

Letters in my green bag

*A Collection of ineffable,
life-transforming ways to
experience God*



Modupe
Kumapayi

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This book is a collection of short stories and teachings detailing my discovery about prayer in my walk with God.

DEDICATION

To everyone who wants to communicate
with God.

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My deepest gratitude goes to my family, which comprises of God, my mother Fadekemi and my uncle 'Dele. I acknowledge the support I consistently receive from them.

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PREFACE

I GREW up in a single-parent home. It was always God, my mum and I for a long time. In fact, it's still kind of just us three. My mother is a Christian; she has been since I can remember, and that means she took me along to church all the time. Though I went to church, however, I couldn't call myself a Christian; and though God had always been present in my life, I couldn't boast that I knew Him.

In church I heard people pray. At home I heard my mum pray; all the prayers were done to an invisible God to me, but One who made His answers, many times, very visible. Without a personal relationship with God, whenever I was asked to pray either in church or at home, I just mumbled the words I had heard others say so I could sound intelligent; but whenever I was alone, I would try praying with my own words

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for different requests; and though I often got answers to my prayers, whether it was a sheer act of divine mercy on God's part or, as they say, it was time and chance playing a role, I would never know. All I knew was that I was happy I had found a way to get my desires met.

After I gave my life to Christ and began my relationship with God, I discovered the importance of prayer, and developed a different perspective to prayer. I prayed different prayers and got different results. It's all what I discovered through my personal experiences that I want to share with you in this book.

You may want to see this book, therefore, as a guide to prayer for the novice; it's the kind of book I would have wanted someone to give me after I gave my life to Christ, something that would feed me with knowledge about prayer and help me manage my expectations.

I'm a firm believer that there is a high probability for people to do better when they are armed with the knowledge of how to do it. So, in

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this book you will be armed with knowledge for effective prayers. Everything will be presented in the simplest form.

If after you read the book your prayer life improves, then all my experiences both good and bad wouldn't have been for nothing.

I pray the Holy Spirit beams His light in your heart that you may gain full understanding, in Jesus' name. Amen!

1

SETTING THE SCENE

“S ISI, COME over here. I have a gift for you! You’re going to love it,” my mum said.

Across Nigeria, ‘Sisi’ is colloquial for young lady. It’s the nickname my mum used for me for as long as I can remember, especially when she wants to surprise me. And I kind of like it because it gives me expectation that something good was up, and I couldn’t wait to see what it was.

“I’d be right there,” I replied, rushing to the living room where my mum called from.

“Here you go,” my mum said, handing me a big nylon bag.

“What’s in it?”

“Open it and see for yourself.”

“What’s the occasion?”

“Do I need an occasion to buy you a gift?”

“Well, no but—”

“Oh please, open it and see what’s in there.”

I peeped into the bag and saw two glittering objects, a yellow one and a green one. I grabbed them and brought them out. In my hands were two beautiful bags. There is something about ladies with bags, isn’t there? Though small I then considered myself, holding a bag for my little things sure made me look the lady I craved to be, do you get?

“Wow! Thanks mum,” I gushed. “These bags are beautiful. The green one is my absolute favourite!”

“When did green become your favourite colour?”

“It’s not, neither is yellow. But I just like the green one better. Thanks again, mum.”

“I’m glad you love them. You’re welcome. Rock them and enjoy.”

That initial joy of receiving the bags died down after a few months. I had used them so often till

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I got tired of them. A young girl where we lived had liked the yellow one, so I gave it to her as a gift. Though I was tired of the green one too, I couldn't part with it.

One particular day I was feeling really lonely. You would think growing up as an only child I would be used to being alone, but I never was. There were days I would feel really lonely. Naturally I had many hobbies I used to pass time, and right at the top of my list were reading and writing in my diary.

On this particular lonely day, I decided to read. I took a book from my mum's library, it was titled, "Letters from a Solo Survivor" by Kathy Keay. In it were a series of short letters, and right there, midway through the book, I decided to pray to God about my feelings and concerns.

When I tried praying out loud, I couldn't find the words and so I decided to write letters instead.

"Dear God," I started. "Can You please send me a friend that will be only mine? I feel really lonely. Sometimes, I'm okay when I'm by myself

but sometimes I'm not. I'm sorry I'm writing this down; I would have said it out loud if it didn't seem so weird and I didn't get so tongue-tied. I hope You understand. Thanks."

Those were the words of my first letter to God. When I was done writing, I didn't know what else to do. How would God receive it if I don't send it? I sat and thought about it for a while and then I had an idea.

"I'd write the letters and put them in my green bag. God can read them there. Whenever I got the answers to the prayers in a letter, I'd remove the letter from the bag," I said to myself.

And that's how it began, my first personal encounter with prayers. So, I'd write letters to God in my own words, drop them in my green bag and hope for a reply; and then I'd get a reply, and be so excited. I'd take out that letter that I had gotten answers to and replace it with a new one, and the cycle would continue until the letters turned into real conversations.

2 OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

So, Jesus taught them this prayer: “Our heavenly Father, may the glory of your name be the center on which our life turns” Luke 11:2a (TPT).

M ANY YEARS later...
I was suddenly no longer a child.
An adult!

As it were, the nuances of life were all screaming at me to put my childish ways behind, and that was to include that I no longer wrote letters and hid them in a bag. One hard consequence of that was that I would no longer

talk to God, not with letters or with my words. I had fallen back to the pattern of just using the words of others so that I could sound intelligent.

That pattern of prayer was what I thought adults do, and it's what I launched into for the many years through secondary school and university.

When I got back home from the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, God disrupted my plans – I came to realize that only later – just so I could get to know Him truly. A series of encounters had led to me surrendering my life to Jesus, finally that is: one, the absence of my biological father in my life was the foundation of my relationship with God.

My parents weren't married by the time they had me; they never got married to each other. I was like that visitor that showed up uninvited and refused to leave. I never felt wanted by my dad. I still do not feel wanted by him. Though we tried getting to know each other and building a relationship, it just didn't work. And it left a void in my life. It was that void I invited God to fill.

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I remember the moment I discovered God could be my Father. It all started with the soundtrack of a gospel movie by Mount Zion Film Productions; and then it continued on the pages of a Bible concordance my mum gave me, and then proceeded to verses of the Holy Scriptures that proved that God is a Father, our Father, MY Father.

I read loads of those scriptures and drank in the words I needed to quench the thirst of my soul. The climax came on the day I listened to a sermon by the late Evangelist Billy Graham. I bowed my head and asked Jesus into my heart, using the Evangelist's words of course.

After the prayer, we were assured we were now Born Again, and became children of God. Seeing that I was now a child of God, I took the initiative to attempt praying, this time using my words. I said:

*“Dear God,
I learnt You are our Father.
Can I address You as Father?”*

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Since You know all things, You already know I don't have a relationship with my biological father, and it's the one thing I would really like.

Can You and I have a father-daughter kind of relationship instead – the type most of my friends have with their fathers and I don't, the type I was bullied about when I was younger for not having?

Can You please love me unconditionally – the way fathers are supposed to?

And, can You please make my relationship with You work? Because, I couldn't make the one with my dad work.

Can You please be my friend too?

You know my mum is my mum but still my friend. I want that with You too. Would You be my Father and Friend; and can You also please help me with some money? I don't have a job yet.

Thank You."

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Blame me all you want for being so personal with the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth! But it felt really cool talking with my dear heavenly Father that way. It was my first real prayer, and I liked the feel of it like I never exactly felt with those letters in my green bag.

When I was done praying my first prayer as a believer, I felt light, I believed I had been heard by God and that was that.

Looking back now, I see praying to God isn't weird or awkward as some people made me feel growing up. In my new experience, I called and related with God as MY Father, and I wasn't tongue-tied because I was simply having a conversation with my Father. This was a safe space for me. I could be myself.

THE MOMENT TO PRAY

“MO, I’m in trouble!”

Okay, ‘Sisi’ is my mum’s sassy way of calling me to surprise me with something. But ‘Mo’ –

the stylish abbreviation of the longish ‘ModupeOlaOluwa,’ which is my full native Yoruba name – was the particular friendly clarion call by a friend for my partnership, especially when something really fishy was afoot. It’s like a battle call; and you get to expect that among close buddies.

“What! What’s going on?”

“Trouble at work! I may get fired!”

“Wait! What? What did you do?”

“It’s a long story....”

My close friend had called me frantically that evening. Something had gone wrong. There had been an incident at work. He was a medical doctor but was always offshore working with engineers in an oil rig. The threat on his job had been because he had given a medical report to favour someone.

There had been a fight in a cafeteria; it was between a man and a woman; both were colleagues of his. In the course of the incident, the man had slapped the woman and she had gone to the clinic where my friend was to report

the issue and ask for medication. He had given her medicine to ease her pain and had written out a report. The issue didn't die down; instead, it was brought before the board.

My friend had been called to recount what he knew about what had transpired, and his involvement in all that happened. He then gave an account that favoured the man. He had done that to help the man because the man had approached him to help him. He had said he was a family man and would lose his job if it came out that he actually hit the woman.

One way or another, the truth had been revealed and he was in trouble; his job was on the line, not that of the actual culprit he thought to save. He called me so he could get things off his chest and at least reveal the whole truth to someone.

“Why not pray about it?” I said to him after having heard the full story. “Talk to God. Tell Him everything and let Him give you the courage to do the right thing, and hopefully He will salvage the situation as well.”

“Pray to God?” he replied sounding both surprised and confused.

“Yes, pray to God.”

“See, Mo, the only way I know how to pray to God is how my father at home taught me and my siblings, and quite frankly I haven’t done that in ages.”

“How did your father teach you?”

“He would lead prayer points and we will all repeat them. Sometimes, we would just say, Amen. Honestly, I don’t have prayer points in my head to start with.”

“But you know there are other ways to pray. When you’re around, we should see. I will show you how.”

“Okay, then.”

Few days later, while the matter was still pending, my friend returned home and I went to see him. After he had gone over the story again, he finally said: “Oh, yeah, teach me how to pray your way.”

I replied, “There is no formula or special technique for praying. Just have a simple

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conversation with God. He is your Father. Talk to Him like that.”

“Really? Show me how you do it.”

“Okay.” So, I did a mock prayer for him....

“Is that it?”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“I can’t be comfortable doing it like that; it just seems too easy.”

“You can put a chair in front of you while you speak to Him and imagine He is there, if that would help.”

“That, I can work with.”

“Good, now you try it, just speak from your heart.”

“This is weird, it will be weird.”

“It won’t be; just try it and believe God hears you and will respond back to you, okay?”

“Okay, I do believe He hears and responds.”

“So, pray!”

My friend finally tried praying to God as though he was having a conversation with God. And God responded by giving my friend the courage he needed to be honest, though he was

suspended for a while and didn't continue his job offshore. He got a placement elsewhere.

THE RIGHT TONE

THE HOLY Spirit had taught me to pray aright without having any one model it for me; and I had in turn taught my friend to pray with that same freedom the Holy Spirit gives. Our experiences so far remind me of Jesus and His disciples.

The disciples were privileged to spend three and a half years walking with Jesus, this was the duration of His earthly/public ministry; and at several times within that period, they had seen Him pray. They heard Him pray, and He prayed in a way and manner that was different from how they had been taught to pray and had seen the priests and other religious leaders pray. The words of Jesus were not repetitions. At first, they didn't ask questions, but their curiosity later pushed them to approach Jesus.

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One day, after Jesus had finished praying, one of His disciples came over to Him and said, “*Would you teach us a model prayer that we can pray, just as John did for his disciples?*” and Jesus taught them to pray, He said, “*Our heavenly Father...*” (Luke 11:1-2a).

Jesus’ first words decided the tone appropriate for prayers. We are to speak to God as we would to a Father, for He is truly Father to everyone that is already born again or seeks to be born again. From the moment we become God’s children, He ceases to be a distant figure in our lives but One close by. He created us and knows us intimately. He is One before Whom we can be completely vulnerable.

Though Jesus had begun the model prayer by saying “Our heavenly Father,” it doesn’t necessarily mean all our prayers must begin with those words. It however means we should always bear in mind that when we approach God in prayer, we are approaching our Father.

My friend whom I had taught to pray had grown up in a Christian home and was a believer in the sense of attending church from childhood, howbeit nominal, which accounts for why he didn't know how to pray by himself. He must have observed ecclesiastic and sanctimonious prayers by both the clergy and high professing Christians in their impressive manners. The way and manner prayer was introduced to him by me was strange because it was simple, a simple conversation.

Over the years since I became a Christian, I have seen a lot of believers struggle with having a personal prayer time with God. They only thrive in prayer when in a congregation with other believers praying together. Could it be that their struggle is because they didn't know God as their Father? So, they weren't comfortable speaking with Him privately and confidently? Could that be why you're struggling with having a personal prayer time too? Let's check out Galatians 4:5-6.

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5 Yet all of this was so that he would redeem and set free those held hostage to the law so that we would receive our freedom and a full legal adoption as his children.

6 And so that we would know that we are his true children, God released the Spirit of Sonship into our hearts—moving us to cry out intimately, “My Father! My true Father!” (TPT).

Apostle Paul let us know in this scripture we read that in Christ, we have been fully adopted by God; we are now His children. In fact, when we surrendered our lives to Jesus, the evidence of our salvation was proven by the release of God’s Spirit, the very Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who now resides in us. God’s Spirit on the inside of us confirms to us who we truly are, God’s children, and now enabled to cry out and confidently call God “Our Father, our true Father.”

Knowing this, you can now draw near to God freely and boldly in prayer to receive mercy,

grace, strength etc. In the same Galatians 4, Paul opens the chapter by saying,

1 As long as an heir is a minor, he's not really much different than a servant, although he's the master over all of them.

2 For until the time appointed by the father, the child is under the domestic supervision of the guardians of the estate. (TPT)

For the sake of the point I'm trying to pass across, I would interpret these verses to mean: It's true that you are a child of God and have become joint-heirs with Christ and are entitled to a lot of blessings and inheritance; but for as long as you remain spiritually immature, not having full knowledge of the relationship you have with God through Christ, and the provisions and privileges that are yours for the taking, someone else will lie to you about who you are; that person will decide the ratio of good things you have access to... and that person isn't God but the devil and his demons.

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Prayer is a two-way communication line between us and God. Not only does prayer bring us closer to God, through it we get access to all that God has apportioned for us for being His children. Now if you don't get comfortable with praying to God and doing it regularly, you will end up short-changing yourself and allowing the devil dictate a lot of things in your life; he will hide so much from you, and you can't even begin to imagine the havoc he'll cause you spiritually.

The only person that will benefit from the absence of a personal prayer time in your life is the devil. He will come in and fulfil his three-fold mission in your life. Jesus said, *"A thief has only one thing in mind—he wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy"* John 10:10a (TPT).

That thief is the devil. He wants to steal your rights and privileges. He wants to slaughter, i.e., kill whatever relationship you have with God and whatever vision God has shared with you. He also wants to destroy your glorious destiny. One powerful weapon with which you can beat him at his game is prayer.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

WHEN I pray, I use my own words as much as possible with the exception of when I use scriptures to pray; even then, I still use my words. I like to be free when speaking to my Father.

There are many denominations that give people exact words to say during prayers; those exact words were to be repeated not just while they are in the congregation but also in their personal prayer time. They make people believe that repeating those words would mean they would get exactly what they wanted from God. But why should I stick to certain words while praying to my Father? Doesn't He want to hear from me? Doesn't He want to hear what I have to say in my own words, and how I feel while praying? My needs change from time to time; how would a particular and restricted set of words express my specific feeling per time, and the different things I may need at different times?

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Needless to say, that a lot of people are in that dilemma. For instance, the university I attended was owned by a particular denomination, and our public prayers were void of feelings and originality because we were repeating someone else's words over and over again. It was so boring!

When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, He gave them a model prayer, He prayed using a particular set of words; but then, in other instances in the Scriptures where He prayed, He used other words while presenting His desires to God, thereby proving that our prayers could contain whatever words we believe would best express our feelings and concerns.

Here is The Lord's Model Prayer as rendered in Luke 11:2-4 (TPT):

2 So Jesus taught them this prayer: "Our heavenly Father, may the glory of your name be the center on which our life turns. May your Holy Spirit come upon us

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and cleanse us. Manifest your kingdom on earth. 3 And give us our needed bread for the coming day. 4 Forgive our sins as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us. And rescue us every time we face tribulations.”

Now compare another prayer of Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39 (TPT):

Then he walked a short distance away, and overcome with grief, he threw himself facedown on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if there is any way you can deliver me from this suffering, please take it from me. Yet what I want is not important, for I only desire to fulfill your plan for me.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen him.

See the difference between the prayers? It explains why you should be free from any form of restrictions that come with repetitions.

PRAYER POSTURE

THE FIRST prayer I prayed to surrender my life to Christ, I did it sitting on a couch in my living room with my head bowed and my eyes closed.

