the seeds listed above? Have you accepted God’s word as truth? Do you live by it and obey it? Can people identify you as a Christian/believer? Do you have faith in God and His power? Are you a giver? If your answer is no, then you know areas you need to work on. If your answer is yes, then let’s proceed to learn how we can plant our seeds, see them grow and multiply.

In the story of the farmer that planted seeds, the seeds that fell on good soil grew well and multiplied; this refers to those who heard the message from God, understood it, believed it and continued with it even though they encountered some problems. What we must do: we who have believed and received God’s word to be true are to keep on reading and speaking

God's word, think about what it says all the time, and be careful to obey it regardless of the troubles we face. When we continue in God's word, we end up looking more and more like Jesus.

In the story about the weeds, the good seeds grew to be good plants and were harvested while the weeds were pulled out during harvest time. The good seeds that grew to become good plants and were harvested refer to those who believe Jesus' message and whose profession match their conduct while on earth. When Jesus comes back to take His people, they are taken up in the clouds and allowed into heaven. We can assume the bad seeds and weeds are people who refuse the message, continue in their sinful ways and are to end in hell. We who are children of God must strive not just to remain good seeds, but grow into good plants. What this means is that we must grow spiritually and maintain our testimony before others in our speech and conduct. This way, when Jesus receives us in

heaven, He will call us good and faithful servants.

Before Jesus made the sick boy well, a task His disciples should have been able to do, He taught them what they lacked –Faith. We that have some measure of faith should seek to increase our faith by exercising it. In all seasons and in all occasions, we must exercise our faith in God. Trust Him with everything and in everything.

Paul encouraged the Church in Corinth to give by explaining to them that giving is like planting a seed. God will cause it to grow and multiply until it's like a great harvest. We too must plant our seeds. We must give to the church and to those in need around us; when we do, we are sure to receive a harvest back. What that means is that God will keep empowering us with resources to continue to be of help. We will never lack. Seed time and harvest time are sure guarantees in the Bible, but you can only enjoy harvest time if you took the pains to plant. So,

get to planting! Keep being a reader/hearer and doer of God's word. Maintain and don't mar your testimony. Keep exercising your faith in God and don't stop giving. All of these will be worthwhile!

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to help you be patient in your planting and to preserve your harvest.*
- ♥ *Pray that God should help you plant your seed and never relent.*
- ♥ *Pray for good harvest of the seeds you have planted.*

32 | He'll Fight to Help You

“The Lord your God will go in front of you. He will fight to help you, as he fought for you in Egypt. You saw him do it.”
Deuteronomy 1:30, EASY

HAS someone ever said to you, “I’d like to help you but my hands are tied”? It’s a metaphor, and means they are unable to act on your behalf for some reason, perhaps a rule or because they answer to a higher authority. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, this idiom was first recorded in print in 1642. It alludes figuratively to having one’s hands physically restrained because they were bound by someone

else. Let's now reflect on the background story of the verse above.

The sons of Jacob moved into the land of Egypt due to shortage of food in the land of Canaan. Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son, had miraculously become prime minister in Egypt, and was in the good books of the then Pharaoh, king of Egypt. But nowhere on earth do good times last forever. Joseph eventually died, and a new Pharaoh that didn't know Joseph came into power. He felt threatened by the growing population of the Israelites in Egypt; so, he enslaved them. The people of Israel became slaves partly due to the insecurities of one man, and remained enslaved for years for another reason.

Let's read that in Ezekiel 20:8. *"But your ancestors did not obey me. They refused to listen to me. None of them destroyed their disgusting idols. They continued to worship the idols of Egypt. So I decided to show them that I was very angry. I said that I*

would punish them there in Egypt." Here we discover that they remained enslaved because of sin, the sin of idolatry. God's words to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-17, declaring that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years in a strange land, suddenly makes more sense.

I often wonder why these people would be slaves for so long and God wouldn't act on their behalf earlier. Now we know it was because of their sin. The sin of idolatry had God's hands tied. God hates idolatry and wants His people separate from all fetish practices. Let's read further from Ezekiel 20:9-12. *"But I did not want the people of other nations to insult my name. I had promised Israel's people that I would bring them out of Egypt. The nations near where the Israelites were living knew this. So I brought my people out of Egypt. I led them into the wilderness. I gave them my laws and my commands. Anyone who obeyed them would enjoy a good life. I also gave them Sabbath days when they would rest. It*

would help them to remember that they belong to me. They would know that I, the Lord, have made them my holy people.”

Despite Israel’s sins being a hindrance to their deliverance from slavery, God stood by His promise to Abraham and, as it were, “untied His hands”. His mercy found a way. He raised up Moses as a deliverer for them and led them out of slavery. He fought to help them till they were delivered.

God fought, and still fights to help each and every one of us who are now believers. The wages of our sin was death, and since our sins had His hands tied in the past, He could have left us to suffer the consequences of our wrong doings but instead untied His hands and showed us mercy. He proved His love for us by giving His one and only Son Jesus Christ on our behalf. Now we who have believed will no longer perish, or eternally separated from God; instead, we shall live for ever with Him in glory (John 3:16).