After I gave my life to Christ, I was told that in order to develop intimacy with God, I needed to have a quiet time with Him each day, preferably in the morning. The quiet time was to include a time of Bible study and prayers. I was excited to start, but my excitement died down quickly. I found myself struggling to stay awake each morning. I was struggling to stay awake because I was lying down. So, each morning, I would move from my room to the spare room in my house, study the word sitting down but pray standing up, eyes opened to avoid sleeping off.

A time came when I was plagued with a terrible sleep disorder called sleep paralysis, and I wanted God to correct it. I prayed many times on my knees, head bowed and eyes closed. When the healing came, I was so overjoyed, I

couldn't sit or stand or kneel to pray and praise God, I lay prostrate before Him, eyes closed.

I have only been admitted in the hospital twice so far. Both times, I was mainly laid down. I struggled to sit or stand because of how sick I was; and all the prayers I struggled to pray then were done with me lying on my back, eyes closed.

I once worked in a demanding work environment. I would wake up pretty early for my quiet time; but I often felt like it wasn't enough. So, when I alight at my bus stop and walked towards my office building, I would pray, walking. I loved it.

Altogether, I've prayed sitting, prayed standing, prayed kneeling, prayed lying prostrate, prayed lying on my back, and prayed walking. To be honest, to me, it really didn't matter what sort of prayer I was praying and what sort of posture I took; what mattered was that I was having a conversation with my Father. It can get really confusing trying to match a particular posture with a particular

prayer. Why complicate something that's meant to be simple?

While physical posture might not be relevant for prayer, the posture of our heart is relevant. Jesus taught about the right heart-posture in prayer. In His illustration were two men: a proud religious leader, and a despised tax collector. The account is in Luke 18:9-14.

11-12 The religious leader stood apart from the others and prayed, 'How I thank you, O God, that I'm not wicked like everyone else. They're cheaters, swindlers, and crooks—like that tax collector over there. God, you know that I never cheat or commit adultery; I fast from food twice a week and I give you a tenth of all I earn.'

13 "The tax collector stood alone in a corner, away from the Holy Place, and covered his face in his hands, feeling that he was unworthy even to look up to God. Beating his breast, he sobbed with brokenness and tears saying, 'God, please, in your

mercy and because of the blood sacrifice, forgive me, for I am nothing but the most miserable of all sinners!’

14 “Which one of them left for home that day reconciled to God? The humble tax collector, not the religious leader! For everyone who praises himself will one day be publicly humiliated, and everyone who humbles himself will one day be publicly honored and lifted up” (TPT).

Both men were standing but that didn’t seem to matter. They could have been kneeling or seated for all Jesus cared; their physical postures didn’t stop God from listening to them. Their words however revealed the state of their hearts, and the state of their hearts was one of the qualifying factors for answered prayers. One ended up having an effective prayer time while the other had simply put up a show.

The man who had an effective prayer time was the one who approached God with humility. He saw himself for what he truly was which was

one who needed God's mercy for answered prayers. He knew he couldn't get what he sought from God by doing any good deeds.

We too must always approach God with humility. We must always see ourselves for who we truly are, one who was once a sinner but had been saved. We must never think that we will qualify for God's help just because of our righteous deeds, but instead seek His mercy and see all our righteousness acts as filthy rags.

Remember, if you act proud before God, He will teach you a lesson on humility. But, if you humble yourself before God, then He will publicly exalt you.

BENEFITS OF PRAYER

FROM MY experience with prayers, here are some of the benefits I've enjoyed:

Peace: Since I believe I'm having a conversation with my Father, Someone who

wants to hear from me and cares deeply about me, I always unburden in the place of prayer and receive peace afterwards (1 Peter 5:7; John 14:27; 16:33).

Clarity: I learnt the hard way to put God first in all my decisions; and so, you'll often find me in the place of prayer asking God for direction; and I always wait to receive clarity. Only then do I know what to do (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalms 25:4-5).

Insight/Inspiration/Creativity: The Holy Spirit does way more than just help us speak in tongues. I have enjoyed insight while studying the Bible. I've come to have inspiration and grace for creativity for projects during prayers (John 15:26; 16:13-15).

Forgiveness: I've often found myself falling into sin, clear misdeeds, not as a habit, but by mistakes. I guess it's all more about my level of maturity. I know I should not sin, and I don't want to sin; but when I slip, and do something wrong, I take a cue from the mistakes of Adam and Eve, I prioritize my relationship with God

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over pride and fear and approach God to forgive me. He also gives me grace to forgive myself and those who offend me; as I often struggle with that as well (1 John 1:9).

Healing: When I am ill, I struggle to pray; so, I have formed the habit of praying ahead of time for divine health and healing. I have experienced the power of God at work in my body, and it makes me whole. This happened twice when I was admitted in hospital, and many times when I was ill at home (Isaiah 53:5).

Strength: I struggle with seeing things through. I struggle with remaining committed to a course God has called me to, especially when it's not yielding the desired results immediately. I also struggle with getting up for my quiet time. Other times, I struggle with getting through the day. But I always receive fresh strength in the place of prayer (Isaiah 40:29-31).

Provisions: My needs are constantly on my mind; but since I have a Father who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and can bring money

out of the mouth of a fish, I present my needs before God in prayer and see Him miraculously get them sorted (Matthew 6:25-32).

Protection: The life of a believer is characterized by a lot of spiritual warfare. Without the protection of God, it is impossible to survive even for a day. The name of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, all guarantee protection, and are accessible via prayer (Psalms 34:19).

Victory: Daniel was a man of prayer and he never lost any major challenge in his life. He was never defeated. He knew that was the secret to his victorious life. So, when he was threatened to stop praying, he kept at it. I also have encountered many victories, physically and spiritually, because of prayer (Psalms 120:1; Daniel 6:6-28).

Intimacy with God: There is this undeniable bond you have with God when you are a person who prays to Him every day about everything. God begins to reveal things to you too. He shares secrets with you and brings you into a

deeper revelation of the knowledge of Him. It's a bond that should be sort after and prized above everything else (Psalms 25:14).

DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS IN PRAYER

WHEN SPEAKING on prayer, James raises a valid point which is one of the major barriers between a lot of Christians and an effective prayer life with the Father. James 1:6-8 (TPT) says, *“Just make sure you ask empowered by confident faith without doubting that you will receive. For the ambivalent person believes one minute and doubts the next. Being undecided makes you become like the rough seas driven and tossed by the wind. You’re up one minute and tossed down the next. When you are half-hearted and wavering, it leaves you unstable. Can you really expect to receive anything from the Lord when you’re in that condition?”* The barrier here is called Double-mindedness.

Double-mindedness depicts lack of faith, or confident faith, as this version of scripture puts it. Many Christians/believers won't receive anything from God though they've prayed; and it's sometimes because they are double-minded. They go through the motions when they pray but one of the keys to having an effective prayer time, which is faith, is absent.

Some, while praying, have faith; but after they are done praying, they consider whether or not any progress has happened and conclude that they won't get their desires. This is not the right attitude when praying.

Many times, I've prayed and then tempted to doubt, mostly because the answers seem delayed. But then, I remember the situation of the man whose son was possessed with a mute spirit (Mark 9:14-27), though he had done well by bringing his son to Jesus for healing, he was lacking in one area, and it was addressed by Jesus. Read the account in verses 22b-24 (TPT):

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22b ...But please, if you're able to do something, anything—have compassion on us and help us!”

23 Jesus said to him, “What do you mean ‘if’? If you are able to believe, all things are possible to the believer.”

24 When he heard this, the boy’s father cried out with tears, saying, “I do believe, Lord; help my little faith!”

The man had little faith which he had already expressed by bringing his son to Jesus; but the confident faith required to receive the healing for his son was lacking. Realizing it, he cried out asking Jesus to increase his faith. It will do us no good to take our concerns to God in prayer and not express confident faith required to get the answers to our prayers even if the answers are delayed.

As believers when we pray and ask God for something, we must keep in mind that there are no impossibilities with God, and believing is

seeing, not the other way round. What I mean is, if you have faith, you don't have to see what you are asking for before believing that you have received it. You believe first, thereby exercising confident faith, and then God gives you your desires. See how Hebrews 11:1 (TPT) explains it:

“Now faith brings our hopes into reality and becomes the foundation needed to acquire the things we long for. It is all the evidence required to prove what is still unseen.”

Instead of continuously suffering the effect of lack of faith or little faith in our prayer lives, we can cry out to Jesus like the man whose son was possessed did, and ask God to increase our faith.

SIN'S IMPACT ON PRAYER

THE FIRST man and woman – Adam and Eve, the only humans not biologically born like the

rest of us, but made directly by God's hand – had God for their Father. Though the Bible doesn't give too much detail on their relationship with God, from the little facts it does give, we can assume it was an intimate relationship until the untoward happened.

God had planted a garden in Eden and put Adam there, Eve would join later. Both had a lot of freedom. God gave Adam work to do and spoke to him, when He saw he was lonely He created Eve to join him in the Garden. He also gave them freewill, with the hope that they would choose to obey Him when He gives them instructions. We also discover later that both Adam and Eve could speak to God too. In these times, when we communicate with God, it's called prayer. I'm trying to get you to understand that Adam and Eve had a relationship with God. Now, that we have established that, I won't digress anymore.

Though Adam and Eve had freewill, they didn't choose to obey God, just as most humans

do many times. They were deceived by the devil (through the serpent) whose main intention had been to separate them from God. He emerged victorious in his attempt, for after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, God came. This is how The Message Bible (MSG) renders the account in Genesis 3:8.

“When they heard the sound of God strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.”

Adam and Eve who might have at one time rejoiced at the sound of God in the garden, now hid from Him. Just like Adam and Eve, the reason a lot of Christians struggle with their prayer life, and ultimately with their relationship with God, is the presence of sin in their lives. Sin separates us from God.

One thing remains true then and now: sin fills one with shame and fear. When you feel ashamed and afraid, your first instinct wouldn't be to run towards God but away from Him.

Letters in my Green Bag

The story didn't end with Adam and Eve hiding, for God did what any Father would. He called out to them.

God called to the Man: "Where are you?" (vs. 9)

Adam responds, He said, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid" (vs. 10).

After that, a conversation ensued, what might have been an opportunity for repentance, yes, discipline and restoration, became that of blame game and judgment. The same way God called out to Adam and Eve is the same way He calls out to us if we sin, to come out from wherever we've gone hiding ourselves. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, that's God calling out to us; when we hear Him, we must respond and not harden our hearts (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

God calls out to us to give us opportunity to speak to Him again and hopefully make things

right. When such opportunities come, we ought to take them, confess our sins to God, receive His forgiveness and restore our relationship with Him.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve never repented of their sin, and the last conversation they had with God was the one recorded after their disobedience, not only that they were ushered out of the garden and into the harsh realities outside the garden; thereafter, we never heard of their relationship with their Father anymore. What disaster sin can cause! It was their children God spoke to next.

“So, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground, the same dirt out of which they’d been made. He threw them out of the garden and stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path to the Tree-of-Life” (vs. 23-24).

Letters in my Green Bag

The conversation you had with God before you fell into sin doesn't have to be the last prayer you should pray. Don't let the devil welcome you into an unknown where the presence of God wouldn't be felt, where your relationship with God will suddenly be a thing of the past. If you know and believe that God is your Father, then you must be comfortable approaching Him even when you don't feel worthy because you have sinned.

Interestingly, one of the most fascinating characters in the Bible, David, a passionate psalmist and lover of God, made the kind of terrifying mistake we all fear a lot: immorality. David did not just sleep with Bathsheba, another man's wife, he actually came up with a scheme that caused Uriah's death, the innocent man whose wife he had defiled, all in a bid to hide his sin of adultery (Read 2 Samuel 11). However, after being confronted about his sin and in his terrible sinful state, David still recognized his need of God and restoration of

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his sweet relationship with the Father. Hear him in Psalm 51:17 (TPT),

“The fountain of your pleasure is found in the sacrifice of my shattered heart before you. You will not despise my tenderness as I bow down humbly at your feet.”

If you approach God humbly, showing sincere remorse for the sins you’ve committed and a desire for atonement, then He will surely not turn you away, but will cleanse you from your sins and restore you back to Him.

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

WHAT ROLE prayer plays in our lives can’t be quantified. “How praying rests, the weary!” a songwriter says. The reverse is equally true: How burdensome our lives remain if we fail to pray! Let’s list a few reasons we need prayer in our lives:

1. We Pray to Sustain Connectivity with God

“But Jesus often slipped away from them and went into the wilderness to pray” Luke 5:16 (TPT).

Jesus introduced God to us as our Father and modelled for us ways to make the relationship with our heavenly Father thrive; one of which is through prayer. Since effective communication is key for a successful relationship, Jesus would often slip away from His disciples, the crowd that followed Him, and the demands of ministry, so He could communicate with the Father. We must emulate Jesus and prioritize our prayer time above all else. This is how we sustain connectivity with God always.

2. We Pray to Learn the Will of God.

“So, Jesus said, “I speak to you eternal truth. The Son is unable to do anything from himself or through his own initiative. I only

do the works that I see the Father doing, for the Son does the same works as his Father”
John 5:19 (TPT).

“For I’m not speaking as someone who is self-appointed, but I speak by the authority of the Father himself who sent me, and who instructed me what to say” John 12:49 (TPT).

Just as communication is a two-way process, it’s the same with prayer. When you pray, you are communicating with God. He in turn responds. He may respond to your prayers by showing you things, or by instructing you with what to say and do.

Jesus never did anything outside of God’s will, nor did He ever say words that God didn’t inspire. All of this He could do because He was constantly in tune with God through prayer. We too must see prayer as a means to be privy to God’s will and leading.

3. We Pray for Survival.

“They mobbed Jesus and threw him out of the city, dragging him to the edge of the cliff on the hill on which the city had been built, ready to hurl him off. But he walked right through the crowd, leaving them all stunned” Luke 4:29-30 (TPT).

Jesus was in constant prayer, so He knew the will of God and aligned with it. The things He did and the words He spoke automatically ruffled the feathers of the religious leaders. They were always planning to kill Him but never could. In fact, Jesus’ life was not taken from Him, He voluntarily, at the right time, laid down His life and released His Spirit.

What I’m trying to say is, the minute you decide to be identified with Christ, you’ve ruffled some demonic feathers and you’re always going to be on the hit list. The way to survive and not be killed before your time is

through prayer. The only way to be triumphant and remain triumphant is through prayers.

4. We Pray for Strength.

“Then he withdrew from them a short distance to be alone. Kneeling down, he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup of agony away from me. But no matter what, your will must be mine” Luke 22:41-42 (TPT).

We humans are prone to wander from the will of God because it's usually contrary to what our flesh desires; and many times, the going gets really rough; then the struggle becomes real. Jesus models beautifully the struggle between the flesh and the spirit with His prayer at the garden of Gethsemane.

But in the place of prayer, Jesus received strength to face the severest test of His faith that was about to come. If we are to overcome trials

and temptations, we must stay prayed up, for in the place of prayer we draw strength from God.

5. We Pray for the Spirit's Filling.

“One day, Jesus came to be baptized along with all the others. As he was consumed with the spirit of prayer, the heavenly realm ripped open above him and the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove and landed on him. Then God’s audible voice was heard, saying, “My Son, you are my beloved one. Through you I am fulfilled” Luke 3:21-22 (TPT).

“But I promise you this—the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be seized with power. You will be my messengers to Jerusalem, throughout Judea, the distant provinces—even to the remotest places on earth!” Acts 1:8 (TPT).

Jesus didn't begin His earthly ministry proper until the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and landed on Him. In the same vein, He instructed His disciples to wait to be filled with the Holy Spirit before they began the great commission. Why? Obviously, for empowerment.

Whether it's daily Christian living or for works of ministry, without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit all will be futile; and you will be frustrated. Daily ask for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through prayers so you can live a victorious life.

3 PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

*And in the midst of everything be always
giving thanks, for this is God's perfect plan for
you in Christ Jesus.*

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (TPT).

“**M**ODUPE, wake up!”
Well, it's my mum again. When she spells out my name this way, the situation has to be different from the playful mood when she calls me 'Sisi'. As you can imagine, this time, something worrisome is amiss.

“I'm awake, mum, what's the matter?” I called back to my mum from my room. It was pretty early, so I was wondering why she would be calling

out to me. Could something be wrong? I hadn't even had my quiet time yet.

"Please come to the living room."

"Okay."

I got up from my bed, came out from my room and walked towards the living room. When I got there, I saw my mum looking distressed.

"What's the matter?"

"Look around you, why is everywhere so messed up, even if you wanted to study here, why did you have to leave everything scattered all around."

I looked around me. Usually, I'm the neat freak between the two of us, why would I leave anywhere in a mess.