Having saved and delivered us, God continues to fight to help us in our faith-walk. See Proverb 24:16a. *“If an honest person falls down seven times, he will still stand up again....”* Though we are no longer of the world, we live in this world, a world that’s fallen into corruption and sin, and every now and then, we who are saved may unintentionally find ourselves marring our testimony. Even in those times when we repent of our sins, God’s grace gives us the privilege of getting a clean slate and starting again. God doesn’t have to do this; give us second, third, fourth and several chances; but He does so, because He loves us and would rather, we are reconciled to Him than perish for our sins (2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:1-2). Of course, this is good news for those who have sinned and backslid. If you are humble and sorry, God will overlook your faults and help you start again.

That being said, God’s grace must never be abused. It will do us good to remember the words of Apostle Paul in Romans 6:1-2.

“Someone might say, ‘Perhaps we should continue to do wrong things. Then God can be kind to us in more and more ways.’ No! Certainly we should not do that! Sin does not rule our lives any longer. That old life is dead! So it is not right that we should continue to do wrong things.” Becoming believers means sin no longer has the power to rule us; so, we must fight against sin in our lives. If we continue in sin, God reserves the right to allow us suffer the consequences of our actions, if it will help us act right going forward.

Hebrews 12:7-11 explains: *“When you have troubles in your life, you must be patient and strong. Remember that God is teaching you what is right because you are his children. There has never been any son whose father did not punish him. God teaches all his children not to do wrong things. So if he does not punish you, it shows that you are not really his children. Instead, you are like children who do not really belong to him. Also, we have all had*

human fathers who punished us. As a result, we respected them. So think about our Father that our spirits belong to. We must surely obey him, and then he will give us true life. Our human fathers punished us for a few years. They did this in a way that they thought was good. But God punishes us in a way that will really help us. As a result, we can become completely good, like he is. Punishment never makes us happy at the time when we receive it. No, the pain makes us sad. But later we know that the punishment has taught us good things. It helps us to live in a right way that gives us peace in our minds.”

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray for a heart that can admit wrong.*
- ♥ *Ask God to give you a clean slate, so you can start over with Him.*
- ♥ *Pray to live holy.*

33 | A Happy Life

“You will have a happy life that is brighter than the sun at noon. Even if trouble makes it dark, it will still seem like a bright morning.”

Job 11:17, EASY

WHILE Zophar was wrong to assume that something Job might have done was the reason for the bad things that happened to him, he did manage to say a few things that give us a healthy dose of proper perspective. He says, being faithful to God, praying to Him, refraining from doing evil things and not letting others do wrong things in our home leads to a happy life, a life brighter than the sun at noon, and even if trouble makes

it dark, it will still seem like a bright morning (Read Job 11:13-14).

Let's break it down.

The first requirement is being faithful to God. To be faithful to God is to have constant devotion to Him. It is to be committed to His word and command even when it appears what He is saying doesn't make sense, especially where we don't have the full details of what He is doing, and therefore lack complete understanding. David, testifying of the benefits of being faithful to God after God had saved him from the power of his enemies, especially Saul who was king of Israel, says in Psalm 18:25, *"Lord, if people are faithful to you, then you are faithful to them. If people do nothing that is bad, they can trust you to do nothing bad to them."* When we are faithful to God, He is in turn faithful to us. The benefits of our faithfulness to God are seen in different areas of our lives where God divinely intervenes in order to meet our needs.

Next, he mentions praying to God. Joseph Medlicott Scriven, writer of the hymn *What a friend we have in Jesus*, captures the essence of prayer as regards us having a happy life. The lyrics say:

*“What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our
sins and grieves to bear! What a privilege to
carry everything to God in prayer! O what
peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain
we bear, All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there
trouble anywhere? We should never be
discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer. Can
we find a friend so faithful who will all our
sorrows share? Jesus knows our every
weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered
with a load of care? Precious Saviour, still our
refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy
friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the*

Lord in prayer! In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there."

A person who prays a lot is lighter, more at peace, hopeful and happier. James confirms the power of prayer by saying in James 5:16b; *"When a good person prays to God, God does powerful things."* After this, Zophar says: Refrain from doing evil things. For every action there is a reaction, if the actions are negative, the reactions will be consequences. See Galatians 6:7. *"Nobody can hide the things that he does from God. Do not think a false thought like that! It is like a farmer who plants seeds in his field. The same kind of crops will grow as the seeds which he plants. That will be his harvest."* If we indulge our flesh and do evil things, our happiness won't last, because the consequence of our actions, God's punishment, will be at our heels! And we know punishment never makes anyone happy (Hebrews 12:7-11). It's best we spend our time doing the things that

God's Spirit wants, so we can receive favourable reactions from God.