"I didn't do this. I didn't study last night. In fact, after prayers I have been in my room till now."

"What!"

"Yes."

Suddenly fear gripped me, as I came to realize what must have happened.

"Mum! I think someone was in our house... please look around."

Letters in my Green Bag

We looked around and discovered what had happened.

“Mum! We’ve been robbed!”

IT WAS exactly a month since we moved into that neighbourhood. At the time we moved in, the house was an answered prayer because it had all the things we wanted, privacy and close proximity to work and church. Initially when we moved in, I had felt uneasy because of the young men that loafed around; but I had reassured myself that their attention on me was because I was new in the neighbourhood, nothing else.

Not long after, I had two dreams in succession that showed young men jumping over the fence into our house. I had fearfully shared the dream with my mum and the owners of the house, but they had assured us that the area was free of burglars, and we had nothing to worry about.

But now, the windows had been removed, our bags ransacked, monies as well as jewellery stolen. My phone was gone too. We also discovered a large stick with nails that they had come into the house with, probably to attack us.

“Wow, mum! This is new and very unpleasant.”

“Indeed, but we must carry on,” my mum said sounding brave.

My mum had a catering job to deliver that day; it wasn't large cooking, so she had decided to do it alone. She went to attend to that. As for me, what I had to do was begin my day like I usually did, with my quiet time.

The quiet time that day was a struggle.

I didn't read my Bible as usual. I started out singing songs, then began to thank God for only one thing: that the thieves didn't kill us in our sleep, for all the while they were in our house, we were asleep. We didn't see any of them. I realized I was dressed scantily and I was grateful no evil thought crossed their minds.

After prayers, I summoned courage to go to work. Since I was working as P.A. to a woman of God, work was in the church. My mum had decided to get in touch with a welder and get the burglary proof fixed as well as the affected windows.

Letters in my Green Bag

I got to work/church that day on time. It was a meeting day for women fellowship. Before the service, I kept my composure for as long as I could, relating what had happened to all who saw my countenance and asked if all was well. When the service started and it was time for praise and worship, I lifted my hands to worship God and ended up tearing up.

“Father, thank You!

I refuse to see only the negatives.

I’m tempted to ask You why this happened to us, but I choose not to.

I thank You instead. I thank You again for life. I thank You because the things that would have been hard to replace were not taken.

I thank You that the things that were taken will be replaced by You.

Thank You. Thank You. Thank You.”

IN THE course of that week, someone approached me and asked how much was taken from me. I told this individual the amount and the money

was refunded. Some days after that someone asked me about the jewellery that was stolen. I told her, and that too was sorted. I got new jewellery to replace all the ones that were stolen. I was so elated. My joy would have been full but one thing was yet to be replaced: my phone.

I kept expecting a miracle but nothing happened... until one day.

“Get ready, we’re going to Tafawa Balewa Square,” my mum sweetly announced.

“I’m ready.”

There was a special programme going on at TBS; it was an interdenominational women programme and I was part of the workforce, my mum and I actually.

“Guess what!”

“What?”

“Nathaniel Bassey is coming to minister in songs today!”

“What! This is awesome,” I said excitedly, as the gospel singer is well known and very inspirational too.

Letters in my Green Bag

Everyone who knew me knew I loved Nathaniel Bassey's ministrations. That day I got so excited about hearing him minister that I couldn't be still because I couldn't see him from where I was in the wide arena. I was part of the welfare team, with our canopy far away from where the altar was.

"Oh, my goodness! It's Nathaniel Bassey!" my mum suddenly announced.

"Where? Where? Show me!"

I looked towards the direction she pointed, and I saw him. But I couldn't believe my eyes. I had been so sure I wouldn't see him; but there he was in the flesh, walking not too far away from me.

Soon he began to minister in songs and I worshiped along. Then he sang my favourite song, '*Hallelujah eh*'.

I sang along and jumped!

I was so excited!

Everyone was singing and jumping too. The atmosphere was charged and electrifying. Soon Nathaniel Bassey said, and I heard him correctly: "Ask God for something!"

Yes, you guessed correctly.

I asked God for a phone. A Samsung J7 NEO to be specific. I had seen it with a friend and I liked it a lot. I asked God for it and thanked Him for it.

A FEW days later....

“Modupe, are you done transcribing today’s sermon?” That was my boss.

“In a minute, ma,” I said, still correcting the script I had made in my laptop.

“Hurry up, you’re going somewhere with me.”

“Okay, ma.”

It was already getting late, I wished I could close for the day and go home; but now that my boss had said we were going somewhere together, I didn’t have much of a choice. I hurried up my work, and soon we were on our way.

“Please stop at SLOT,” I heard my boss say to her driver.

SLOT is a place where you’d go to get a new mobile device or a PC.

We walked in and she says to me.

Letters in my Green Bag

“I want to get a new phone.”

Thinking she meant a new phone for herself, I walked with her to the Samsung spot where the phones were displayed and joined her to look at the phones on display.

She picked one, and just as she was about to pay for it, she changed her mind and walked back to where the phones were displayed. She looked through the display again and picked a Samsung J7 NEO. When we got to the counter, she pays for the phone and turns and said to me. “I got the phone for you, to replace the one that was stolen.”

I was stunned and overwhelmed with emotions.

How did she know the right one to buy for me? I didn’t discuss my desire and prayer with her. I hadn’t asked her for a phone. I couldn’t have, she was my boss. I had asked God and He had done it.

No doubt, this was the Lord’s doing, and it was marvellous in my sight.

IN BAD TIMES

EARLIER IN the anchor scripture for this chapter, we read Apostle Paul charging us, *“And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks, for this is God’s perfect plan for you in Christ Jesus.”* He calls it “God’s perfect plan.” This means in the midst of everything bad, amid everything good, we should give thanks.

My struggle oftentimes is giving thanks when things are bad; and I know same is the case for majority of believers; that’s why I started out this chapter by sharing a very painful experience for me, and how challenging it was to give thanks to God when it happened. My experience does end on a good note, as we have seen.

I remember two instances in Scriptures when the situation was bad and Jesus prayed the prayer of thanksgiving:

1. The feeding of five thousand (John 6:1-15).

Note verses 9-11 specifically.

9 *“Look! Here’s a young person with five barley loaves and two small fish... but how far would that go with this huge crowd?”*

10 *“Have everyone sit down,” Jesus said to his disciples. So on the vast grassy slope, more than five thousand hungry people sat down.*

11 ***Jesus then took the barley loaves and the fish and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to the disciples to distribute to the people. Miraculously, the food multiplied, with everyone eating as much as they wanted! (TPT).***

2. The resurrection of Lazarus (John 11).

Here are the specific verses too:

39 *Jesus told them, “Roll away the stone.” Then Martha said, “But Lord, it’s been four days since he died—by now his body is already decomposing!”*

40 Jesus looked at her and said, “Didn’t I tell you that if you will believe in me, you will see God unveil his power?”

41 So they rolled away the heavy stone. Jesus gazed into heaven and said, “Father, thank you that you have heard my prayer,

42 for you listen to every word I speak. Now, so that these who stand here with me will believe that you have sent me to the earth as your messenger, I will use the power you have given me.”

43 Then with a loud voice Jesus shouted with authority: “Lazarus! Come out of the tomb!”

44 Then in front of everyone, Lazarus, who had died four days earlier, slowly hobbled out—he still had grave clothes tightly wrapped around his hands and feet and covering his face! Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him loose” (TPT).

In the first scenario, there wasn’t enough food for the multitude, but Jesus gave thanks for what was available. He didn’t ask God for anything,

yet the five barely loaves and two small fish miraculously multiplied. In the second instance, a man who was Jesus' friend had died. The natural thing to do would be to cry and stay dejected; but Jesus said a prayer of thanksgiving instead for answered prayers, and Lazarus came back to life.

Someone might say, but this was Jesus we are talking about. Of course, He doesn't respond to situations the way humans do; we can't be like Him. To think this way is to think wrongly. We are expected to have the mind of Christ in us.

“And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation” Philippians 2:5 (TPT).

The prayer of thanksgiving in bad times isn't to invalidate our feelings but to stretch our faith. When you pray the prayer of thanksgiving in bad times, you are training your eyes to see God instead of the situation; you see how good He is and will

continue to be; you see what He is able to do and can still do.

Very often we mindlessly quote Romans 8:28, but don't truly believe it.

“So, we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together for good, for we are his lovers who have been called to fulfill his designed purpose” (TPT).

Someone who is truly convinced that every detail of their life (including bad situations) is woven together for good and fits into God's purpose, really shouldn't find it hard to thank God when the going is tough, except they don't truly believe.

Thanking God in bad/difficult times is part of God's plan for us; meaning it's possible to do this. God wouldn't ask us to do something He hasn't provided the grace for.

Someone might ask, “If I thank God in bad situations, would that guarantee a positive end result; after all the examples you gave, both your personal one and that of Jesus, all ended on a positive note?”

Letters in my Green Bag

To this question, my answer is, when you pray the prayer of thanksgiving, focus on how big God is. Offer your faith-filled prayers and leave the end-result for God to decide.

In one of the examples I cited, the feeding of the five-thousand, Jesus gave thanks but didn't offer any prayers; yet, God multiplied the bread. Our Father knows what we need even before we ask. You can offer the prayers of thanksgiving and just rest in the assurance that your needs will be met, and God will honour your faith.

I believe it's important to add that I have prayed prayers of thanksgiving concerning a situation with hopes that the issue would be sorted immediately, but the situation persisted for a while. While I was going through it, I felt bad and I didn't understand what God's plan was. But at the end, I realized God was helping me learn patience, which is one of the hardest aspects of the fruit of the Spirit to produce.

God is very interested in our spiritual growth; and He will prioritize it over making us happy by giving us what we want and when we want it. He made the situation persist so; I could learn to be

patient. I also learnt in that time that the delay of my answered prayers doesn't mean I'm not loved by God. I have held on to this lesson and still applying it in my spiritual walk now.

A NOTICE FOR BLESSING

“HERE, MUM,” I said as I handed her a letter.
“We’ve been issued a quit notice.”

“Really!” my mum said, sounding alarmed.

“Yes, the man came today while you were away.”

For as long as I can remember, the life my mum and I led had always seemed only a few precious steps from destitution and homelessness; just two women, mum and daughter, hanging in there for survival. Each day came with its miracles, and tumbles too. I was actually in the middle of a worship session when I heard a knock at the door. It was the house caretaker, and I immediately could tell his visit wasn't for good.

Letters in my Green Bag

The man had repeatedly harangued my mum over our rent in the past. He was actually becoming a nuisance I couldn't get off my face quick enough. This time, without even the courtesy of a smile, he grimly stretched a paper at me when I told him my mum was out. I initially didn't want to receive it from him, but when I saw the letter-headed paper, immediately seeing what it was, I knew he was for real."

"Wow!" my mum exhaled with depressed shoulders. What are we going to do now?" It was more an exclamation than a question.

"Honestly, this is a surprise," I said more confused than attempting an answer.

We had been living in that apartment since I was in my final year in secondary school and all through my four years in the university. I wasn't particularly attached to the apartment for any sentimental reason; I was more concerned about the funds required to get a new place and set it up.

“Don’t worry, God will do it,” my mum said to me. She was trying her hardest not to fall apart. But we both knew that we had been caught unawares by the new development, and it would take nothing short of a miracle to be out of there by the set time.

Our worries were for nothing. In a short while after we received the quit notice, funds started pouring in. Soon we had enough to secure a new apartment. It would be a bungalow and we would live in it alone. It was also close to work and church; that would help with savings. (This is the apartment I referenced while discussing prayer of thanksgiving in bad times.)

Though we still needed money for setting up the apartment, we were very happy the day we paid the required rent for the new apartment. “Let’s sing a song of thanksgiving tonight; let’s appreciate God for this miracle,” my mum enthused when it was time for prayers that night. And we enthusiastically sang thanksgiving choruses. We sang hymns too. We were just overjoyed.

Letters in my Green Bag

The time for us to move came and we moved into our new apartment, among the things we needed were curtains, television, cable, cushions, bed frames, wardrobes, kitchen cabinets etc. We had all these things where we lived before, but they were now old and we had to give them out; we gave them to those who requested for them, and trusted God to replace them.

“Make a list of all the things we need,” my mum said to me.

“Why, do we have money now?”

“Our needs will be met; just write them down.”

“Okay.”

That night when it was time for prayers, my mum said to me, “Start by thanking God for this apartment. We must never forget to appreciate God for it.”

I started leading songs of thanksgiving, expressing our gratitude to God for giving us a roof over our heads.

“Go on and begin to thank God for all the things money cannot buy that we have,” she added.

Understanding the full import of what my mum meant, I went from song to song, piling up praises to God. We both sang so joyfully. Then...

“Call forth the things we need in this house, and go on and begin to thank God for the provision,” mum suddenly said.

I had the list ready in my head; so, I began to reel out our needs, thanking God for all the things we were expecting but hadn’t yet received. That session of praise went on and on till those items appeared all so real in our hearts.

Not many days after, God sent someone to us. He asked us what we needed in our new house and we told him. He gave us a huge amount of money that was just enough for the things we needed.

You can imagine how happy we were, so happy that all we could do for several nights during prayer time was to thank God. We couldn’t ask for anything more!

IN GOOD TIMES

THANKING GOD when things are going on well for us is what God expects of us. Yet a lot of us take for granted the goodness of God to us; we trivialize it because we have gotten familiar with God's help. We do not even remember to thank Him for anything. In Luke 17, we are introduced to ten lepers that came to Jesus for healing.

13 They shouted to him, "Mighty Lord, our wonderful Master! Won't you have mercy on us and heal us?"

14 When Jesus stopped to look at them, he spoke these words: "Go to be examined by the Jewish priests." They set off, and they were healed while walking along the way (TPT).

These lepers called out to Jesus using words like, "Mighty Lord" and "wonderful Master" to get Him to respond to them, as though flattery would help them get Jesus' attention. It's very

likely they had borrowed these words from the lips of other people who had encountered Jesus, for this was their own very first encounter with Him. The lepers asked that Jesus should have mercy on them and heal them. All ten lepers were healed, not one was denied healing. This was an act of mercy on Jesus' part.

15 One of them, a Samaritan, when he discovered that he was completely healed, turned back to find Jesus, shouting out joyous praises and glorifying God.

16 When he found Jesus, he fell down at his feet and thanked him over and over, saying to him, "You are the Messiah" (TPT).

One out of ten, upon discovering his healing, didn't trivialize it, but turned back to find Jesus who had healed him. Notice how he expressed his joy: he shouted joyous praises, glorifying God. He fell at Jesus' feet and thanked Him over and over. In verse 16, we hear the man's confession,

he called Jesus the Messiah, acknowledging Him for who He is, signifying a new knowledge of the One who healed Him. And Jesus responds by saying,

17 “So where are the other nine?” Jesus asked. “Weren’t there ten who were healed?” (TPT).

Jesus’ response shows that God expects our prayer of thanksgiving. Remember the words of Apostle Paul in our anchor scripture for the chapter: “...*always giving thanks*” is God’s plan for us. We are expected to return to God when we receive the answers to our prayers, and thank Him, glorify Him. The experience we get with our prayer being answered is supposed to bring us into a more intimate fellowship with God as it increases our faith.

The one man who returned, fell down at Jesus’ feet and called Him the Messiah; he didn’t see Him as just a healer anymore. For the man, the relationship had gone beyond meeting a man who

cured his physical disease, but One who had a cure for his spiritual illness as well. Apparently, God's plan when He gives us our desires is to draw us closer to Him; it is not His plan for the answer to our prayers to take us farther away from Him.

Another instance is the story of the mad man of Gadarene in Mark 5:1-20. Jesus met this man in a sorry state.

2 As Jesus stepped ashore, a demon-possessed madman came out of the graveyard and confronted him. 3 The man had been living there among the tombs, and no one was able to restrain him, not even with chains. 4 For every time they attempted to chain his hands and feet with shackles, he would snap the chains and break the shackles in pieces. He was so strong that no one had the power to subdue him. 5 Day and night he could be found lurking in the cemetery or in the vicinity, shrieking and cutting himself with stones! (TPT).

This man was under the influence of so many demons who caused him to have a loner mentality, unusual physical strength, continual unrest, animalistic crying and screams, self-inflicted wounds, split personality, a fixation with death, and aggressive behaviour. All put together, the man became an outcast from society, went stark naked and deranged. Apparently, he had complicated issues. Yet Jesus healed him. And people could testify to that.

15 When they found Jesus, they saw the demonized man sitting there, properly clothed and in his right mind. Seeing what had happened to the man possessed by many demons, the people became afraid (TPT).

Though the man who had been healed didn't say a word of thanksgiving to Jesus, His healing drew him closer to Jesus. He offered his thanksgiving by deciding to go with Jesus.