Finally, he says, we're not to let others do wrong things in our home. Joshua tells us how in Joshua 24:15b. He says: "*But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.*" Our first circle of influence is our home, with our family. We ought to take advantage of this and live the way God will be pleased, while encouraging members of our families to do the same. Now imagine a family where each member loves God and walks according to His will. Happiness will definitely be found there.

Thomas Watson says, "*He has no design upon us, but to make us happy. Who should be cheerful, if not the people of God?*" Happiness is our portion. We have to be diligent in doing the things we've discussed; be faithful to God, pray to Him, refrain from doing evil and do not let others do wrong in your home.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Pray for grace to do all that's required for you to live a happy life.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to please God, since pure happiness derives from pleasing God.*
- ♥ *Ask for God's help to keep yourself holy, and be able to influence your family to please God also.*

34 Builders: Labouring with God

“You will build again the cities which became heaps of stones a long time ago. You will build your houses on the old foundations. People will call you, “Builders who mend the walls and the streets with their houses.”

Isaiah 58:12, EASY

BELIEVERS are like salt and light. *“Jesus said, ‘You are like salt for all people to taste and use. You are like a light for everybody in this world’ (Matthew 5:13a,14a). Going by His words we know the meaning of the phrase “saved to serve”. As salt, we show people what a life that’s surrendered to Christ looks like, not just with words but also*

our good deeds. And as light, we share God's true message, help people understand the gospel, and lead them to Christ.

Believers are God's building; but we are like builders too, and no I'm not referring to the physical which the prophet Isaiah was referring to in the opening verse, I'm referring to the spiritual, where we labour with God to build people up (1 Corinthians 3:9-10). I for one I'm not who I used to be when I first gave my life to Christ. I had to do so much learning, unlearning and relearning; yes, some in private but mostly with the help of many believers. One such in particular was Pastor Peter Yakubu who encouraged me greatly by helping me find my place in his church family, spending time helping me understand the Scriptures and giving me my first platform for Christian service. I also remember Pastor Mike Izibili who was my workers-in-training teacher, and taught me about Christian conduct and ethics. I wouldn't be the useful vessel I am if they didn't

work together with God to build me up. I mentioned just two believers but there are many more who have worked to build me up till date.

As builders, we partner with God to build up people who are new to the faith or those struggling with their faith. By helping them fit in, helping them understand God's word, offering support with kind words, and in other ways, not forgetting confronting their sins and helping those who have drifted from the faith find their way again. There is one believer who was a great influence in the life of Apostle Paul and John Mark, his name was Joseph, but we know him as Barnabas. Luke describes Barnabas as a good man. One who was filled with the Holy Spirit and had the power of the Holy Spirit with him. He was a man who trusted God completely (Acts 11:24). This man played a significant role in the lives of two men, Paul and John Mark. I'll explain.

After Paul's conversion, the healing of his eyes and baptism, he stayed with the disciples in

Damascus (Ananias helped him settle in and fit in), after which he immediately started teaching people about Jesus. When God exposed the plans of the Jews in Damascus to kill Paul, he returned to Jerusalem. But getting there, there was no Ananias to help him. He wanted to join the believers there but they were afraid of him, thinking he was still his former injurious self who persecuted the Church of Christ. Acts 9:27 says, *“But one of the believers who was called Barnabas helped Saul. He took Saul to meet the apostles. Barnabas then explained to the apostles what had happened to Saul. Barnabas said to them, ‘Saul saw the Lord when he was on his way to Damascus. The Lord spoke to him there. Then, while Saul was in Damascus, he bravely told people the message about Jesus.’”*

Barnabas stood up for Paul and spoke on his behalf. This must have greatly encouraged Paul. After he was accepted, he lived with the apostles, studying with them, hearing their experiences, praying with them etc. The next we

hear of him was that he continued telling people about Jesus; from there he went to Caesarea and Tarsus. But it didn't end there. Barnabas also worked alongside Paul in telling people about Jesus. An interesting account in Acts 11:25-26 reads, *"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When Barnabas found him, he brought him back to Antioch. For one whole year, Barnabas and Saul met together with the group of believers there. They taught very many of them about Jesus. Antioch was the first place where the believers were called Christians."*

John Mark's mother was Mary, a believer whose house was open for other believers to meet and pray (Acts 12:12). When Barnabas and Paul were done helping the believers in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch and took John Mark with them; he served with them as assistant (Acts 12:25; 13:5). Perhaps because he was new to the faith, John was scared of persecution or just homesick; he left Barnabas

and Paul at Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

After some time, as we come to learn, John Mark was ready again to accompany the apostles in their missionary journey. Barnabas was ready to give him a second chance, *“But Paul did not think that this was right. He said to Barnabas, ‘John Mark did not remain with us until we had finished our work. He left us when we were in Pamphylia.’ Paul and Barnabas argued strongly about this. They could not agree, so they went in different directions. Barnabas took John Mark with him and they sailed to Cyprus”* (Acts 15:38-39).

Did you know that it’s the same John Mark that wrote the book of Mark, which contains Peter’s account of the gospel? We might not have had that book written if Barnabas didn’t give John a second chance, encouraged him by sticking with him, and giving him a platform to serve in the first place.

Sometimes we are more like Paul than we are like Barnabas. We have enjoyed being built up by others but fail to expend the same energy on others. This shouldn't be so. As good builders, we must take our responsibilities seriously. God has given us this job, and we must do it well. Each one of us must contribute to each other's life and be committed to it. Knowing full well that one day God will show clearly how good our work had been. So, we must be careful how we build.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to forgive you for the times you resisted His will and ignored the needs of others.*
- ♥ *Invite God to help you prioritize building other believers up in the faith.*
- ♥ *Pray for grace to help others grow in the faith.*

35 | Predicted Rest

“At that time, the Lord will let you live safely, without trouble and without pain. You will no longer have to work for cruel people, as their slaves.”

Isaiah 14:3, EASY

THE word of God came to the exiles in Babylon, predicting a time of rest, when they would live safely, without trouble and without pain, and would no longer have to work for cruel people as slaves. That predicted rest fuelled their hope and gave them a reason to keep living.

I remember as a new believer my reaction when I read the words of Jesus in John 16:33,

the line “in this world, you will have trouble.” In some way it got me worried. The thing was, I had heard many teachings that when you surrender your life to Christ, things become easier; and I had believed it. So, when I read that verse of scripture, I didn’t know what to do with it. Looking back now, I think those preachers should have said, “things will become hard before it gets easier,” instead of saying “things become easier,” because that couldn’t have been the truth.

While those preachers were treading the path of deception just to increase the number of people that responded to their altar calls, Jesus wanted His disciples to know what they were up against. Because we are His doesn’t mean we will not find ourselves in uncomfortable and unpleasant situations. But it doesn’t end there; there’s predicted rest for us in this life and in eternity. In this life we can receive rest from our troubles and pains when we take Apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 4:6-7 seriously. “Do

not worry about anything. Instead, pray to God about everything. Ask him to help you with the things that you need. And thank him for his help. If you do that, God will give you peace in your minds. That peace is so great that nobody can completely understand it. You will not worry or be afraid, because you belong to Christ Jesus.”

We can trust God to always help us when trouble comes. We can ask Him to help us when we need help and be rest assured that He will be kind to us in whatever way we need His help (Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 4:16). That’s how we receive rest in this life. The scale of divine elevation and rest for the believer in eternity is just mind-boggling. John shares in Revelation 21:1-5, *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had gone away. The sea also was not there anymore. I saw God's own holy city, called the new Jerusalem. It was coming down out of heaven from God. It was very beautiful, like*

a bride who is wearing beautiful clothes, ready to meet her husband. I heard a voice that spoke loudly from the throne. It said, 'Look! God's home is now among people! God will live together with them. They will be his people. God himself will be with them and he will be their God. God will take away all the tears from their eyes. Nobody will ever die again. Nobody will be sad again. Nobody will ever cry. Nobody will have pain again. Everything that made people sad has now gone. That old world has completely gone away.' God, who was sitting on the throne, said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, because these words are true. Everyone should believe them.'

Did you notice that in John's revelation there's a prediction of rest? He says, God will take away all tears from our eyes, nobody will ever die again, nobody will be sad again, nobody will ever cry, nobody will have pain again; the old world and all its troubles will be gone! That's

something to look forward to, don't you think? It's a sure reason to keep living.

Every new and mature Christian should know that trouble and pain will always be a part of this life, a part of our lives no matter how good we are. So, rather than letting your troubles overwhelm you, choose to reach out to God in prayer and receive comfort from the Scriptures.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *In prayer, choose to share with God your troubles and pains.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to send you help and give you rest.*
- ♥ *Resist any fear; rather, confess your faith and trust in God.*

36 | When You Have

“Keep this food for the Levites, who have no land of their own. It is also for the foreign people, the widows, and the children who have no family. These people in your town can eat as much as they want. If you do that, the Lord your God will bless you in all your work.”

Deuteronomy 14:29, EASY

THE people who belong to the Lord are God’s own special people who He has chosen; and they must not become like the people of the world; they must do things differently. The blessings from their hard labour will not be for them alone, it will be shared with

those who do not have, people like Levites who serve in the temple, foreigners, widows and children who have no family. This is what God wants His people to do; it is what will please Him.

While the verse above encourages sharing of food, our giving shouldn't be limited to food. Mother Teresa rightly says, "*God gives us things to share, God doesn't give us things to hold.*" God's blessings in our lives aren't limited to what we can eat, so we too must share with others all of the blessings that He has given to us, and not hoard them.