18 And as Jesus began to get into the boat to depart, the man who had been set free from demons asked him, "Could I go with you?"

19 Jesus answered, "No," but said to him, "Go back to your home and to your family and tell them what the Lord has done for you. Tell them how he had mercy on you" (TPT).

When Jesus said no, the man obeyed Jesus' command and dedicated his life to spreading the gospel as a way of thanking Jesus for His healing.

20 So the man left and went into the region of Jordan and parts of Syria to tell everyone he met about what Jesus had done for him, and all the people marveled! (TPT).

4 PRAYER OF SUPPLICATION

Until now you've not been bold enough to ask the Father for a single thing in my name, but now you can ask, and keep on asking him! And you can be sure that you'll receive what you ask for, and your joy will have no limits!

John 16:24 (TPT).

“**M**UM, WHY is God not answering me?” I asked amid tears in one burst of emotion. “I fasted and prayed! Shouldn’t everything have worked out?”
“Please stop crying so much.”

“I mean the man even denied ever making that promise. Can you imagine! He denied it.”

“But how could he have denied it? When he made the promise, everyone heard.”

“I’m telling you, mum, he denied it. I went to his office, and when I reminded him of his promise, he denied it.”

“Just take it easy.”

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand.”

“What’s that?”

“Why did God not answer my prayers. Doesn’t my fasting and praying mean anything to Him?”

“God does listen to prayers, my dear.”

“So?”

“I don’t know why He didn’t answer this particular prayer of yours.”

“I want to know why. I was told that new converts get answers to their prayers fast. So why is my own different? Is something wrong with me?”

“I hate it when you say this. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is wrong with you.”

“Something must be wrong with me if I’m the only new convert that didn’t get answers to my

prayers. Something must be definitely wrong with me.”

“My dear, let it go. You have to move past this.”

“I can’t. Please let me be by myself.”

“Are you sure you want to be alone? Please stop crying so much.”

THE BOTCHED TRAVEL PLAN

I COULDN’T stop crying even if I wanted to. After I completed the compulsory one-year national youth service (NYSC), I had bought into my mum’s idea of going out of the country for my master’s degree. Actually, a friend of hers had sown that idea in her heart and she had in turn sown it in mine. We had gotten all necessary documents ready but her friend had left us hanging. We didn’t hear from him again concerning our initial plans.

After I gave my life to Christ, someone had mentioned to me that new believers got their prayers answered quickly because God wants to encourage

them. I believed completely and decided to try it out. When I was younger, in church, I had recited a whole Bible chapter in church; and the senior pastor had been so impressed that he had in a whim promised me a scholarship throughout my education. He hadn't kept his promise. Now that I was older still holding to the erroneous teaching I had received, I decided to fast and pray for my scholarship. When I was done fasting, I went to see the pastor. I returned home thoroughly disappointed!

I couldn't understand why my prayers weren't answered. Hasn't Jesus told us to ask and we would receive? I believed something was wrong with me. I never stopped to think maybe something was wrong with the prayers I prayed.

"God, what's wrong?" I desperately questioned. "Why aren't you answering my prayers? Why do I feel You're fencing me in? I have prayed about furthering my education but You aren't giving me a favourable response. Even my mum has prayed about it, yet nothing has changed. All the moves

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we make are getting blocked. I don't understand."
I prayed with much crying.

I yet didn't get a response.

Days after, I was in a foul mood.

"What's wrong?" My mum asked. I was lying down and in both emotional and physical pains.

"My shoulder hurts. It hurts so bad on the right side." That's true, but I was also looking for an excuse to coat my frustration.

"Since when?"

"Since Uni days. I honestly don't know what's wrong; all I know is it's painful."

"That's serious. We should do something about that."

"Yes please."

I really couldn't tell if it's because of a bad sitting posture or excess sugar causing me the pain, but the pain in my shoulder was recurrent, and I was tired of it. I hid it for as long as I could but the pain, I felt made it harder to hide. I was somewhat glad my mum knew. Yet, regardless of what we tried; the pain didn't go away.

AT THE CAMP TO PRAY

“Mum, this Redemption Camp is really huge! There’s a lot of people here too!”

“Yes, that’s how it is. But why are you acting surprised? This isn’t your first time here.”

“I know. It’s like I’m just taking in the view for the first time.” That wasn’t the entire truth. I was overwhelmed by the size of the auditorium and the crowd that gathered because I had a plan. The pain on my shoulder was still there but I was beginning to learn to live with it, even though I would have preferred not having to deal with it at all.

Ever since my mum’s friend had invited us all to go to Redemption Camp for a week, I had considered talking to God about the pain in my shoulder. Now we were there and I was feeling overwhelmed. There were so many people with different prayer requests, no doubt, leaving me wondering: Why would God ever hear my own prayers among the throng praying to Him?

That concern was beginning to look true six days after.

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“Mum, tonight is the last night, right?”

“Yes. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, never mind.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure, don’t worry.”

It was the last night and I was going to pray for my healing. Even though I felt it would be a miracle if my prayers were heard considering the multitude that were present. I prayed and the pain disappeared.

“Mum! Mum!! You won’t believe it!”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ve been healed! I’ve been healed!”

“Really! When?”

I took my time to explain everything to her, from my plan to pray to the time I had received my healing.

“You know what, mum! I can’t believe I was heard!”

“Why can’t you believe that?”

“There are just so many people here with more important prayer requests I think, so I thought

God may be more disposed to those than hear me. But thank God I presented my request to Him. I received my healing.”

“This is amazing! I’m so glad God did this for you. He has strengthened your faith.”

“Yes, He has.”

Right there at that service, Pastor E. A Adeboye mentioned that all who had received their healing during the programme should come out for more prayers and thanksgiving.

“Go on,” my mum nudged me.

“I’m shy.”

“Go on, and receive more prayers and join the others to thank God.”

“Okay.”

I ran out and joined the others.

ASKING AND RECEIVING

In our anchor scripture for this chapter, Jesus speaking to His disciples had told them that because of their relationship with Him they were qualified

to go to God to ask for anything and God would give it to them. But in the preceding chapter, that's chapter 15 of John, in verse 16, we get a clearer picture of what Jesus meant by what He said.

“You didn’t choose me, but I’ve chosen and commissioned you to go into the world to bear fruit. And your fruit will last, because whatever you ask of my Father, for my sake, he will give it to you!” (TPT).

The disciples were given an order to evangelize; alongside that order came a promise: that whatever they asked the Father He will give to them. For as long as the disciples were doing God's will, preaching the gospel of Christ and evangelizing the world, whatever they asked the Father they were sure to receive. For as long as their requests aligned with God's will, their requests would be granted. This didn't mean they get to ask of God and use the name of Jesus for their own selfish desires, to ask for things outside of God's will for them.

Unfortunately, a lot of Christians have taken the passage to mean they could ask God for anything they desired and they would get it, whether or not those things were carnal, inappropriate and utterly ungodly. But no; no such prayers will be answered. Christians who pray for what God has not promised will end up disappointed. God is not a genie or magician.

The disciples were so aligned with God's will, they never asked for wealth and material possessions for themselves. The first prayer they all prayed was regarding decision making; then they prayed for the gift Jesus promised (the Holy Spirit). See Acts 1 and 2. Later, they would pray for boldness to preach. They went on to pray for the healing of others etc.

I spent many days wondering why my fasting and prayer didn't produce a desired result; then God revealed the answer to me. He wanted to train me Himself. He had a plan for my life, and was going to reveal His purpose to me. That prayer that I so desperately wanted Him to answer was

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not part of His plan for my life; it would have driven me away from Him. It would have served my selfish ambition alone. Since my request didn't align with His will, He said No. He didn't even reveal the reason until I was mature enough to understand it.

On the other hand, after praying I received healing for the pain in my shoulder without even fasting because it was God's will for me to be in good health.

I'm not going to complicate what's simple. When God says yes to your prayer of supplication, it's because your request aligned with His will and plan. You might not even see how, but it aligned. And when He says No, your requests didn't align, no matter how important and meaningful you thought that request was. It might be painful to hear this, but that request just didn't align.

Someone might say, what about Matthew 7:7, where Jesus says we should ask, seek and knock. He even encourages us to be persistent, and that our persistence will be rewarded? You might even say the reason some people get a No is because

they aren't persistent enough with their prayers. Truth however is, Jesus said those words to encourage us to bring our requests before God Our Father who cares deeply for us and listens to us; but Jesus never gave those assurances to mean that prayers can be used as a means of manipulating God to get just about anything we ask, whether they aligned with His will or not.

Yes, we get to ask, we get to seek, and we get to knock; but we don't get to determine the kind of answer we will get when we ask; we don't get to determine exactly what we find when we seek, nor do we get to determine what's on the other side of the door we have knocked to have it opened. God determines those.

Our part is to offer our faith-filled prayer with humility, and God's part is to decide the rest, no matter how long you pray. If you have faith in God enough to pray to Him, then you should have faith enough in Him to let Him decide the outcome of your prayers, and to be okay with it.

LEARNING TO WAIT

“JUST BECAUSE you don’t have it yet doesn’t mean you won’t have it.”

“But Uncle, I need it now.”

“You can’t have it now because I don’t have it to give you now; but if you wait, you will get it.”

“How long will I have to wait?”

“I can’t say, but you have to wait.”

“I hate waiting.”

“If you can’t wait then too bad.”

My uncle ‘Dele is a father-figure to me. The conversation we had illustrates why, after we have prayed, we should wait for the answer, and not attempt to stampede God. That’s what I was attempting to do with my uncle. I trouble him with my requests, and usually, eight out of ten times, he gives me the things I need; but at times, he says no, and there are also times he would say wait.

Everyone that knows me knows I hate waiting. I especially hate waiting in a queue. Hearing from my uncle that I have to wait caused me so much distress you'd think I was badly wounded.

Unfortunately for me in my dealings with God, after presenting my requests to Him, I've been asked to wait many times. Apparently, it would have been easier to get a yes, if you ask me. It would be even better to get an outright no. But when I hear wait, that's where the challenge lies.

My uncle would often tell me to wait because my request was valid but my timing was off. He told me to wait because he didn't have the resources available to meet my needs, but in time he would. On the other hand, God tells us to wait, not for want of resources or ability, or that our requests do not align; but more because our timing is off. Timing is important to God.

Even then, God won't tell us how long we are to wait. He doesn't tell us to wait as if to enable Him gather resources; His store is NEVER depleted. He has all He needs at any time, in any place. He

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is El-Shadai, don't forget. Often, He tells us to wait because of His sovereign prerogative over Time. The timing just has to be right.

Even more miraculous, in the time while we wait for God's first-move, He orchestrates events that work in our favour, while at the same time working patience in us. Patience, if you ask me, is one of the most difficult parts of the fruit of the Spirit to produce; it can only be produced when you learn to wait and consistently trust God for the best at all times, in all circumstances.

Waiting usually tests our faith, but ends up producing patience. See what James says in James 1:3-4 (TPT).

“For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up in you the power of endurance (A.K.A Patience). and then as your endurance (i.e., patience) grows even stronger, it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking.”

Besides, God makes us wait to produce virtues in us. He is way more interested in our spiritual growth than making us happy by giving us what we want, when we want it, and how we want it. So, when God says wait or puts you in a situation where you have to wait on Him, don't freak out. Don't try to get out of it prematurely. Submit yourself to the process or risk forfeiting all the benefits that come with the finished work when the waiting time elapses.

When my uncle says wait, even though I hate to wait, I wait. I wait not because I like it but because I trust him. He has always fulfilled his promises to me, why should he lie now? And in my waiting, I don't get mad at him, as the delay doesn't affect our relationship, nor does it put my life on hold. We still relate like we always have, and I go about my day-to-day life. It's the same way I relate with God when He asks me to wait.

That's how we too should treat God in our waiting season. Keep trusting Him because in times past He had kept His word, proving Himself trustworthy.

Keep relating with Him; the delay shouldn't bring a premature end to that sweet relationship. It's also important that our lives shouldn't be on a standstill while waiting for answers to prayers in whatever areas of our lives. Are you a minister, keep up with your tasks as a faithful minister of God. Are you responsible for a task during services in church, say as a chorister, usher, electrical/electronics technician, protocol or security officer; whatever you are doing for God, keep at it while waiting for God to deliver your requests.

FASTING

I BEGAN fasting from a very young age. I knew fasting at times accompanied prayers, but no one told me why. I just knew there were times when we were asked to go without food in church because there was a prayer meeting. When I became a believer, I began to understand why we fast.

One time, I was in church and a 40-day fast was announced. I had chosen the type that would

enable me eat by 6p.m. just as some other people chose not to eat at all but drink water during the period. I had joined the fast but I still didn't understand why we were fasting. While I was still thinking about it, I heard my pastor say: "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is renewed."

I quickly looked up the scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16, thinking Apostle Paul was talking about fasting. I realized however he wasn't. Yet, as I joined the spiritual exercise of fasting, praying and studying the Bible, I noticed a change in me. I was indeed physically exhausted but, on the inside, I felt **renewed and strengthened**. Truly some things are better experienced than explained.

Over the years as a believer, I have fasted; and while abstaining from food for a specific period, I have prayed and studied my Bible. Now, I not only fast by abstaining from food, sometimes I also abstain from social media, and at other times from attending events: just about anything I consider a distraction. When I do this, I find out I'm able to concentrate more on spiritual things.

In Matthew 17:21, Jesus said: *“But this kind is cast out only through prayer and fasting”* (TPT). The background story to this scripture is this. Jesus’ disciples had been approached by a man whose son was afflicted by a demon. The boy had epilepsy and had suffered from horrible seizures. The disciples had tried but weren’t able to heal him. Now the man recounted the story to Jesus, and He in turn had said that the **unbelief/weak faith** of the disciples had rendered their efforts ineffective, as a result the boy wasn’t healed. He then added, as we have read: *“But this kind is cast out only through prayer and fasting.”*

Jesus lived fasting frequently. He abstained from food time and again, as He often withdrew from society to pray. Before His ministry began on earth, He fasted for forty days. While Jesus was with His disciples, though they observed Him fasting and praying often, they didn’t fast themselves at all. One time when Jesus was confronted and asked why His disciples didn’t fast, He said there was no need for them to fast yet because He was yet with them physically, but

the time shall come after His departure when they shall begin to fast. That time eventually came and the disciples embraced fasting (Matthew 9:15 c.f. Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).

What I'm trying to say is that Jesus was informing His disciples about one of the purposes of fasting. Fasting and praying, with much reading and study of the word of God, produces **strong faith**, a faith so strong demons wouldn't be able to resist but obey commands given to them.

I can attest to this. Unlike the time of old when fasting was usually done for public show, Jesus says we're to do otherwise:

“When you fast, don't let it be obvious, but instead, wash your face and groom yourself and realize that your Father in the secret place is the one who is watching all that you do in secret and will continue to reward you”
(Matthew 6:17-18, TPT).

Emphasis is on “when” – there is no “if”. So, it's safe to say we're expected to participate in the

spiritual exercise of fasting; and when we do, we must do it with the right motives. We must focus on worshiping God, studying the word, praying to Him etc., never to pretend to be spiritual; such hypocrisy was what the Pharisees were renowned for and we are warned against.

Someone might ask: “Does fasting guarantee answers to prayers?” To this question my answer would be no (see 1 Samuel 28:6, 20 & Isaiah 58:3). Fasting doesn’t necessarily guarantee answers to prayers. Remember we already talked about getting answers to prayers only when our prayers align with God’s will and His timing?

WHEN THERE ARE NO WORDS

I REMEMBER when I resigned from my job as a personal assistant to a woman of God. I resigned based on the instruction I believe God gave me; but I was having a hard time moving on. People weren’t making it easy for me either. On one hand

I was afraid of the unknown; on the other hand, people made me doubt if I heard God correctly because I left a stable job for nowhere, plain nothing! “It just doesn’t make any sense,” they’d say.

The first Sunday service I attended after I left my job was at a new growing church. I believe God had led me there as well. The ambiance was great and the people, young people like me, were very welcoming.

However, though I was in the midst of a crowd, I felt alone. I was troubled by my thoughts. I wanted to talk to God but my heart was heavy. I wanted to tell Him how I felt but I couldn’t find the words to express my feelings. I hid the turmoil in my heart well. But during the worship session, I couldn’t pretend anymore; my walls that I had carefully built shattered and I began to cry. I cried and cried and cried until people around me noticed.

My heart was so heavy with unexpressed emotions, unanswered questions, doubt and guilt – everything! Soon, the pastor’s wife came to me and held me tightly. Not long after the pastor in charge started to sing.

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*When we call, Lord, You answer, answer all
our prayers*

We're casting all our cares on You.

*Sometimes we have no words, sometimes we
have no words.*

Yet we call, yet we call.

*When we call, Lord, You answer, answer all
our prayers.*

We're casting all our cares on You.