I know what it is to lack certain things in life. I also know the joy that accompanies receiving from informed and cheerful givers. Aside Jesus who continues to be the first and best example of a giver in our lives, my uncle Dele has also taught me a lot about giving by being a great example. He became my uncle not by blood but because of Jesus. The Lord is our connecting factor. Uncle Dele has his own family but upon

seeing the absence of a father-figure in my life, chose to take on that role. I never shy away from telling him how grateful I am that he allowed me to share him with his family.

The outstanding thing about him is that he doesn't only give when he has more than enough, he gives even when he doesn't have enough. And because to whom much is given much is expected, I try as much as possible to share what I have with others too, also by being their support, a prayer partner and encourager. Jesus himself said: *"It may make you happy when you receive things. But it makes you more happy when you give things to someone"* (Acts 20:35). A lot of people claim to be Christians, but not all of us experience the happiness that comes with giving and sharing; and that's because we haven't been sharing with others; whether it's sharing our time, knowledge or other resources. We are consumed with concerns only for ourselves and our families, and have little or no thoughts for others. To help

broaden our thinking, here's a poem titled *God Pity the Poor*, by Amos Russel Wells.

*"God pity the poor!" I cry.
And I feel a virtuous glow;
Not many so tender as I
To the weight of the sad world's woe.
"God pity the poor!" I shout,
And draw back my garment's hem.
God pities the poor, no doubt;
But how am I pitying them?*

It is not enough to observe the state of others and verbally express our concerns; we must do our bit to help out as much as we can, knowing that our giving is recorded in God's book and we will be duly rewarded (Proverb 28:27). Here is another poem, *Charity*, by Eliza and Sarah Wolcott

*Recorded in the Book of Life – blest name;
And blest the soul that feels another's wo;*

*Who when the houseless stranger weary
came,
Welcom'd his guest, a favor to bestow.
Blest soul! who wipes the tears from
weeping eyes,
Who hastens to the widow's lonely shade,
There mingling in the hapless orphan's
sighs,
Leads them to spring's perennial fountain
head.
There speak of all those mansions well
prepar'd,
Where Jesus smiles and blesses all that
mourn,
The father of the fatherless, the widow's
guard,
To comfort all the comfortless, and forlorn.*

*Blest soul! who visits oft the prisoner's cell,
Who cheers that dark, that dreaded damp
abode,*

*Where often pale and wan in chains they
dwell,
Forgotten, lie beneath oppression's load.*

*Blest soul! whose prayers and alms are
freely given
To all affliction's sons and daughters here;
Such incense bears a sweet perfume to
heaven,
And angels lend a listening ear to hear.*

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to give you the grace to be a cheerful and consistent giver.*
- ♥ *Pray that your giving and sharing reflect God's love to others.*
- ♥ *Ask for a caring heart to spot out the needy near you.*

37 | The Handicap

“But he said to me, ‘I will be kind to you and I will help you. That will be enough for you. When you are weak, I will show that I am completely powerful to help you.’ So I am happy to be proud about my weakness. Then I know that Christ's power will be with me.”

2 Corinthians 12:9, EASY

THERE are different kinds of handicap but, because physical handicaps are more obvious, they are the most popular. But there are also mental and emotional handicaps. A handicap is something that limits you and your activities; it's supposed

to make progress and success difficult; yes, difficult, but not impossible because every day the list of those who have overcome their handicap and became successful is increasing.

Did you know **Stephen Hawking**, the theoretical physicist, astrophysicist, cosmologist, and eminent scientist was diagnosed with ALS (medical acronym for *Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis*) at age 21 and was paralyzed from head to toe? He used voice synthesizer so he could communicate and a wheelchair that was operated through slight movements of his head and eyes. The catalogue includes others like:

- **John Milton**, the great poet was blind.
- **Beethoven** who made such great music was deaf!
- **John Nash**, the American mathematician who is a Nobel Prize winner in Economics in 1994, suffered from acute paranoid schizophrenia but fought it and developed an academic career.

- **Oprah Winfrey** in her book, *What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience and Healing*, opened up about the trauma she suffered as a child and how it affected her. Thankfully, she found a way to overcome it and has gone on to become very successful.

In the Scriptures, Apostle Paul speaks of a handicap, though he doesn't mention what it is exactly. Many Bible scholars have leaned towards it being only a physical handicap. I for one think it's physical, mental and emotional because of the things said about him, and all the challenges he faced in ministry (2 Corinthians 10:10; 2 Corinthians 11:23-30). Like we all do when we have challenges and limitations, Paul attempted to pray away his handicap. He prayed and prayed and prayed but God said no, because Paul's handicap served a purpose in keeping him humble (2 Corinthians 12:7-8), also because God had plans of teaching him how to overcome his handicap.

In the end Paul learnt that handicaps could be overcome when we wholly depend upon Jesus to supply the strength and power, we need to accomplish His purpose. His handicap notwithstanding, Paul went on more missionary journeys than any of the other apostle; he also wrote most of the epistles in the New Testament. That's amazing! I've also had to deal with several handicaps; the proof that I overcame at least one of them is this book you're reading, and the other books I've authored.

Each and every one of us have handicaps, some we are aware of and others we're not aware of; but none is too great that can't be overcome if we but rely on the help that Christ offers. As a matter of fact, it's only when we truly embrace our handicap and received help from Christ that we become useful to God. See 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, *“Christian friends, remember the time when God called you to come to him. Think about what you were like. Not many of you were clever or powerful in the*

way that people think is good. Not many of you belonged to important families. Instead, God chose to use things that people think are silly. He did this so that clever people would be ashamed. Yes, God chose to use things that people think are weak. He did this so that powerful people would be ashamed. God chose to use things that people think are useless. People who belong to this world do not like those things. They think that they have no value. God did this so that the things that seem important would become unimportant. Because of all this, nobody can be proud of themselves in front of God.”

Charles U. Wagner says, “While God is pleased to use man, He is not dependent upon man and his natural ability. A God who is seen guiding is One who is also providing. He delights in taking our weakness and showing His strength. Then the glory goes to Him and not to us. Ours is not to complain in areas where we feel we have been short-changed, but

to delight in God's taking the little that we have and showing the greatness of His power and Person through us."

Perspective is really important. When how we view our handicaps change, we too like Paul will be able to say, *"So I am happy to be proud about my weakness. Then I know that Christ's power will be with me,"* also, that we can do all things (Philippians 4:13).

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to give you His perspective on the disabilities and difficulties you currently face.*
- ♥ *Pray for insight into what you're called to do despite your handicap.*
- ♥ *Exercise faith in God's grace and power and look away from your handicap.*

38 | When Slandered

“But nobody can make a weapon that will beat you, when your enemies attack you. If people accuse you of bad things, you will show that they are wrong. That is what the Lord will do as a gift for his servants. Yes, I will show that they are right.’ That is what the Lord says.”

Isaiah 54:17, EASY

IN Matthew 12:22-24, after Jesus healed the man who had a bad spirit in him that made him blind and dumb, the people who witnessed the healing were very surprised, and began to contemplate if Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. But just as soon as they

began to think this way, the Pharisees spoke up and accused Jesus of using Satan's authority to perform such miracles.

In Acts 2, when the day of Pentecost finally arrived, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples who were gathered together, and they began to speak in languages they had not previously learned. The volume of voices attracted the people around; and as they gathered, the believers began to speak, and people who were from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome etc. could all hear them speak their languages. But then, some people began to laugh at the disciples and say they had drunk too much wine.

Also in Acts 6, we see Stephen, a man helped by God in many special ways. He taught the people about God, but some men spoke against him just because they didn't agree with his teachings. They argued with him. But when they

didn't win, they paid people to slander Stephen before the Jewish leaders.

As for Paul, he was misunderstood so many times. He always had to prove or defend himself over what was said or perceived about him. What did Jesus say again? *“A student is not more important than his teacher is”* (Luke 6:40). If Jesus could be slandered, why wouldn't His disciples? Why wouldn't you, and why wouldn't I?

If you're a child of God trying to live in a way that pleases God and you're also involved in the sharing of the good news, one of the weapons the enemy will use against you is slander. To slander someone is to make false and damaging statements against the person; the aim is to damage the person's reputation and make them less credible, less believable. Slander is a powerful tool the enemy employs against us. But what does the Bible say about the tongue again?

“A person's tongue is like a fire. It has the power of everything in the world that is wrong.

It is a small part of the body but it can spoil the whole person. Like a fire, it can destroy all of a person's life. It is a fire that comes from the fire of hell itself... It is like a bad poison that can cause death. (James 3:6, 8b).

The Devil knows that if he can ruin our testimony with false accusations people make against us, then he can make us less credible, less believable as we share the gospel. No wonder Charles Spurgeon said, “*Satan leaves no stone unturned against the Church of God. He uses not simply the hand, but what is oftener a sharper weapon, the tongue. We can bear a blow, sometimes, but we cannot endure an insult. There is a great power in the tongue. We can rise from a blow which smote us to the ground; but we cannot so easily recover from slander that lays the character low.*”

While we cannot control the way people perceive us or the narrative, they try to spread about us, we can handle slander the way David did in Psalm 120. He prayed about it, seeking

God's help. See verse 2. I prayed, 'Lord, keep me safe from people who tell lies. Save me from people who want to deceive me.' After praying, David received assurance from God and was confident in His intervention. See verse 3. *How will God punish you, you people who deceive others? He will punish you properly!* And verse 4, *"Yes, the sharp arrows of a soldier will hurt you. They will give you pain, like wood that burns with fire."* He also chose not to let the situation he was in influence him negatively. In verse 7, he says, *"I want to live here in peace. But when I say this, they only want war!"* Even though those who were against him wanted war, he remained one who longed for peace.