Two things happened that day. First, after crying, I felt heard somehow even though I didn't say a word to God. And because I believed I had been heard, I felt light, relieved, reassured. Second, through that song and my experience, I knew I didn't always have to have words to pray. Yet God will hear. He understands everything.

Many times, afterwards in my life, I had moments when I had no words. Yet I prayed and God listened. How? By His Spirit. See Romans 8:26 (TPT):

“And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, at times we don’t even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words.”

There will be times in your Christian walk when you will want to pray but won’t have the words: the words best to describe how you feel and what you want. But in those moments, even if it’s groaning, sighing or tears, know that God hears you. He totally understands the unsaid words, those unuttered longings of your heart.

Remember Hannah, Samuel’s mother? She was unable to have children for a long time. Her barren state so bothered her, especially when her husband’s other wife began to taunt her about it. She decided to do something about the situation. She went without food and made a vow to God. As she continued

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praying, she did so in her heart, her lips moved but she didn't utter a word. See 1 Samuel 1:12-14 (MSG).

It so happened that as she continued in prayer before God, Eli was watching her closely. Hannah was praying in her heart, silently. Her lips moved, but no sound was heard. Eli jumped to the conclusion that she was drunk. He approached her and said, "You're drunk! How long do you plan to keep this up? Sober up, woman!"

The priest was fooled into thinking she was drunk; she wasn't. Her deep groaning made no sounds, but God heard her heart's cry and gave her a child, the Prophet Samuel, and even added other children later. God knows how to meet us right where we are.

PRAYING AMISS

HERE IS something to note about prayer, if we are to expect God's answer: we must not pray amiss.

“And if you ask, you won't receive it for you're asking with corrupt motives, seeking only to fulfill your own selfish desires” (James 4:3, TPT).

Is it possible to pray wrong prayers?
Yes.

Prayer is meant to be a conversation with God, regardless of what type of prayer we are praying, and that can never be wrong. What makes us pray wrong prayers are the motives we bring into it; that's what James addresses in the scripture above.

Our motives play a huge role in determining how effective our prayers will be. Why are you asking for what you're asking? The answer is not the reason that easily rolls off your tongue, but the one hidden in the secret place of your heart.

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We can lie to others; we can even lie to ourselves, but we can't lie to God. He sees right through us. He searches our hearts. See Jeremiah 17:9-10 (MSG):

“The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out. But I, God, search the heart and examine the mind. I get to the heart of the human. I get to the root of things. I treat them as they really are, not as they pretend to be.”

Though many times we attempt to use God, truth is, God will not allow Himself to be manipulated and used to serve our selfish motives.

A little back story before James talks about praying amiss. He reveals something else in the previous verse (James 4:2):

“You jealously want what others have so you begin to see yourself as better than others. You scheme with envy and harm others to selfishly obtain what you crave—that’s why you quarrel

and fight. And all the time you don't obtain what you want because you won't ask God for it!"

There were recurrent fights among the people and internal conflicts as well because they weren't content with what they had. When they looked at someone else who had what they didn't, they were jealous and craved what belonged to others. Following their thoughts, they began to use worldly wisdom to try obtain these things when they could have trusted God to meet their needs. When their worldly wisdom failed, they decided to drag God into the mess, asking Him for those things. We can guess the answer God gave them.

Requests that find their roots in jealousy, envy, greed etc. are wrong prayers. We must pray well, with humility, faith, the right intentions and according to God's will. Let me give a few personal illustrations.

It was the beginning of the new year, 2021, and I just moved to a new city and a new church. There was a programme going on. On the first

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day of the programme, the senior pastor asks the ushers to share a white pamphlet around. I received one, and written at the top was, “EXPECTATIONS 2021”. We were to write out our prayer requests for the year and come along with it to every service of the programme; at a set time we were to bring out the pamphlet and pray on our requests. Before we wrote out our requests though, the pastor cautioned, “Don’t just write anyhow; be in the Spirit when you write.”

But I wasn’t in the Spirit when I wrote my requests.

If you peeped into my pamphlet you’d see: a high-paying job, a black shiny car, plots of land, etc. And I was quite proud of my list.

When I got to service the next day, I had my pamphlet ready. I couldn’t wait for it to be time for us to pray on our requests. That time eventually came. Just as we were about to start, the pastor says: “Some of you didn’t write as led by the Spirit; your flesh led you and you’ve written rubbish. God’s Spirit will help you. You will cross out what you wrote and write out the right things, maybe not

now but later, just be flexible; allow God to lead you by His Spirit.”

Surely, all I’d written were the right things. They couldn’t have been otherwise, could they? “I just couldn’t be part of those he is referring to,” I thought to myself.

Well, when I got home, the Holy Spirit ministered to me. He said, “Strike out the job you wrote and write opportunities for financial independence. Strike out the land and the car you wrote and write instead, divine guidance to remain in God’s will. Also include Favour and a prayer request for someone aside yourself.”

I obeyed. I cancelled eight out of 10 of my requests and replaced them as led by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit revealed my motives to me. I wanted to prove a point. I wanted everyone to know that I’ve arrived, and in a big way; and so, I was attempting to use God to serve my ambition. Apparently, I couldn’t see past myself to include

even one person on my prayer list. I would have prayed amiss and in vain.

Someone might ask: what's wrong with asking for a high-paying job? What's wrong with wanting a car? What's wrong with wanting to own land? My answer would be nothing. Nothing's wrong with wanting these things. In fact, God blesses His children with these things too; but for me, at that time, those were wants, not needs. I wanted those things. I didn't need them. They were not part of God's agenda for me at that time. At least that's what I sensed God was telling me.

When I was a little girl, my uncle, 'Dele, would often call to speak to me. In the course of our conversation, he would ask me a question: "Baby girl, so what are the things you'd like to have?" And I would go ahead to mention the things I wanted and needed. Then he would often reply, "Arrange them in this order: the most important to the least important." I would do that. Then he would brood over my list and say to me, "Okay, you get to have two out of your five requests; or, you get one out

of three requests.” When I cry because I’d rather I had all than some, or have the ones I considered more important than the ones he chose, he would say, “Modupe, the ones you’re getting now are those I consider more important; they are priority.”

It’s the same way God deals with us. We get to ask for anything, but not every request gets granted. Sometimes, the requests don’t get granted because we are with the wrong motives, and sometimes we are asking for the wrong things or things that aren’t priority.

Speaking of priority, I remember the healing of the man by the entrance called the Beautiful gate (Acts 3). The man was crippled from birth. He was often carried and placed at the entrance of the temple where he sat begging for money from those who went into the temple to worship. On the day of his visitation, he came across those whom God would use for him; but having no idea what kind of day it was, and which kind of men he was speaking to, he asks Peter and John for money.

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4 Peter and John, looking straight into the eyes of the crippled man, said, “Look at us!”

5 Expecting a gift, he readily gave them his attention.

6 Then Peter said, “I don’t have money, but I’ll give you this—by the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!” (TPT).

Many of us are like that crippled man. There are many obvious issues in our lives that require the attention of God; and in spite of us having prayer as a means of communicating those personal needs to God, we ask for something else than what’s truly important.

To the crippled man, receiving money for his daily sustenance was very important. To be honest, the money he sought appeared important, but what was way more important than money was **walking**. And God saw to that instead. If he walked, he wouldn’t need to beg; he could work and be able to provide for himself and his family. What he needed was release, not relief.

Don't be surprised when your 'wants' are set aside by God for your 'needs' or when your 'very important needs' are set aside for your 'way more important needs'. God doesn't think the way we do, and He doesn't work the way we do or the way we prefer; but we can trust Him to always do what's best for us. See Isaiah 55: 8-9.

Now that you know this, the question is, how do you avoid praying amiss? As always, I'd only point out what has worked for me. To avoid praying amiss, you must:

1. Understand the will of God for your life. Someone who understands God's specific will for his or her life will pray prayers that align. For instance, if I know God's will is for me to share the truths of His word with others by being a Christian writer full-time, I won't go wrong by asking for divine insights into God's word or creativity in sharing those insights with others. I won't go wrong by asking for resources needed for the publications either. Do you understand? I would however be praying amiss if I asked God for a secular high

paying job that will take me out of God's will for my life. To know more about the general will of God for our lives as believers, you need to read your Bible daily and deeply, as casual or occasional reading will definitely not do. To know the specifics, you should ask God in prayer.

2. Understand God's timing. One of the first things I learnt about God when I became a believer is that He is so time-specific. When I first started praying to God to reveal His purpose for creating me and His will for my life, the answer came in bits, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The knowledge came to me in bits per time. When I understand a part, I would try to run with it as quickly as possible, and would begin to pray for big platforms for a bigger reach. I never got those. What I got instead were opportunities to write devotionals and teach small groups. Not until much later did I begin to get the bigger platforms I long sought. If you understand that God is God of order and process, and that timing matters to Him, you'd not pray amiss.

3. Ask the Holy Spirit for help. The Holy Spirit is supposed to join us in our prayers, guiding us to pray prayers that align with God's will, purpose and plan for our lives per time. I wonder why people leave Him out! Just kidding, I make that mistake sometimes too. But I wonder what makes us leave Him out! We don't even know what to pray for, or how we ought to pray outside of His help. God's Spirit knows us in and out. He interprets God's heart to us. Many times, my prayer direction has changed because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Remember Apostle Paul. He prayed three times concerning a matter; he wanted a thorn in his flesh removed. But when God's Spirit revealed the purpose of the thorn, his prayer direction changed (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-9). He had attempted to pray away a situation that caused him discomfort, not knowing that God had no plan of stopping that uncomfortable situation, because it served a purpose. When he finally knew this, here was his latest response to that situation in verse 10:

“So, I’m not defeated by my weakness, but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment—when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ—I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power” (TPT).

PRAY UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS

ONE OF the questions that constantly plagued my mind as a new convert was, ‘is praying until something happens the same as vain repetition?’ Not having the right answer to this, I plunged into the Bible for an answer. Now I know better. Let me share two Bible passages with you.

“When you pray, there is no need to repeat empty phrases, praying like the Gentiles do, for they expect God to hear them because of their many words” (Matthew 6:7, TPT).

41 Elijah said to Ahab, “Up on your feet! Eat and drink—celebrate! Rain is on the way; I hear it coming.” 42-43 Ahab did it: got up and ate and drank. Meanwhile, Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bowed deeply in prayer, his face between his knees. Then he said to his young servant, “On your feet now! Look toward the sea.” He went, looked, and reported back, “I don’t see a thing.” “Keep looking,” said Elijah, “seven times if necessary.” 44 And sure enough, the seventh time he said, “Oh yes, a cloud! But very small, no bigger than someone’s hand, rising out of the sea.” “Quickly then, on your way. Tell Ahab, ‘Saddle up and get down from the mountain before the rain stops you’ (1 Kings 18, MSG).

In the first scripture, Jesus says, “do not repeat empty phrases,” as many words don’t guarantee answered prayers; and in the second scripture, Elijah kept praying for one thing, which was rain. He prayed over and over in faith until he saw changes. So, which is wrong, and which is right? Well, both

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are right. None crosses out the other. Jesus tells us what we ought not to do in the first scripture, and Elijah shows us what to do. Many times, it's from knowing what we ought not to do that we learn what to do.

Jesus is saying that God doesn't respond to our prayers because we fill our prayer time with many words, "repeating empty phrases." Instead, we should pray faith-filled prayers, "pray knowing that your Father already knows your needs before you ask" (Matthew 6:32).

Meanwhile, Elijah simply modelled persistent faith-filled prayers. His prayers "availed much" (James 5:16-18), for God indeed sent rain upon the land at his request.

Praying until something happens simply means praying persistent faith-filled prayers. It is different from vain repetitions, a.k.a. repeating empty phrases. What makes them different is faith. One expresses faith; the other does not. If you pray faithless prayer, you're simply going through the motions, devising many means to get your prayers

answered. No prayers get answered that way (James 1:6-7).

My praying for the right spouse over the years is a persistent faith-filled prayer, and I will continue to pray so while still unmarried. My faith hasn't wavered. I believe God knows my need and at the right time He will bring the right person my way.

Meanwhile, my constant whining and mindless prayer for electric power to be restored in my house whenever there's power cut is just me going through the motions. It's like saying something over and over because it's what I'm supposed to say, but not really expecting it to happen.

Now that you know the difference, please go ahead and pray faith-filled prayers; dare to be persistent in it. Stretch your faith until you see your desires manifest.

5 PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

"I looked for someone to stand up for me against all this, to repair the defenses of the city, to take a stand for me and stand in the gap to protect this land so I wouldn't have to destroy it. I couldn't find anyone. Not one"
(Ezekiel 22:30, MSG).

“SINCE MY mum passed,” he said to me, “I’ve been having series of bad dreams; it’s just terrible!” He sounded alarmed.

“Wow! I’m sorry about that,” I replied, sounding just as surprised. “Is it like a recurrent dream?”

“No, it’s just different types.”

“Are the dreams about her?”

“No, about myself.”

“What are they about?”

“Like someone is after me.”

“We will have to pray about that then.”

“Yes, please. I’d like that.”

“We can fast, and then use your prayer booklet as a guide to pray.”

“Okay, that’s fine by me.”

This conversation was between my friend and I. We called ourselves Christians because we grew up in Christian homes and had always attended church, when, at the time, we didn’t have any genuine encounter with Jesus yet. I can say that specifically of myself, as I only became born again at a later date. Rather curiously, even at that carnal period of our lives, being nominal churchgoing Christians, we knew the power of prayer, and had also been taught about fasting. With the little knowledge we had, we decided to do something about what was bothering him.

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“Thanks for coming over,” he said to me.

“Of course! Where’s your twin?” I asked him.

“I’d get him.”

In the meantime, while he stepped out, I picked up his prayer booklet that was visibly on the coffee table nearby, as it were to view the prayer points, we were to raise later about his strange dreams. Soon enough, he returned with his twin brother to team with us in the prayer session.

“All right,” I announced, “let us pray about your bad dreams.” I began to lead the prayers, reading loudly from the prayer booklet. I said:

“Say after me, O Lord, every power troubling me, I exercise authority over you. Leave me alone, in the name of Jesus.”

The prayers went on and on until we were done with the prayer points on the specific page on dreams in the booklet. We gave thanks to God and I went home. Never mind that though unconverted at the time, being a church girl, my actual spiritual

state made no particular difference to me. I prayed with all my heart as sincerely as I knew how. God was my witness.

That night was an unusual night. I had a nightmare and someone was chasing me. I was reliving someone else's experience. I woke up frightened. "What have I done?" I asked myself. The nightmares soon turned to spiritual attacks. I was confused.

But, of course, unconverted, as I was, I was vulnerable to such spiritual attacks, more like the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16. This is one clear example of the danger that hypocrites and pretenders are faced with in church. People who are not converted but pretending to be God's true children are in danger of demonic attacks if they veer into deliverance ministry.

You can't cast out devils while unconverted yourself. That space is given to only true children of God, converted from the habit of sinning, and holy disciples of Jesus Christ. They alone had Jesus given the power to tread on demonic serpents and scorpions and to cast out devils (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:1-9, 17-20).

INTRUDERS AT THE ALTAR

“THAT GIRL is not a believer even though she pretends to be one. She is so gifted though; she sings so well.”

“Yeah, I can discern that too.”

“She is under satanic influence; and she is on a mission. She has set her eye on that young man, and I’m afraid for him, he is like a little brother to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had a revelation about it all. I feel this burden to snatch him from the snare of the fowler.”

“Wow! This is serious.”

“Yes, it is very serious.”

“What are you going to do, confront her?”

“Of course not. The real person I’m waging war against is the devil, not her. I won’t confront her; I’d pray instead. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal...”

“They’re definitely not carnal.”

The young lady being spoken about may indeed be an evil schemer, though very skilled, well-loved but diabolically misleading everyone by her pretentious innocent demeanour and sweet face. But God knows every one's heart and secret life. He is the Omniscient God with whom nothing is hid. He has the prerogative, and may choose to place a burden in the heart of a true believer to pray against the evil works of witches and wizards that mingle with His true children in church, and by so doing rescue innocent and willy-nilly believers from the evil associations orchestrated against their souls.

Back then, I didn't know better. I know now that it's not in anyone's place to start accusing or pointing at supposed witches and wizards in the church. Praying for one another in church on the other hand is a genuine Christian duty. I once had such a burden for a brother in church, about whom I noticed a devious lady that manifested obvious signs of wily behaviour was doting in apparent ways to seduce and mislead him, and

anyone with spiritual insight could easily see that something was just not right.

It was at a time, to be honest, I was busy, really busy with my work in the church and couldn't take on another responsibility. But I felt strongly that God wanted me to make out time to pray for this particular brother in Christ to save him from the strange association this lady was concocting around him. So, I did.