When dealing with slander, we too can pray and be confident about God's intervention while we continue doing the things that are right and please God, because He already promised us in our opening verse, *"But nobody can make a weapon that will beat you, when your enemies*

attack you. If people accuse you of bad things, you will show that they are wrong. That is what the Lord will do as a gift for his servants. Yes, I will show that they are right.’ That is what the Lord says.”

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to help you believe in His ability to protect you from slander and vindicate you when slandered.*
- ♥ *Pray for courage to forge ahead and keep doing the right things even in the midst of slander.*
- ♥ *Pray not to slow down in devotion to God, no matter the slander against you.*

39 | There's Room for You

“My angel will go in front of you. He will bring you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. I will destroy them completely.”

Exodus 23:23, EASY

GOD'S promise to His people was that they would be led by His angel to a prepared place. He goes on to tell them what to expect. The land was already occupied by Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites. Before they get alarmed, God reassures them that He will destroy any threats to their settlement. We already know Israel was an unbelieving nation.

Even though everything God did with them was to help them to believe in Him, they got scared after the spies gave a frightful report; at last, for their obstinately uncooperative attitude and persistent unbelief, they didn't enter the prepared place.

Have you ever doubted that it was God sending you to go somewhere or do something because that space was already crowded and everyone else seemed to be doing that same thing you were called to do? Well, I hope the scripture above helps you realize that God can lead you someplace that's already crowded, to do something that seems to have already been done. What you need to do is follow God's leading and trust that He will make room for you. I'll share my favourite examples for this point I'm trying to prove; it's about the prophets in the Bible and the writers of the Gospels and epistles.

Do you know how many books of the prophets we have in the Old Testament? We

have Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentation, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi. Though they are separated into groups called Major and Minor prophets by Bible scholars, God called their writers Prophets. They all had unique messages during their time, but none of them was operating in an office that had not been occupied before, nor gave a prophecy as though no one had ever prophesied before. Yet, we can't deny that there was need for each and every one of them. In other words, God made room for them.

Did you ever wonder why we have four accounts of the Gospel? Isn't it all the same story? Assuming Matthew wrote his first, why did the others bother with theirs? Well, it might be the same story but with four writers, each with unique perspective; and what we miss from one account, we find in another, what we read briefly from one account, we get the details from

another account. Aren't you glad that you don't have just Matthew's account of the Gospel? There's room for all four accounts. This is why we are advised not to compare ourselves with others because each person is unique! Even if we are called to operate in the same ministry, called to the same purpose and gifted with the same spiritual gifts and given the same opportunities, nobody will do it like you, and no one will do it like me or the next person. So, answer God's call and embrace your uniqueness. Let Him handle the rest.

In John 4:1-3, we read about how the Pharisees tried to pit John against Jesus, as though they were competitors or rivals. Even though they were doing God's work in similar yet unique ways, what we ought to emulate is John's and Jesus' way of reasoning. John knew who he was and who he wasn't. John replied, "A man can receive only what God gives to him, nothing else. You yourselves will remember that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but God sent me

to prepare things for the Messiah” (John 3:27-28). Jesus knew what His assignment was and what it wasn’t. He did not baptize anyone, He preached the gospel, went about doing good and died and resurrected for our sake (Read John 4:3; Acts 10:38; Matthew 27-28).

Often times when the Devil doesn’t succeed in making us turn down God’s call because there are others doing what we are called to do and occupying spaces we are led to, he tries to get us to compare ourselves with them and compete against them, and in the process lose our uniqueness. We must remember that this is a waste of time. If we fail to embrace and focus on our uniqueness, we may not be able to accomplish what God has asked us to do.

I’ll let you in on one secret. Only when we embrace our uniqueness do we see that God has already made room for us. No wonder in verse 24, the verse that follows the opening verse above, God tells His people: *Do not worship their gods. Do not serve them. Do*

not copy the evil things these people do. Destroy their idols and break their special stones in pieces. In summary, don't be a copycat; do your thing, dare to be yourself, be different and you'll never feel out of place. God will handle any threats.

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Ask God to help you feel secure while being yourself.*
- ♥ *Pray that you have the courage to go where God leads you and do what He asks you, regardless of who's already there and who's doing what.*
- ♥ *Pray for consistent faith until you accomplish purpose.*

40 | The Future

*"I am sure that you will always be good to me.
You will love me all the days of my life. That
will never change. I will live in the Lord's
house for as long as I live."*

Psalm 23:6, EASY

EVERY time I think of the future, I remember a particular conversation two people had in a reality show I watched. The young lady had mentioned that she loved to plan, and always planned ahead. To that, the young man replied with a question: "How far ahead can you see?"

We humans can't see that far ahead, can we? We don't even know what will happen to us the

very next minute. Of course, this doesn't mean we shouldn't plan; sure, we should, and I urge you to make your plans. The point I'm trying to pass across is that it is because we can't see very far that we are usually afraid of the future. If we could tell what will happen the next minute, then we wouldn't worry so much, since we would be able to plan adequately. If I could tell that what would happen to me next year would be good, I would make choices that would ensure I get that goodness; and if it's bad, I would do all I can to avoid that outcome. The thing is, if we could see far ahead, sure we might not be so worried again as we usually are. But then, we won't need God.

In Isaiah 46:9-10, God tells us about Himself. *“Remember all the things that I did a long time ago. I am God. There is nobody else like me. There is no other God, except me. From the beginning, I say what will happen at the end. Long ago, I spoke about future things that have not yet happened. I say this: “My*

purpose will not change. I will do everything that I want to do.” And in Ecclesiastes 3:11 we find out a bit about ourselves. “God has chosen a good time for all things to happen. He has caused people to think about things that will continue for ever. But nobody can completely understand everything that God has done, from the beginning of their lives to the end.”

While God is all-knowing, even able to tell the end of a thing from the beginning, we only can long to know what will happen in the future. It seems God made it so, so that He can remain God, we can realize our need for Him, and then go ahead to depend on Him. Read what He says through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:11. *“I, the Lord, tell you this: I have decided what I will do for you. I have plans to help you to do well. I do not want to hurt you. I want to give you hope for a good life in the future.”* God knows we will recognize our limitations and, in our helplessness, turn to Him; but way before that, He’s already made plans for us, plans that

lead to hope for a good life in the future. Who else but God will be able to plan effectively for the future? None other than He. Who else can guarantee all the outcomes will be favourable? None other than He.

David figured this out early. Instead of being afraid of the future or worrying about what he didn't have the ability to control, he turned to God. In the verse above, he seemed to be saying, "Why should I entertain feelings of uncertainty about the future? I have God who knows the future. He has been good to me up until now. I am sure that He will always be good to me! He will love me all the days of my life, and that will never change. I will always enjoy His presence here on earth; and when I die, I will live with Him in heaven forever." And with that, all his fears disappeared.

To help the rest of us get to this point in our faith walk, Jesus goes on a lengthy discourse about worry in Matthew 6:25-34. My favourite lines from Jesus' words are in verses 31-32. "So

do not worry about these things. Do not always say, “What will we eat?”, or “What will we drink?”, or “What will we wear?” People who do not know God are always trying to get these things. But as for you, your Father in heaven knows that you need them.” Do you see what I see? It is people who do not know God that worry so much. So, when you are worried about the future, what it means is that you do not know God; and if you aren’t worried about the future, then you truly know God.

You know that God doesn’t change. He is good and will always be good to you. His love for you is permanent and unchanging too. You’ll always enjoy His presence and He will meet your needs. He is always around so you don’t have to feel alone.

What are your fears about tomorrow? About the future? Whatever they are, let the words of Corrie Ten Boom, a woman who was faced with so many uncertainties yet had no fear of the

future, minister to you: *“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”*

PRAYER FOCUS

- ♥ *Confess your dependence on God.*
- ♥ *Tell Him your fears about the future.*
- ♥ *Ask Him to fill your heart with peace.*

BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR



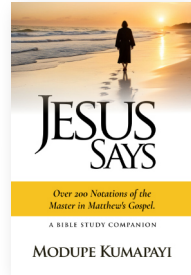
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A collection of ineffable, life-transforming ways to experience God.



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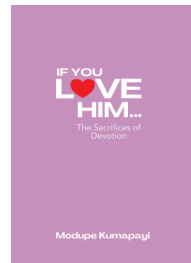
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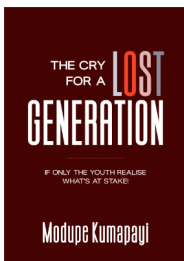
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A book that answers the question, What is God's love? And it presents the challenge, if you love God, then what?



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



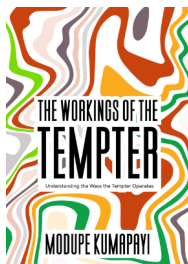
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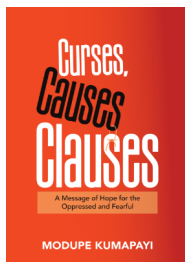
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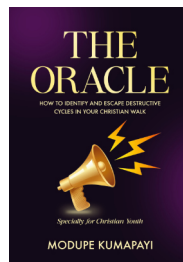
The Workings of the Tempter

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.



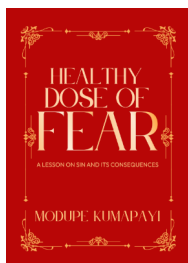
Curses, Causes and Clauses

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 Devotional

This book is a devotional guide with enough material to cover *all the days of your life*. And that's not an empty claim. There are just forty pieces here, each of which you're sure to read over and again, day after day, week after week, and in months and years ahead.

Infused into each piece are soft, easy-to-read materials that are plain to life, reflective of common experiences, and applicable to many issues of life. The copious reference to God's word does not just authenticate the soundness of thought and reason, the delivery comes with adaptable illustrations that everyone, old and young, all genders in all climes can relate with.

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.