I made out time, fasted and used scriptures to pray for the deliverance of the brother. Soon things began to change in the dynamics of the relationship the said lady was having with him. I was pleased. At a point when I thought the purpose of my prayer had been achieved and attempted to stop praying, I felt the urge that God wanted me to continue. And so, I did. Surprisingly, the lady came to some knowledge I was praying against her affair with the brother. She turned on me.

On more than one occasion, she challenged me, questioning me and attempting to attack me spiritually. But I stood firm on the word of God

and continued to pray. She was powerless to hurt me physically and spiritually but her attitude towards me showed that she would have loved to try. Apparently, my prayers hindered her from perpetrating evil in that church.

I continued praying for the young man until I was led to leave that church to do other things. After I left, I heard a lot of people finally began to discern things about the said lady. No doubt, my prayers weren't in vain.

TRUE BELIEVERS AS INTERCESSORS

ACCORDING TO research studies, many ancient cities were usually surrounded by walls for protection. No one succeeded in invading and attacking those cities except the walls were breached. People often attempted to secure their cities by risking their lives and standing in the gap to fight off their enemies.

Pardon my not too subtle attempt at explaining what Ezekiel is saying in our anchor scripture for this chapter. “Standing in the gap,” also known as prayer of intercession is when you offer prayers to God on behalf of someone else, another family or nation other than yours. There is always a need for intercessors, and every *believer* should be an intercessor. Emphasis on the BELIEVER.

And why?

The conversation I shared at the beginning of the chapter, reminds me of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:11-16. Described as vagabonds in the text, those sons of Sceva were what you may call itinerant Jewish exorcists; they weren’t believers in Christ, but took it upon themselves to use the name and authority of Jesus over people who were demonized. They got away with it for a while until one day, a demon challenged them.

15 One day, when they said those words, the demon in the man replied, “I know about Jesus, and I recognize Paul, but who do you think

you are?” 16 Then the demonized man jumped on them and threw them to the ground, beating them mercilessly. He overpowered the seven exorcists until they all ran out of the house naked and badly bruised (TPT).

You see, demons recognize authority. They know that the only power that can cast them out is the name of Jesus. They also know that that power and authority have been given to true believers to use against them. They also can identify true believers from impostors. Hence the reason for the successful spiritual attacks I got when I attempted to intercede for the friend of mine earlier mentioned, and the beating the sons of Sceva received from *“the demonized man”*.

Did you see the difference when I became a believer and I interceded for someone? There was an attempt still to attack me but it was futile. The evil spirits at work were powerless. Jesus, while on earth, interceded for His disciples, and by extension for us, in John 17 (TPT).

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11 Holy Father, I am about to leave this world to return and be with you, but my disciples will remain here. Holy Father, each one that you have given me, keep them in your name so that they will be united as one, even as we are one.

And even now in heaven, the Lord still intercedes for us, as Paul affirms in Romans 8:34 (TPT). *“Who then is left to condemn us? Certainly not Jesus, the Anointed One! For he gave his life for us, and even more than that, he has conquered death and is now risen, exalted, and enthroned by God at his right hand. So how could he possibly condemn us since he is continually praying for our triumph?”*

If we have enjoyed and continue to enjoy this much intercession from Jesus, shouldn't we follow His example and intercede as well for others?

PURPOSE OF INTERCESSION

THE BEST way to describe the purpose of intercession is to answer the question: Why does God want me to pray for others? There are many reasons the Bible gives for this:

I.

“24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you truly want to follow me, you should at once completely reject and disown your own life. And you must be willing to share my cross and experience it as your own, as you continually surrender to my ways. 25 For if you choose self-sacrifice and lose your lives for my glory, you will continually discover true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will forfeit what you try to keep” (Matthew 16, TPT).

The gift of salvation which we have received was made available because Jesus looked beyond Himself and saw us in our true state: helpless and

needing a saviour. So, He set aside His glory, endured the cross and despised the shame, giving Himself up for us as a “sacrificial lamb”. The new lifestyle He has called us to live is a selfless one. One that goes beyond me, myself. and I or me and my nuclear family, to all of mankind, all the nations of the world.

Praying for others is a way to prove that we are surrendered to Jesus’ ways. This spiritual exercise will help us become selfless, since death to self is required for following Jesus. Being selfless runs counter to human nature; and though challenging, it proves that we now live a new life in Christ and are following Christ’s example.

II.

“And the second is this: ‘You must love your neighbor in the same way you love yourself.’ You will never find a greater commandment than these” (Mark 12:31, TPT).

What do you think is the mark of a true believer? The answer is love: your ability to love God and

love people. Jesus says we are to love others the way we love ourselves. It's easy for us to pray for ourselves because we love ourselves. The challenge is how to pray for others with as much generosity and sincerity as we'd pray for ourselves.

God wants us to pray for others because it's a way to express our love for them. When Jesus answered the question, "Who is my neighbour," He used an illustration: the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

The Good Samaritan is the man who loved a Jew as himself. He saw him bleeding and was moved with compassion. He gave him first aid, placed him on his donkey and took him to an inn where he paid with his own money for the room and medical expenses for the injured man. He even made a promise to return to check up on the injured man and offset any further bills. Jesus says we should emulate the Samaritan.

What Jesus meant can be interpreted as physical and spiritual. While we must show kindness and mercy towards those that are helpless around us physically, we can also do so spiritually with prayers.

In our surroundings and beyond, the world is full of people who are being oppressed and afflicted by the devil. They are beaten and stripped, left bleeding and helpless. And one of the ways to reach these people in whatever corners of the world they may be is through prayers. Our prayers are expressions of our love for the people we care about.

WHO OR WHAT TO INTERCEDE FOR

Intercede for Non-Believers:

“He crumpled to his knees and shouted in a loud voice, “Our Lord, don’t hold this sin against them.” And then he died” (Acts 7:60, TPT).

Here are the words of Stephen who was a follower of Jesus, a man of faith, overflowing with the Holy Spirit. He was at a point commissioned into the ministry of serving tables in the early Church at Jerusalem but God had another use for him. Stephen was full of grace and supernatural power. So, God

used him to perform signs and wonders. He also had remarkable wisdom given to him by the Holy Spirit who prompted his words during arguments. The man was truly blessed.

But yet, to me, all Stephen did while he was well and alive pales off in comparison to what he did just before he died. Stephen was falsely accused and arraigned before the supreme council because his teachings rubbed some people the wrong way. In his defence, he only taught some more. But the resolve of his accusers was to silence him completely. They pounced on him and took him outside the city walls to stone him. Just before he died, he asked God not to hold his killers accountable for their errors. He saw their salvation as more important than their judgment, thereby emulating Jesus' last request as He hung on the cross about to give up His spirit (Luke 23:34).

When we pray for non-believers, especially those who have wronged us, we are emulating Christ who is our example, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We are also doing what pleases God, for it is God's desire for all men to be saved and

come to the knowledge of the truth instead of dying in sin and suffering eternal condemnation in hellfire.

Stephen prayed for his accusers and killers. One of the people that benefited from Stephen's prayer was Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul the Apostle, who God used mightily. Similarly, your prayer of intercession for a non-believer (whether they are family, friends, acquaintances or colleagues) will avail much.

Intercede for Other Believers:

“Confess and acknowledge how you have offended one another and then pray for one another to be instantly healed, for tremendous power is released through the passionate, heartfelt prayer of a godly believer!”

(James 5:16, TPT).

The next believer is supposed to be a safe haven for another believer. Sometimes when a believer sins against God and can't approach Him because

of guilt, he or she should be able to confide in a fellow believer who must then be willing to lift up the fallen believer before God in prayer till they are confident enough to approach Him themselves.

Since every believer is a work in progress, it is not strange for one believer to be offended by another. As it is often said, you can't hate or hold a grudge against someone you're praying for. When you're offended by another believer, spend time praying for him or her, whether they apologize or not.

“The church went into a season of intense intercession, asking God to free [Peter]” (Acts 12:5, TPT).

Peter was one of the leaders of the early Church, but at the time of this scripture he had been arrested and thrown into prison on the orders of King Herod. Though it was said that he would have been put through public trial, the real intent of the king was to have Peter killed so the ruler could please the Jews and Jewish leaders.

But the Church went into a season of intense intercession, asking God to free Peter. And God heard their prayers and did the seemingly impossible: He freed Peter.

We too can pray for our fellow believers when they are passing through challenging situations, whether illnesses, joblessness and deprivations, or are being persecuted. We can also pray for our church leaders.

Intercede for Political Leaders:

“And pray for every political leader and representative, so that we would be able to live tranquil, undisturbed lives, as we worship the awe-inspiring God with pure hearts”

(1 Timothy 2:2, TPT).

Political leaders aren't really loved, save a few. If it was left to me, I wouldn't pray for politicians. You want to know why? It's because they make promises to cajole the people to get voted into political offices, promises they know they won't

keep, and this they do without the least scruple or remorse. I can also list other things they are doing wrong. It's all in the news. I'm sure the way I feel about politicians is the way many believers also feel about them. I dare say, it's the way the believers in the church where Timothy pastored felt about politicians of their day. Yet, Apostle Paul encourages us to pray for them. Indeed, it is our calling as believers to pray for political office holders.

Imagine believers in every nation praying for their political leaders and their nation! Of course, the goal of living peaceful, undisturbed lives can then be achieved, the goal of Christians worshipping where and when they pleased, hopefully without persecution, can then be achieved; and then the hope and desire of having godly and Holy Spirit-led political leaders can also be realized.

Intercede for Nations:

“When Jesus caught sight of the city, he burst into tears with uncontrollable weeping over Jerusalem”

(Luke 19:41, TPT).

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Jesus wept over Jerusalem because He loved Israel as a country. The lamentation of Jesus was because the people didn't recognize His time on earth as their "day of visitation" and failed to accept the salvation He came to offer.

True Patriotism is seen in our empathy and prayers for our country. Our prayers express our goodwill and compassion for our country. We should pray for our Nation to turn from sin and embrace God's salvation, to be a nation for Christ. We should pray always for peace in the nation and for love in our hearts towards one another; we need to pray so that kidnappings and senseless killings, tribal wars and diabolical rituals would all end.

It doesn't end there; we ought to pray for all the other nations of the world. Abraham interceded for the city of Sodom even though he didn't live there (Genesis 18:16-33). Someone might say: "It's because he had family there." Well, you can choose to keep this perspective; but since Christians are scattered all over the world and they are your brothers and sisters in Christ, you too have family

all over the world. It means there's no excuse for not praying over other nations of the world where you don't live.

Intercede for the Church:

“I give you the name Peter, a stone. And this rock will be the bedrock foundation on which I will build my church—my legislative assembly, and the power of death will not be able to overpower it!” (Matthew 16:18, TPT).

Peter confessed Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God. In turn, Jesus said His Church will be built on that revelation and no power will overcome it. Yet we need to intercede for the Church. Someone might ask, “Why yet pray for the Church that is already secure in Christ?” We yet pray because, though Jesus has declared victory for the Church, we all as the Church must key into what Jesus has declared.

Every believer, in all denominations across the world, must come into this victory in Christ. Until

then, we must continue to pray and intercede for the Church. If we fail to intercede for the Church, we risk having docile believers everywhere. Even worse, there are professing believers in the church who unwittingly become partners with the devil to fight against the unity and victory which Christ desires for His Church.

The early Church faced problems such as disunity among the believers, harmful teachings and false doctrines, lawsuits among believers, sexual immorality, racial tensions etc. These were the devices the devil used against the early Church and is still using against the Church now. We must not act ignorant, but take our battle posture in the place of prayer. And when we pray, we got to do so with the mind-set of victory.

RIGHT MOTIVE FOR INTERCESSION

“Let love and kindness be the motivation behind all that you do” (1 Corinthians 16:14, TPT).

I REMEMBER one time when I was praying for the salvation of two people who were close to me. One was a childhood friend and the other a recent acquaintance. To me, both were on the fast lane to destruction, and I was on a rescue mission with my prayers.

I prayed every day for them. Along with my prayers, I would check in on them to see if there were any changes. For a long time, there were none. It seemed the more I prayed the worse they became. It wasn't long before I got frustrated, but not frustrated enough to cease to pray for them. I continued praying until one day I heard what I believe was God's voice. It said, "In their time, at their pace."

What I heard addressed the situation and exposed my motives for praying for them. You see, I was getting frustrated in my intercessory prayers for my friends because the prayers weren't producing immediate results on the time frame I had set. God was telling me that my friends will draw near to Him in their own time at their own pace, not mine.

His words also exposed the true motives of my heart. I wasn't praying for them because I loved them so much. If I was, I wouldn't get so frustrated; instead, I would have remained persistent. I was praying for them because I was attempting to use prayer to control their lives and personal decisions. Even worse, I wanted to gloat in the glory that my prayer got them converted. Imagine that! That's why I kept checking endlessly to see if there was any progress with them. At the time, my wrong motive for praying for them may have stood in the way of their salvation.

Till date, I still have these men in my prayers but neither has surrendered their lives to Christ yet. There is a little sign of progress, I am glad to report: my childhood friend, though still not a believer, now joins prayer meetings. One step at a time, wouldn't you say?

Apostle Paul in our anchor scripture encourages us to do everything with love and kindness as our motive; this includes intercession. When love serves as the motivation for our prayer of intercession, we will be incredibly patient and gentle towards

others, and remain consistent in our prayers regardless of whether there are little or no immediate results.

And when some result does manifest, we would celebrate with the converts or those so blessed, without any jealousy in our hearts, nor do we become envious of the blessings they had received. Also, we won't have to brag about the part we played in their testimony, but give all the glory to God.

Moreover, we will not shame or disrespect those who are still struggling with sin, neither would we get easily irritated with them or be quick to take offense. We will celebrate everything they do right and find no delight when they do wrong. We will never stop believing the best for others and never give up on them.

RIGHT ATTITUDE TO INTERCESSION

I READ the story of Simon of Cyrene as a new believer, and the Holy Spirit used it to teach me the beauty of intercession and the right attitude towards it. Let me share it with you (See Mark 15).

In Mark's account of the Passion of Christ, Jesus had just been handed over to Pilate by the ruling priests, elders, religious scholars, and the entire Jewish council, for questioning. A very important aspect in their plan being to get Jesus killed.

During the questioning, Jesus offered no defence against the allegations against Him. Pilate being fully aware that the religious leaders were simply envious of Jesus, tried to find a way to have Jesus released. He asked the people to choose between having Jesus released or having Barabbas, a notorious criminal and murderer, released.

Jesus was rejected. The crowd asked for His crucifixion. Prior to all this, Jesus had been betrayed and treated unfairly. Then came the soldiers sent by the chief priest to arrest and forcefully take Him away.

Pilate, having failed to free Jesus, released Him to be crucified. So, they took Jesus into the headquarters of the governor's compound and summoned a military unit of nearly six hundred men. They spit in His face and hit Him repeatedly on His head with a reed, driving the crown of thorns

deep into His brow. They knelt down before Him in mockery, pretending to pay Him homage as king of the Jews. When they were done ridiculing Him, they led Him away to be crucified.

Jesus carried His cross but was weak due to the beatings and emotional torture, and couldn't go on. This is when we are introduced to Simon of Cyrene. He was a native of Libya who was passing by, just coming in from the countryside with his two sons: Alexander and Rufus. The soldiers forced him to carry the heavy crossbeam for Jesus.

It wasn't strange that a Roman soldier would press a bystander into service like they did to Simon. So, Simon promptly obeyed. Though he was coming into Jerusalem, he was forced to turn back and carry the cross outside the city. What relief he must have brought to our Lord in that particular trying time.

It's easy to read the story and move on, except the Holy Spirit guides you into the truth hidden in it. Let's explore these truths:

1. We must see intercession as a command from God: *“Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other’s troubles. If you think you are somebody too important to stoop down to help another (when really you are not), you are living in deception”* (Galatians 6:2-3, TPT).

Simon of Cyrene was pressed by the Romans to bear Jesus’ burden; he was given a command he couldn’t refuse. Every believer has been called into this mandatory service of bearing the burden of others through intercessory prayers.

I love the fact that Simon was African, and the reason is because Jesus in human form wasn’t. He was an Israelite, so interceding for others should not be affected by tribe or race. Nothing should stop you from interceding for others. Believing that you have a suitable excuse for not interceding for others means you are deceiving yourself. We are all inexcusable.

2. We must be willing to go out of our way for others, especially in prayer:

Simon was coming into the city when he was asked to carry a cross that wasn't his outside of the city. His two sons would have to stay back and wait for him. We know he was given a command, which he willingly obeyed. We also mustn't hesitate to intercede for others at all times and when the Holy Spirit impresses it on our heart. We will be going out of our way, yes, even inconveniencing ourselves, yes; but it will always be for a greater good; and we will have a chance at being a part of that.

3. Intercession gives us an encounter as well: We have no idea whether or not, prior to that time, Simon had met Jesus at all. But as he was pressed to carry Jesus' cross, he got a chance to meet Him. I doubt very much that the encounter, though it started there, ended there. There are researches that prove that Simon of Cyrene became one of the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch.

Letters in my Green Bag

When I intercede for people, my prayer life improves, so also my Christian lifestyle. Besides, I often begin to feel more compassionate towards others. Surprisingly I have been able to forgive easily after praying for others. I also empathize more when I pray for people.

6 PRAYING IN TONGUES

*“But you, my delightfully loved friends,
constantly and progressively build yourselves
up on the foundation of your most holy
faith by praying every moment in the Spirit”
(Jude 1:20, TPT).*

“**Y**OU KNOW, you can pray using your words too.”

“I know, but I’d rather pray in tongues.”

“Okay o, but you know...”

“Please indulge me, mum. I’ve waited so long for this; now that I can speak in tongues, I’m going to pray in tongues as much as possible.”

“Hmmm! Okay o!”

My mum sounded tired of me, I could tell that by her shrugged shoulders and resigned look. Since I became confident enough to pray in tongues, especially in public, that was all I wanted to do. She wouldn't have understood how I felt even if I tried explaining it. She had been a Christian since I was a child and had been speaking and praying in tongues for as long as I can remember; but my experience was new, and I was still basking in the euphoria.

I remember growing up and watching people pray and speak in tongues. I would have copied them but I was too scared. What if God heard and was upset that I was speaking rubbish? What if I suddenly couldn't speak again for attempting to?

When I finally gave my life to Christ, just few months into becoming a believer, I got a visitation. I remember that day. I was home alone doing nothing in particular and then suddenly feeling the urge to sing. Since I loved hymns, I brought out my hymnbook and began to sing.

I sang and sang and sang for hours until suddenly the singing gave way to tongues. I had goose bumps all over me. I was feeling many things all at once. I was crying. My tongue was hot, but the heat bearable. Then I was speaking in tongues. I was also cold. It was an experience that would stay with me forever.

However, though I knew I had received the gift, I kept it under wraps. I was too shy to pray in tongues in the presence of others. Imagine the look on my mum's face the first day she heard me pray in tongues.

"Wow! Congratulations!" she said. "I didn't know you had received the gift. This is nice."

"Well, I'm just shy."

"Why, don't be."

"No reason. I'm just shy. Pastor Yakubu has been encouraging me to speak in tongues every night for at least an hour."

"That's great; it will help you."

"I just started; we'll see how it goes."

"It will only go well."

"Really?"

“Yes, you already aren’t shy anymore; you’ve prayed in tongues with me.”

“Well, yeah.”

“Boldness is one thing; more blessings will follow.”

“Okay! Can’t wait then.”

TONGUE TIED

“UNCLE, I can’t pray.” I said amid sobs.

“Yes you can.”

“I can’t. I can’t find the words.”

“Pray in tongues.”

“I’m so sad.”

“Pray in tongues, baby girl. ‘Twill help you. You’d feel stronger, and soon you’ll find the words. Just do it. I’ll call back to check on you.”

I was heartbroken from a recent break-up. Don’t ask me to go into details. I really don’t want to. But, yeah, I was going through a heart-break. I had known from the very beginning that God wouldn’t

approve of the person, but I had gone ahead to date¹ him. Now God was showing me red flags here and there and He wanted me to end that toxic relationship. I had grudgingly obeyed and I couldn't stop crying.

My uncle, 'Dele, had advised that I prayed in tongues since I was so heart-broken and I couldn't stop crying or find the words to express how I felt to God. Not that I didn't know I could do that; I willingly forgot, and needed the reminder.

So, I knelt by my bed, since that was the posture at the moment, I felt comfortable in. For what seemed like several minutes, I stayed there crying. Then I began to pray in tongues. I prayed in tongues for so long my knees began to hurt, but I didn't mind. I didn't stop because, as I kept on praying, and the Holy Spirit ministered to me, I began to understand why that relationship needed to end. The Holy Spirit played scenes in my head, reminding

¹ I'm aware the idea of dating the opposite sex has been grossly abused by sinners, and the sanctified heart of the Christian loathes their sensual, carnal and sinful activities of premarital or extra-marital sex that have come to be associated with dating. I have used the word advisedly to denote "platonic friendship with an intended spouse in the hope it would lead to a future marriage relationship." I have no part in any other immoral, un-Christ-like, hell-bound connotations people conjure for dating. I am a Christian, and have no delight in sinning!

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me of flaws I had overlooked that would end up being costly if I sustained that relationship. There and then, I was infused with strength to move on.

“Thank you, Lord, for causing me to triumph in Christ Jesus,” I cried out!

I remember the prayers of thanksgiving my uncle had offered to God on my behalf when we spoke on phone when he heard of the breakup. At the time I didn’t quite see any reason to be thankful to God. Now I see it. My uncle had encouraged me to pray, speaking in tongues. Sometime afterwards, he called again to know my welfare.

“Baby girl, how are you?” my uncle had rousingly asked me.

“Thanks be to God who always causes me to triumph in Christ.”

“Yes, girl, thanks be to God! I can tell that you are better.”

“Yes, uncle. I’m way better. I feel better and I can finally thank God.”

“Next time you’re in any similar situation, you know what to do.”

“Yes, I do, I will pray in tongues.”

He prayed over me, and the call ended. But the impact of the whole experience remained.

FACTS ABOUT PRAYING IN TONGUES

AS A new believer, some of the questions you will likely ask are: “Is praying in tongues the same thing as praying in the Spirit? Is praying in tongues biblical? Is praying in tongues effective?”

Praying in tongues and praying in the Spirit are the same. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the one that enables a believer to speak and pray in tongues. And when a believer prays as led by the Holy Spirit with unknown words or human language, he/she is said to be praying in the Spirit. Praying in tongues and praying in the Spirit are one and the same, just with different expressions. While one speaks mysteries, the other is with words that can be understood.

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Here is a little back story. I started out this chapter by sharing the experience of how I received the baptism in the Holy Ghost; so, I can say, you've got to have the Holy Spirit in you to be able to pray in tongues. The Holy Spirit lives on the inside of the believer. We are eligible to receive Him when we surrender our lives to Jesus. Receiving the Holy Spirit needn't always be as dramatic as mine. For others, it could be as simple as the laying of hands by an anointed minister of God (Acts 19:6).

The Holy Spirit is a gift that Jesus promised to send to His disciples (today's believers inclusive). The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is a lot. You can read these scriptures to find out more (John 14:26; 16:7-8, 13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11; 12:7-11; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8: 10-11, 26-27).

The indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer enables him/her to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). He also causes a release of spiritual gifts. The Bible in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (TPT) says:

8 For example; The Spirit gives to one the gift of the word of wisdom. To another, the same Spirit gives the gift of the word of revelation knowledge. 9 And to another, the same Spirit gives the gift of faith. And to another, the same Spirit gives gifts of healing. 10 And to another the power to work miracles. And to another the gift of prophecy. And to another the gift to discern what the Spirit is speaking. And to another the gift of speaking different kinds of tongues. And to another the gift of interpretation of tongues.

Two of the gifts listed are speaking in different kind of tongues and the Interpretation of tongues. Note however: Not being able to speak in tongues yet doesn't invalidate you as a born-again child of God; and, although speaking in tongues is evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit in a believer, it is not the only proof.

At first mention, the disciples that gathered at the Upper Room received the gift of the Holy Spirit; cloven tongues of fire appeared before their

eyes. In their case, the cloven tongues were literal; they saw it on each one. In some way, I also see this as tongues of fire that engulfed the heart of each one of them as they began to speak in tongues, and *“as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

Soon they realized they were speaking in languages they had never learned. Peter put it to good use by preaching a sermon to a large number of people (Acts 2). In this Corinthian text, with greater insight, Apostle Paul reveals to us more about speaking in tongues and praying in tongues. Let me list them from 1 Corinthians 14 (TPT):

- When someone speaks in tongues, they are speaking to God, speaking intimate mysteries in the Spirit.
- The one who speaks in tongues advances his/her own spiritual progress.
- If I am praying in a tongue, my spirit is engaged in prayer but I have no clear understanding of what is being said.
- Paul goes on to say, he will pray in the Spirit (he means tongues) as well as pray with his

words so his mind can be engaged.

Well, it's safe to say that speaking in tongues can be either speaking real human language (like the Disciples on the day of Pentecost) or a heavenly dialect (mysteries that can't be understood except you have a gift of interpretation of tongues).

Praying in tongues is biblical and effective as said by Apostle Paul. That being said, there are other things to consider, like praying in tongues in public and in private.

In the first experience I shared at the beginning of this chapter, I was super excited to be manifesting the gift of the Spirit that I wearied out my mum who was my prayer partner, and who would have preferred that I prayed with words also so our minds could be engaged in the prayer. Praying with words at that time would have strengthened the faith of both of us, rather than praying in tongues which ministered to just me.

Apostle Paul reveals that when praying in tongues, your spirit is engaged; you are speaking intimate mysteries that though even you don't understand,

in the spirit, you're advancing your own spiritual progress. See Jude 1:20 as well.

So, it seems only the person who prays in tongues, be it publicly or privately, benefits from it. Even at that, it's either of two things: you either also have the gift of interpretation of tongues or pray with words simultaneously as you pray in the Spirit.

In the second experience I shared, we see how effective praying in tongues was for me. Truly, I had no idea what I was saying, but I knew I was communicating with God. It wasn't long, while I was still on my knees, that I received clarity, understanding, strength to move on. I even saw a reason to thank God. It didn't matter that I didn't utter a word in my understanding or care to engage my mind in prayer until after I was done praying in tongues, yet I had been ministered to.

There are still times when I pray (regardless of whether it's in public or private) in tongues alone, and other times with words as led by the Spirit; and yet at other times, I do both in turns as suggested by Apostle Paul. You can do any too.

PRAYING EVERY MOMENT IN THE SPIRIT

I REMEMBER when I was a worker-in-training in church, my pastor back then, Pastor Yakubu had called me into his office one day to give me a special assignment. He had said to me, “I want you to speak in tongues for an hour every night before you go to bed.”

I had tried to find out why from him but he had only encouraged me to obey instead. I obeyed. Initially it was the most challenging, boring and confusing exercise ever; but consistency changed everything. Speaking in tongues soon turned to praying in tongues.

God saw me in my struggles and His Spirit encouraged me. While praying, scriptures for more prayers would drop in my spirit. I was able to discern. I also began to enjoy visions and revelations. It was amazing! It still is. It wasn't long that I looked forward to praying in tongues every night.

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My pastor never told me why he asked me to embark on that spiritual exercise, but I think I know why. The reason had nothing to do with how long I spent in prayer each night.

Since praying in the Spirit proved beneficial to me, it was almost like a key that unlocked several other spiritual gifts for me; my pastor was simply encouraging me to cultivate a good habit.

Same thing Jude tells us in the anchor verse for this chapter: *“But you, my delightfully loved friends, constantly and progressively build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith by praying every moment in the Spirit”* (Jude 1:20, TPT).

Praying every moment in the Spirit simply means cultivating the habit of living a life of prayer led by the Holy Spirit, either with words of your understanding or in tongues, speaking mysteries to God. Why? It’s because it’s most beneficial to do so.

WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

ADDING THIS bit is definitely an after-thought; but I'm thankful to the Holy Spirit for reminding me to include it here. Having a good prayer life is a requirement in our Christian walk. Being comfortable and confident enough to pray in public, in the company of one or more believers is good. But what's better is you being comfortable and confident enough to pray in private.

Praying in tongues in private is not a bad idea at all, whether you do just that sometimes or you pray in the Spirit using your words as well. The important thing is to take advantage of the various ways you can pray.

Many believers have the gift of speaking in tongues and can pray in tongues; yet they won't do it. What's stopping them? I may not know what's stopping you, but I know what stopped me.

When I first started speaking in tongues, I had just a few words. A few words that I didn't understand. I was happy I had the gift but I was

embarrassed about it. When I listened in on others speaking and praying in tongues, mine paled in comparison. I felt it was best to keep quiet. So, I kept quiet. Yet when I was alone and praying, the gift struggled to find expression. It was begging to be spoken and used.

One day during a prayer meeting my pastor walked up to me and prophesied over my life. He laid hands on me and prayed; it was as though he was attempting to stir up the gift on the inside of me. That move turned out to be what I needed. I became very bold and comfortable speaking and praying in tongues. Soon I started to pray in tongues in public and in private. It has helped my prayer life a lot ever since.

So, if what's stopping you is the fear of looking ridiculous, you need to rid yourself of that fear right now. Remember, it is not God that fills us with the spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). If you are shy and feeling uncomfortable, you've got to work through it; start easy by speaking and praying in tongues in private. Do it consistently until you become comfortable with it.

One thing that stops a lot of believers from speaking and praying in tongues is their inability to lose control for any period of time. I'll explain. When you pray in tongues, you don't understand what you're saying except you also have the gift of interpretation of tongues. The heavenly tongue for one is a mystery to us, and many people aren't just comfortable with not knowing and understanding what's being said. So, they don't speak or pray in tongues at all. To be honest, that's fine.

Apostle Paul weighs in on this. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:6-9 (TPT), *"6 My dear friends, what good is it if I come to you always speaking in tongues? But if I come with a clear revelation from God, or with insight, or with a prophecy, or with a clear teaching, I can enrich you. 7 Similarly, if musical instruments, such as flutes or stringed instruments, are out of tune and don't play the arrangement clearly, how will anyone recognize the melody? 8 If the bugle makes a garbled sound, who will recognize the signal to show up for the*

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battle? 9 So it is with you. Unless you speak in a language that's easily understood, how will anyone know what you're talking about? You might as well save your breath!"

It really ends up being up to you, what you decide. After weighing the pros and cons, Apostle Paul doesn't rule out completely praying in tongues. He ends up saying, "...*don't forbid anyone from speaking in tongues*" (vs 39b, TPT). I hope you won't stop yourself any longer.

Just taste and see!

7 HEARING FROM GOD

“My own sheep will hear my voice and I know each one, and they will follow me” (John 10:27, TPT).

“**M**O’, do you hear from God?” my friend asked. I could detect worry in her tone.

“Yes, I do.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“HMMMM!”

“What’s wrong?”

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“Nothing is wrong. I’m just not sure that I hear God.”

“How so?”

“I’ve heard His voice once but that’s it, nothing else really.”

“That’s not right. God speaks to us all the time.”

“Well, not me.”

“Including you. Something is off; it’s either you can’t tell when He speaks to you or you’ve tuned out His voice.”

“Maybe.”

“I’m sure. Okay, what’s your relationship with God like?”

“Honestly, things aren’t how they used to be; there’ve been distractions, and it’s not like before.”

“I knew it! Something is getting in the way.”

“Could that be it?”

“Identifying the barriers is great progress, if you ask me.”

“I pray and expect a response, but then I’m not sure I hear God. Tell me, how do you hear God?”

“Over time there are various ways God has spoken to me. Let me share some with you.”

My friend and I had a very lengthy discourse about hearing from God. Let me share with you some of what we talked about.

LEARNING TO HEAR GOD

IT IS the desire of all who pray to God to be able to hear from Him, and over time various books have been published and sermons preached to help people hear from God; yet most people end up more confused than ever.

I personally do not believe that people can be taught how to hear from God. Why? It's because it's something you learn over time in your personal walk with God. No one teaches a child to recognize their father's or mother's voice; over time they get accustomed to their father's or mother's voice and can pick it out in a noisy room.

That being said, we can however learn from each other's experiences vital elements required in order to hear from God, also how God speaks.

The Right Conditions

1. Be A Believer

Jesus said in our anchor verse for this chapter that His sheep will hear His voice; i.e., recognize it and then follow Him. Emphasis on “**My own sheep**”. One who seeks to hear God and recognize His voice must first be His. What I mean is, you must have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, and then begin to fellowship with Him daily to be able to tell what His voice sounds like, and what His commands are.

If you are not a believer who daily fellowships with God, it will be impossible for you to hear, identify and differentiate His voice from the din in the world. You do know that not only God speaks to you; the devil does too (in various ways and forms), and you speak to yourself as well.

2. Shut Out Distractions

Next to being a believer, it's also important that you create an enabling environment for God to speak to you. By this I mean shutting out

distractions. Your heart must not be filled and cluttered with attractions of the world, delights of wealth, search for success and the lure of nice things.

There is a good reason why we are asked to guard our hearts diligently (Proverbs 4:23). We're solely responsible for what we allow to fill and clutter our hearts, and until our hearts are de-cluttered, we might be standing in the way of God speaking to us.

How God Speaks

1. Verbally

Truth be told, the first time I heard God speak, it was verbal. Yes, it was by a still small voice. It was unmistakable; and though I had never heard it before, I knew it was God speaking to me. Elijah did too when he had this encounter with God in 1 Kings 19:12 (TPT). *“And after the earthquake fire, but God wasn’t in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.”*

I was a new convert during my first encounter, and a worker-in-training. It was during one of the days I was called upon to lead prayers during a workers-in-training programme, and I was in full panic mode when He spoke to me. His words were however so real and reassuring, I was greatly refreshed. He said to me, **I WILL GIVE YOU THE WORDS.**

At first, I had to look around to be sure I didn't imagine the words. When I realized I was alone, I knew for sure God was speaking to me. Indeed, He gave me the words to pray with and my fears disappeared. It's been several years after that time, and over time I have heard God speak to me, still verbally, usually after I've prayed concerning a matter, and when He wants me to do something. I wish He would only stick with this way of speaking to me, but nah, He does it also through...

2. His Word

“God has transmitted his very substance into every Scripture, for it is God-breathed. It will empower you by its instruction and correction,

giving you the strength to take the right direction and lead you deeper into the path of godliness” (2 Timothy 3:16, TPT).

Have you ever gone through the Scriptures and just got hooked on one verse or one chapter that addresses an issue in your life?

One day, several years back, I was watching a Christian cable network programme, and a woman shared her testimony. She said she was in debt and about to lose her home. She had done all she could to no avail. Then, just when nothing seemed to be forthcoming, she decided to pray. Let me pause here and say, you don't have to wait till all hell's broken loose before you pray. You can pray ahead of time or you can pray just as you see the signs. Anyways, so the woman prays, and God sends her a word.

She was reading her Bible and got stuck on a verse, where God says, “I will build you a house.” She knew what the original context meant but she couldn't shake the feeling that God was speaking to her. So, she believed that word and waited for the manifestation. She lost that home that she

held onto tightly, but God did build her a house. It took a while, but it happened through someone in a manner she didn't expect. She lives there presently.

I've also had moments when I'm reading scriptures after I've spoken to God about an issue and the case is addressed, be it encouragement, instruction, correction etc. Countless times this has happened.

3. Dreams and Visions

The Bible reports in Job 33:15-18 (MSG), *"In a dream, for instance, a vision at night, when men and women are deep in sleep, fast asleep in their beds—God opens their ears and impresses them with warnings to turn them back from something bad they're planning, from some reckless choice, And keep them from an early grave, from the river of no return."*

You'd agree with me that this scripture is quite explanatory. God does speak loud and clear to us through dreams and visions. Most people already know this. The issue however is identifying which

dream is from God and which one isn't. Here are a few tips:

- You know a dream/vision is from God when it's part of a conversation between you and Him; if you've prayed concerning a matter and you receive godly advice in a dream regarding it; then it's safe to say the dream is from God. For instance, there was a time I wanted to go on a road trip with a couple of friends and my mum and I prayed about it. I was so eager to go but ended up not going because, I had a dream revealing what would happen to me on that trip. I could pray about it and still go but the very next day, my grandma also called to warn me about traveling. Would it be the devil warning me to stay off the road in order to preserve my life? Certainly not.

- You know a dream/vision is from God when it makes known the truth concerning a matter. We all know that the truth isn't always just out there; sometimes it's hidden until it's revealed. Truths concerning someone you're about to start courting, truths about that partnership, truths about

that contract, truths about past events and truths about the future. God reveals truths. It is the devil that thrives in deception. If God can't get through to us while we are up and about, He does it when we are asleep through dreams. I was a member of a church one time which to the physical eye seemed like a true Bible-believing, Jesus-proclaiming church. I was neck-deep in service there until God began to show me what was going on behind closed doors. He also confirmed it through a pastor He sent to me. I left!

● You know a dream/vision is from God when it lingers; you wake up and you can't forget it; it lingers in your memory and troubles your spirit. Everything in you is telling you, God is trying to get through to you. If you are anything like me, then you probably sleep late and wake up pretty early; there's a lot of activity during the day as well. When it's time to sleep, you struggle a bit and so when you dream, you mostly forget all. Until the dream is from God and you don't forget. You remember it vividly. You go through your

day and it lingers in your memory, demanding your attention. And you can't move on from it until you do something about it. Like I shared in the preceding tip, God revealed the underlying issues in that church to me and confirmed it through a pastor. The dreams didn't stop and I didn't receive any peace until I took a step of faith and left that church.

I have shared these three tips to show if a dream is from God or not. You can also try my multipurpose means of detecting: PRAY! I pray about every dream. Whether it's good or bad, whether I feel it's from God or the devil or even from myself. Pray over all your dreams.

4. Illustrations

“He taught them many things by using stories, parables to illustrate spiritual truths, saying”
(Matthew 13:3, TPT).

During Jesus' ministry on earth, He often taught the people using stories and parables to illustrate spiritual truths. More often than not, His disciples

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didn't understand what message He was passing across; and then they would ask Him, and He would explain everything plainly to them.

Even now God still speaks to us through illustrations. He does to me, and when I'm trying to figure out what the direct message is, His indwelling Spirit reveals the meaning to me. All I need to have is an open teachable heart.

Let me share an example. One day after service in church, I had to stay back to receive my coolers from a friend I had lent them. After receiving the coolers from her, I became suddenly aware that I had a lot to carry. Along with the coolers were my bag, my shoes and some of my mum's things. The journey from the main auditorium to the exit became very far to me. I hoped someone would come and help me, but everyone seemed busy.

I struggled beneath the load and walked slowly towards the door. Suddenly a young girl was walking towards me. I was friendly with her so I assumed she would help me with some of what I was carrying. She was also smiling at me; but before she could get to me, someone called out

to her and distracted her. I was all by myself again with no help in sight.

I eventually got to the door and just when I thought I couldn't go any further, I looked up and saw my mum with outstretched arms. She collected most of the things I was carrying from me and I was suddenly light again. I walked easily towards the car waiting to take me home.

On the spot, I didn't think anything of it; but later on, when I got home and I was lying on my bed, anxious about tomorrow, I began to wonder why it seemed I was going through life alone and dying beneath the weight of responsibilities.

The Holy Spirit replayed the scene at church in my head, and ministered to me that indeed, I was heavy laden with worries of today and concerns about tomorrow, and it seems help eludes me because, although people might have the best intentions of helping, they get distracted as well. But just before thinking all hope was lost, God will send help to me.

Do you think the devil will ease my concerns and worries with such encouraging words? Do you think he would point me to look up to God as my help? Absolutely not.

God has used and continues to use illustrations to speak to me and you; but are you paying attention?

5. Other Christians

I saved this for the last because it's quite controversial. God does speak to us through other Christians. There was a time when I had to pause with a decision because of something my cousin posted. She is a believer too. God laid something in her heart and she shared it on her WhatsApp status. I read it; though she had no idea what was going on with me at the time, but God spoke to me through her post.

There are other times when I would be having a conversation with my Christian friends and God will speak through one of them. They will indirectly give me a message without knowing it. God has

used even me to speak to people that way without me having a clue what was happening, that what I was saying meant anything until they confirmed it.

There are other times when my pastor would be preaching and right there in the middle of the sermon, a word falls from his lips and God lays an impression on my heart concerning it. Of course, my pastor wouldn't even be aware.

Those are indirect ways God speaks to us through other Christians; but with the direct one, you've got to be very careful. When someone comes and says to me, "I have a word for you from the Lord," I'm already 50 percent on my guard. Why? Because, you've got the lying spirits to contend with, also personal bias.

What I mean is this: sometimes people speak to you and claim it's from God. They are usually pretty convinced themselves, but little do they know they've been deceived by a lying spirit. Please read 1 Kings 13:11-25; 22:19-23. In the first text we see an old but apparently backslidden prophet

who, feeling envious of a younger man of God sent from Judah to speak with King Jeroboam in Bethel, a place the older prophet considered his private ministerial jurisdiction, concocted a lie he sacrilegiously ascribed to God, by which he deceived the young man to visit with him and eat at his house contrary to the specific instruction God gave. As the story relayed, that young man died for his error, and I believe to the pleasure of the older lying prophet.

In the second text, Prophet Micaiah was forewarning the righteous King Jehoshaphat of Judah not to accompany the idolatrous King Ahab of Israel (Samaria) to a war God had forbidden. But the false prophets that King Ahab had summoned were induced by lying spirits to urge him on. In both stories, we see impostors who posed as speaking the truth from God when in actual fact they were deliberately lying.

In the second story, we may say those false prophets of Ahab were denuded; but the old prophet in the first story was deliberate. His advice to bring the apparently inexperienced young prophet to

his house to eat and drink was blatant. Imagine listening to such an advice or acting on such lying instructions! It's like partnering with the devil.

Other times, people who claim to have a word from the Lord are possibly being led by their own feelings. So, they tell you what they think you should do or be doing and claim God sent them. This is why it becomes very important to test all spirits (1 John 4:1) when people come to you with a direct message purportedly from God.

How do you test all spirits? I remember one time my friend played a prank on a “man of God”. She gave him fake names and told him; those men were asking to court her and he should help her pray on the names and tell her which one God approves. She said they were all Christian men but she just wanted to be sure.

Sure enough the “man of God” went ahead and prayed and called her up because “God” had revealed the man for her to him. Yup! You guessed right. He picked a random name from the list, and said that was her husband. What a good laugh she had!

It is sad that he had ‘helped’ many naïve people pick life partners that way.

Well, I wouldn’t advise anyone to go about pranking pastors and people who claim they hear from God; but we must test all spirits indeed.

How?

Through the most efficient way: Prayer.

Someone comes with a word of direction and instruction, as they say, “from the Lord” for you. Run it by the Lord again in prayer until you feel a conviction that it’s true. Pray as long and hard as possible. No rush. The Holy Spirit should help you with that if you ask Him.

Another way is by running what was said by the Scriptures. What I mean is, is what they are saying biblical? Is it a common practice of the world of sinners, or is it godly wisdom? Does it directly contradict what God’s word says or does it align with it?

Finally, you can test all spirits when you have the gift of the discernment of spirits. Believe it or not, many believers can tell immediately which

spirit is at play when someone comes and offers them ‘a word from the Lord.’ Discernment of spirits is a gift given by the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). Ask God for this gift too.

STIFLING GOD’S VOICE

“MO, ARE you there? Are you listening?”

“Yeah, sure,” I responded to this friend of mine.

“I read your posts. I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

“What do you mean?”

“We see things the same way.”

“I don’t get you.”

“I read your posts and I’m glad the things I consider wrong are what you consider wrong, and what I consider right is what you consider right.”

“Uhm! Okay.”

“Let me explain. There are some things I see believers do that I know the Bible explicitly forbids. They do it and seem to have excuses for why they do what they do. When I attempt to do such things,

Letters in my Green Bag

the Holy Spirit on the inside restrains me so much I'm wondering, isn't the Holy Spirit in them? Can't they hear Him too?"

"Oh! I get you now."

"I really would like to know."

"Well, what I think is going on is that although they have the Holy Spirit in them, they've learnt how to tune Him off.

"What does that mean?"

"When He speaks, they ignore and disobey; and since they are so engrossed in worldly activities, overtime they've drowned out His voice in all that chaos.

"That makes sense."

"It sure does. You on the other hand have been daily submitting yourself to His guidance and commands and so His voice is louder than ever and clear too."

"Hmm!"

We went on to discuss further how the church leaders at her church were pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable to God and not feeling any

kind of remorse about it, nor gave a hoot about what the impact will be to those under their leadership, and the negative impact those actions had on the church. We arrived at the same conclusion: those people had learnt to stifle the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you are stifling the Holy Spirit too, and that's why His voice isn't loud and clear. Perhaps you've indulged your flesh a little too much that's why the Holy Spirit's voice has been tuned out completely.

Read with me the different Bible versions of 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

"Do not quench the Spirit." NKJV

"Don't Suppress the Spirit." CEB

"Don't put out the Spirit's fire." GW

"Never restrain or put out the fire of the Holy Spirit." TPT

"Don't try to stop what the Holy Spirit is doing."

NIV

One of the ways God speaks to us and confirms His word to us is by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

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We are expected to not only make our bodies habitable for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) but also to work hand-in-hand with Him, i.e., be responsive to His guidance and be obedient to His commands (John 14:26).

But what happens when we do not make our bodies habitable and become unresponsive to the Holy Spirit? What happens is that we have stifled the Holy Spirit, quenched the Spirit, suppressed the Spirit, put out the Spirit's fire, restrained the Holy Spirit, and tried to stop the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the verse above, Apostle Paul warns against "stifling the Holy spirit." The language used suggests putting out a fire. Since we have been warned not to put out the fire, what we must do then is fan it into flames.

My friend had mentioned that she hears the Holy Spirit's caution and restrain loudly. She wasn't deceived about right and wrong, even though there was wrong representation from the leaders of her church.

After all that had been said and done, I knew my friend well; she was a genuine believer who always stayed prayed up, and was hungry for the word. She was someone who had dared to believe God, followed His guidance and quit a job to venture into the unknown just because she wanted to please God. The fire of the Holy Spirit in her was constantly and consistently being fanned to flames by her actions.

How do you fan this fire to flame as opposed to quenching it? The Bible tells us how in Galatians 5:17 (TPT).

“When your self-life craves the things that offend the Holy Spirit you hinder him from living free within you! And the Holy Spirit’s intense cravings hinder your self-life from dominating you! So then, the two incompatible and conflicting forces within you are your self-life of the flesh and the new creation life of the Spirit.”

Since there is a struggle between your flesh and the Spirit, you help the Spirit to win by cooperating. Yield to the new life the Holy Spirit

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offers and allow His power free room to work in you.

Furthermore, you should:

- Flee sexual immorality.
- Guard your thought-life from lust; e.g., don't watch porn.
- Don't chase after material things, chase after God instead.
- Don't manipulate others.
- Don't hate others even if they are against you.
- Don't get into senseless arguments.
- Don't resent others when they are favoured.
- Don't throw temper tantrums.
- Don't get into angry quarrels.
- Don't be selfish, only thinking about yourself, being in love with only your opinions.
- Don't be envious of the blessings of others.
- Don't murder.
- Don't get yourself involved in uncontrolled addictions; don't get into wild parties and all other similar behaviours.

I promise I didn't come up with my own 'commandments'. The above are ways we give in to the flesh as described by Apostle Paul (Galatians 5:19-21). By avoiding giving in to the flesh we would be yielding to the new life of the Holy Spirit.

Since we are starving the flesh, we must feed the Spirit.

Just how do we do that?

By studying God's word and meditating on it. This way the Holy Spirit has an opportunity to transform us inwardly and do a total reformation on how we think and influence what we do (Romans 12:2).

BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR



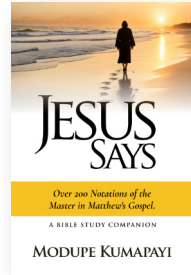
Letters In My Green Bag

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



God's Love Letter To You

A devotional guide.



Jesus Says

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



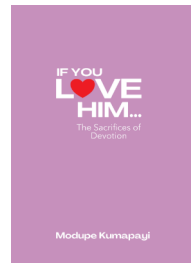
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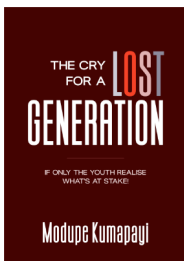
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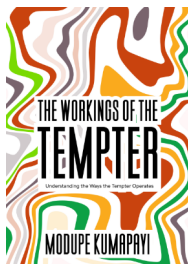
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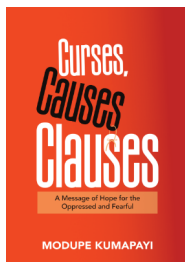
Prophet or Magician?

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



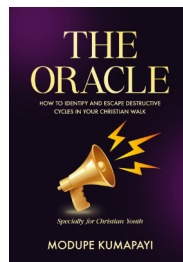
The Workings of the Tempter

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



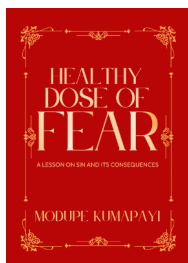
Curses, Causes and Clauses

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



The Oracle

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



Healthy Dose of Fear

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

THE BOOK

How else would you rather that God spoke to you in clear terms? Here in these pages are words you will not doubt are from the anointed pen of a ready writer, though simple by gender, unassuming in age, but she is well experienced in her personal dealings with God.

Letters in My Green Bag will be enjoyed by all: old and young. The collection begins in the author's childhood, so children will relate well too. But this is no baby-talk; the issues are deeply serious, calling all to salvation and a steady fruitful Christian life different from mere 'churchiness', shallow and nominal, lifeless and meaningless sanctimonious life. If you want to be a true Christian, read this book. If you desire a fruitful prayer life, read this book. Is the leading of the Holy Spirit what you want? Read this book.

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 fulfillment comes from watching people thrive spiritually.